

Theoretical Review of the Functionalist Approach to Peace-building: Integrating Gender Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical theoretical review of the functionalist approach to peace-building, with particular attention to the integration of gender perspectives in post-conflict societies. While functionalism has traditionally emphasized institutional interdependence and normative cohesion as foundations for social stability, it has often overlooked structural inequalities, especially those related to gender. This paper addresses that gap by synthesizing classical functionalist theory with contemporary gender-sensitive scholarship and recent empirical studies (2020–2025). Drawing on insights from sociology, peace and conflict studies, and feminist institutionalization, the paper argues that gender inclusion is not merely a normative imperative matter, but a functional necessity for sustainable peace, and societal development. The paper conducted a descriptive comparative content analysis study of selected African countries or societies with similar cases, such as Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Liberia. The paper is qualitative research method using secondary data source and AI as research assistant. This paper demonstrates how women's participation enhances institutional legitimacy, strengthens informal and formal peace mechanisms, and contributes to long-term social cohesion. The study further evaluates emerging trends in global peacebuilding, including the stagnation of women's representation in formal agreements and the growing significance of grassroots networks and inter-sectional approaches. It concludes by proposing a framework for integrating gender into functionalist peace-building and outlines policy and research implications for advancing inclusive and resilient post-conflict reconstruction. The paper uses combined theories of Functionalist Peace Theory, Feminist Theory and Women, Peace & Security as Feminist Theory of the international Women agenda works of three distinguished scholars of J. Ann Tickner 1992, Cynthia Enloe 1989 & Carol Cohn 1987.

Keywords: Functionalist, Gender, Peace-building and Africa

HOW TO CITE

ABULFATHI, Ahmad Arabi & TANKO, Abdullahi (2026). Theoretical Review of the Functionalist Approach to Peace-building: Integrating Gender Perspectives: African Journal of Peace and Social Inclusion, 1(3) 257-283. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.66065/ajpsi-defyhpac>

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Introduction

Peace-building focuses on ceasefire agreements to a broader process of rebuilding institutions, restoring trust, and addressing structural causes of conflict. Scholars across the world have continued to recognize inclusive governance and functional institutions as the foundation for sustainable peace. This paper explores how functionalist theory can be strengthened through gender analysis and applied to contemporary African peace-building experiences.

Within this evolving landscape, the functionalist perspective offers a useful, though underutilized, analytical framework. Rooted in classical sociological theory, functionalism conceptualizes society as a system of interdependent institutions whose stability depends on the effective performance of their respective roles. From this standpoint, conflict is understood not merely as a political or economic phenomenon, but as a manifestation of a disfunctioning system and institutional failure to maintain normative order, equal distribution resources, acceptance and integration of diverse social groups. Peace-building, therefore, involves restoring institutional functionality, reinforcing shared norms, and re-establishing equilibrium within the social system, (Boutros Ghali, 1992; British Army. 2020).

Despite its analytical strengths, the functionalist approach has been criticized for its tendency to privilege stability over justice and to assume consensus in contexts marked by deep inequalities (Adelabu, O., & Duyile, D., 2025). One critical limitation is its insufficient engagement with gender as a structural dimension of social organization. Gender inequalities are not peripheral concerns; they shape access to power, participation, and resources, and therefore directly influence the functionality of institutions and the durability of peace processes.

At the same time, international policy frameworks and empirical research have increasingly underscored the importance of gender inclusion in peace-building. Global commitments to women's participation, such as those reflected in United Nations policy frameworks, have highlighted the role of women in mediation, conflict prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction, (Chinkin, C., & Charlesworth, H., 2006). However, significant gaps remain between normative commitments and actual practice, particularly in formal peace negotiations and institutional decision-making processes.

This paper addresses these gaps by advancing a theoretically grounded and empirically informed analysis of the intersection between functionalism and gender in peace-building. Specifically, it asks:

I- How can the functionalist framework be reinterpreted to account for gender dynamics?

II- In what ways does gender inclusion contribute to the effective functioning of post-conflict institutions?

Functionalist: is a complex study of society structure with working institutions to promote solid, stable and effective society and system.

Gender: is a sexual identification refers to generality of human either for a man, woman, boy or girl.

Peace-building: defined as a process aimed to prevent violent or conflict by addressing the root causes to establish a sustainable foundation for peace.

Africa: is the second-world largest and most populors continental with 54 sovereign countries, various languages, culture, economic and political diversity.

Literature Review

Functionalism theory remains one of the most influential theoretical traditions in sociology, offering a systemic framework for understanding how societies maintain stability and continuity. At its core, functionalism conceptualizes society as an integrated system composed of interdependent parts institutions, norms, and roles each of which performs functions necessary for the survival of the whole. While this perspective has been widely applied to social order and governance, its relevance to peace-building lies in its emphasis on institutional coherence, normative integration, and systemic equilibrium.

The foundations of functionalist thought can be traced to the work of Émile Durkheim, who emphasized the importance of social solidarity in maintaining order. Durkheim distinguished between mechanical and organic solidarity, arguing that modern societies depend on complex interdependence among specialized institutions. In such contexts, the breakdown of shared norms can lead to anomie, a condition of formlessness associated with social instability and conflict. From a peace-building perspective, anomie can be understood as a condition often present in post-conflict societies, where institutional collapse and weakened normative frameworks create fertile ground for renewed violence. Restoring social cohesion, therefore, becomes a central task of peace-building.

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Building on Durkheim's insights, Talcott Parsons developed a more elaborate systems-oriented model of social action. His AGIL framework adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency identifies the functional prerequisites that any social system must satisfy to survive. Each function corresponds to specific institutional domains: the economy (adaptation), the political system (goal attainment), legal and social institutions (integration), and cultural systems such as education and family (latency or pattern maintenance). In post-conflict settings, these functions are often severely disrupted. Economic collapse undermines adaptation, political instability weakens goal attainment, fragmented communities hinder integration, and cultural dislocation erodes pattern maintenance. Peace-building, in this sense, can be understood as a process of restoring these functional capacities.

However, classical functionalism has been subject to sustained critique, particularly for its tendency to assume value consensus and to understate the role of power, inequality, and conflict. Critics argue that functionalism risks legitimizing existing social arrangements by portraying them as necessary for stability, even when they perpetuate exclusion or injustice. This limitation is particularly salient in post-conflict societies, where institutions may reflect entrenched power imbalances rather than shared norms.

Contemporary adaptations of functionalism have attempted to address these shortcomings by incorporating more dynamic and critical perspectives. Neo-functionalist approaches, for example, recognize that social systems are not inherently harmonious but are shaped by negotiation, contestation, and change. This shift allows for a more nuanced understanding of how institutions can both stabilize and marginalize different groups within society.

Integrating gender into functionalist theory further exposes its limitations while also extending its analytical utility. Traditional functionalist accounts often treated gender roles as fixed and complementary, emphasizing their contribution to social stability without interrogating underlying inequalities. Feminist scholars have challenged this assumption, demonstrating that gender relations are socially constructed and frequently embedded in unequal power structures that undermine both justice and institutional effectiveness, (Molynerx, M., & Razarus, 2002).

From a gender-sensitive functionalist perspective, systemic stability cannot be achieved if significant portions of the population are excluded from decision-making processes or denied access to resources. Gender inequality thus represents a form of structural dysfunction that weakens institutional legitimacy, reduces social cohesion, and limits the effectiveness of peace-building efforts. Conversely, inclusive institutions that incorporate diverse perspectives

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particularly those of women and marginalized groups are more likely to perform their integrative and normative functions effectively.

This re-conceptualization is particularly relevant for peace-building, where the goal is not merely the absence of violence but the creation of resilient and inclusive social systems. By integrating insights from feminist theory and contemporary sociology, functionalism can be reoriented toward a more critical and inclusive framework one that recognizes both the importance of systemic stability and the necessity of addressing structural inequalities as part of sustainable peace.

Functionalism and Peace-building

The application of functionalist theory to peace-building provides a valuable framework for understanding how post-conflict societies can transition from instability to sustainable peace. By emphasizing institutional interdependence and normative integration, functionalism shifts attention from isolated interventions to the broader systemic processes required to rebuild cohesive and resilient societies. Peace-building, from this perspective, is not a single event or agreement but a continuous process of restoring the functional capacities of social, political, and economic institutions.

One of the key contributions of functionalism to peace-building lies in its focus on institutional coherence. In societies emerging from conflict, institutions are often weakened, fragmented, or DE-legitimized. Governance structures may lack authority, legal systems may be compromised, and social institutions such as education and community organizations may be unable to perform their integrative roles. Functionalist analysis highlights that these institutions do not operate in isolation; rather, their effectiveness depends on their ability to function in relation to one another. For instance, a reformed political system cannot achieve stability without a supportive legal framework, nor can economic recovery be sustained without social trust and normative alignment. Peace-building efforts, therefore, must prioritize coordination across institutional domains to ensure systemic equilibrium.

Preventive peace-building represents an important dimension of this functionalist approach. Rather than focusing solely on post-conflict reconstruction, preventive strategies aim to identify and address potential sources of instability before they escalate into violence. Early warning systems, inclusive governance mechanisms, and equitable resource distribution are essential in maintaining institutional functionality and preventing systemic breakdown. From a functionalist standpoint, such measures contribute to maintaining normative order and reducing the likelihood of anomie, thereby reinforcing social cohesion.

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In post-conflict contexts, the restoration of social integration is particularly critical. Conflict often fractures communities, erodes trust, and disrupts shared norms that underpin collective identity. Functionalist theory underscores the importance of rebuilding these normative frameworks through processes such as reconciliation, dialogue, and social reintegration. Institutions such as schools, religious organizations, and local governance structures play a central role in transmitting values, mediating disputes, and fostering a sense of belonging. When these institutions function effectively, they help re-establish the social bonds necessary for long-term stability.

However, the effectiveness of these processes depends significantly on the inclusivity of the institutions involved. Exclusion, whether based on gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, undermines the integrative function of institutions and weakens their legitimacy. In functionalist terms, exclusion creates imbalances within the system, preventing it from achieving equilibrium. For example, when women are excluded from peace negotiations or governance structures, the resulting institutions may fail to reflect the needs and experiences of the broader population. This limits their effectiveness not only increases the risk but also renewed conflict and leaving by of underlying grievances unaddressed.

Moreover, functionalist analysis highlights the importance of legitimacy in sustaining peace. Institutions must not only perform their functions effectively but also be perceived as legitimate by the populations they serve. Legitimacy is closely tied to participation and representation; inclusive processes enhance trust and compliance, while exclusion fosters skepticism and resistance. In this sense, peace-building is as much about rebuilding relationships between citizens and institutions as it is about reconstructing the institutions themselves.

At the same time, it is important to recognize the limitations of a purely functionalist approach. While the emphasis on stability and integration is valuable, it can obscure underlying power dynamics and structural inequalities that contribute to conflict. Without addressing these issues, efforts to restore equilibrium may inadvertently reinforce existing hierarchies. This critique reinforces the need to integrate complementary perspectives, particularly gender-sensitive and critical approaches, into functionalist analyses of peace-building.

In sum, functionalism provides a useful lens for conceptualizing peace-building as a systemic and multidimensional process. By focusing on institutional interdependence, normative cohesion, and legitimacy, it offers a framework for understanding how sustainable peace can

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be achieved. However, its effectiveness depends on its ability to incorporate inclusive and critical perspectives that address the structural conditions underlying conflict. This sets the stage for a more focused examination of gender as a central dimension of functional peace-building.

Gender in the Functionalist Peace-building Framework

Integrating gender into the functionalist framework of peace-building requires moving beyond descriptive notions of inclusion toward a more critical understanding of how gender relations influence institutional effectiveness, social cohesion, and long-term stability, (Hudson, H., 2012). While classical functionalism focused on the role of institutions in maintaining social order, it often treated gender as a peripheral concern. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates, however, that gender relations are fundamental to the functioning of political, economic, and social institutions, particularly in societies recovering from violent conflict. A gender-responsive functionalist approach therefore recognizes that the exclusion of women and other marginalized groups weakens institutional performance and undermines the prospects for sustainable peace.

Gender, understood as a system of socially constructed roles, norms, and power relations, shapes access to decision-making processes, economic opportunities, education, and social recognition. In conflict-affected societies, these inequalities are often exacerbated. Women frequently experience displacement, loss of livelihoods, sexual and gender-based violence, and increased care-giving responsibilities, while simultaneously facing barriers to participation in formal peace processes. From a functionalist perspective, such exclusion represents a form of systemic dysfunction because it limits the capacity of institutions to draw upon the experiences, skills, and perspectives of significant segments of the population.

The experiences of Nigeria and South Sudan illustrate this dynamic clearly. In North-East Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency that escalated after 2009 disproportionately affected women and girls through forced displacement, abduction, sexual violence, and economic deprivation. Yet women also emerged as critical actors in peace-building and community recovery. In cities such as Maiduguri, Bama, Gwoza, Damboa, and Mubi, women's organizations have participated in community reconciliation programmes, trauma-healing initiatives, early-warning systems, and the reintegration of former combatants. Organizations including the Women Mediators Network, the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), and local civil society groups have facilitated dialogue between displaced persons, host communities, and local authorities. These activities contribute

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directly to social integration by rebuilding trust, promoting dialogue, and strengthening community resilience.

Recent studies indicate that women have increasingly participated in local peace committees and conflict prevention initiatives across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. Through the implementation of Nigeria's National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, women have assumed roles as mediators, community mobilizers, humanitarian coordinators, and peace advocates. The third National Action Plan (2025–2029) further emphasizes women's leadership in conflict prevention, peace-building, and post-conflict recovery. These developments reflect growing recognition that inclusive institutions are better equipped to perform the integrative functions necessary for long-term stability.

Empirical evidence increasingly supports the argument that meaningful participation by women contributes to more durable peace outcomes. Global studies conducted by UN Women and the United Nations Department of Political and Peace-building Affairs indicate that peace agreements are significantly more likely to endure when women participate meaningfully in negotiation, implementation, and monitoring processes. Women frequently introduce priorities related to education, healthcare, social welfare, justice, community security, and reconciliation issues that are essential for rebuilding the social foundations of peace but are often marginalized in elite political negotiations. Such contributions align closely with the functionalist emphasis on normative integration, collective welfare, and institutional legitimacy.

Beyond formal negotiations, women play indispensable roles in informal and community-based peace-building. Functionalism traditionally focused on formal institutions such as governments, legal systems, and educational structures. However, contemporary interpretations recognize that informal institutions including community associations, religious groups, and grassroots organizations are equally important in maintaining social stability. In Nigeria and South Sudan, women-led community organizations have served as informal institutions that facilitate mediation, disseminate early-warning information, provide psycho-social support, and foster reconciliation among divided communities. These activities represent the micro-foundations of social integration, helping to rebuild trust and reinforce norms of peaceful coexistence.

The concept of internationalization further strengthens this analysis by demonstrating how gender intersects with ethnicity, class, age, disability, and geographical location to shape experiences of conflict and peace-building. In South Sudan, for example, women from rural

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communities in Jonglei or Upper Nile often face different challenges from those experienced by women in Juba. Similarly, in Nigeria, displaced women in camps around Maiduguri encounter unique barriers related to security, economic vulnerability, and access to public services. A gender-responsive functionalist framework must therefore recognize these overlapping forms of exclusion and ensure that peace-building interventions address the diverse realities of affected populations.

Importantly, integrating gender into peace-building is not solely about increasing women's numerical representation. It also involves transforming the social norms and institutional practices that perpetuate inequality. This requires engaging men and boys in initiatives that challenge harmful forms of masculinity, reduce gender-based violence, and promote inclusive leadership. In both Nigeria and South Sudan, programmes focused on gender-transformation dialogue, community sensitization, and youth engagement have sought to reshape attitudes toward gender roles and strengthen social cohesion. From a functionalist perspective, these interventions contribute to the process of normative re-socialization necessary for rebuilding stable and peaceful societies.

Despite these advances, significant gaps remain between policy commitments and practical implementation. Women continue to be underrepresented in formal peace negotiations, governance institutions, and security sector reforms. In both Nigeria and South Sudan, patriarchal norms, limited access to resources, insecurity, and political exclusion continue to restrict women's participation. Consequently, many peace-building institutions remain unable to fully benefit from the contributions of half the population, limiting their effectiveness and legitimacy.

Incorporating gender perspectives into the functionalist framework ultimately enhances its explanatory and practical relevance. By recognizing gender inequality as a source of systemic dysfunction and gender inclusion as a driver of institutional effectiveness, this approach provides a more comprehensive account of how sustainable peace can be achieved. It also underscores the importance of designing peace-building interventions that are not only inclusive transformation and also capable of reshaping the social and institutional structures that underpin conflict.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts combined theories of Functionalist Peace-building and Feminist Peace and Security Theory. The functionalist Peace-building theory was founded by David Mitrany focusing on the institutionals performance and functions through cooperative system for

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societies or organizations needs. While the feminist peace and security theory is a combination of Feminist Peace Theory and Women, Peace & Security (WPS) an international feminist agender, considering the the three scholars of J. Ann Tickner, 1992, Cynthia Enloe 1989 & Carol Cohn 1987. their works are on gender in international relations: feminist perspectives, examining gender in military and the neglection of their role in the international politics, and as well as the feminist security and analysis of gendered security focusing on the women.

The combination is based on the fact that peace-building is not just about cooperation of funtional institutions but also requires social and political understanding and arrangment of the operations. It is an examination of the functiolist approach through gender-sensitivity using analytical lens.

Methodology

This paper is qualitative research, using comparative desk-based review system. Data sources was purely secondary, and AI was used as research assistant for data generation from the sources of online journals, reports, policies, documents, and articles. Nigeria, Rwanda, South-Sudan and Liberia were purposively selected for this study as they share similar issues as this paper concern.

Data was analyzed using descriptive content analysis of contents.

Case Studies: Gender and Peacebuilding in Africa

To demonstrate the practical relevance of a gender-sensitive functionalist framework, this section examines four African post-conflict contexts: Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Liberia. These cases illustrate how women's inclusion or exclusion affects institutional effectiveness, social cohesion, and the sustainability of peace-building processes. Rather than viewing gender solely as a normative concern, the analysis examines how women's participation contributes to the functioning of political, social, and community institutions responsible for maintaining stability and preventing the recurrence of conflict.

Nigeria: Women's Peace-building in the Context of Boko Haram Insurgency

The Boko Haram insurgency, which intensified in North-East Nigeria after 2009, resulted in widespread destruction across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. Cities and local government areas, including Maiduguri, Bama, Gwoza, Damboa, Dikwa, Monguno, and Mubi experienced large-scale displacement, attacks on schools and healthcare facilities, and severe disruptions to governance structures. Accordingly, Georgetown, WPS index, 2023;

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PRIO, 2023; UN Women reports; World Bank, 2024 stated that, by 2024, over 2 million people had been displaced across the region, creating significant challenges for peace-building and social reintegration.

Despite being among the most affected populations, women emerged as critical actors in local peace-building efforts. Organizations such as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI), and the Women Mediators Network have facilitated community dialogues, trauma-healing programmes, early-warning mechanisms, and reintegration initiatives for former insurgents and displaced persons.

In Maiduguri and Bama between 2018 and 2024, women-led peace committees worked with traditional rulers, religious leaders, and humanitarian agencies to rebuild trust between returning former combatants and host communities. Women's groups also participated in community-based de-radicalization initiatives linked to the Borno State government's rehabilitation programmes. These interventions strengthened social integration by reducing stigma, facilitating reconciliation, and restoring communication among divided groups.

From a functionalist perspective, these activities enhanced the integrative functions of local institutions by rebuilding social trust and restoring community cohesion. However, women's representation within formal security governance and peace negotiation structures remains limited, creating a disconnect between grassroots peace-building and formal policy processes.

Rwanda: Institutionalized Gender Inclusion and Post-Genocide Reconstruction

Rwanda offers one of the most significant examples of institutionalized gender inclusion in post-conflict reconstruction. Following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, which claimed approximately 800,000 lives within 100 days, the country faced the challenge of rebuilding political institutions, restoring social cohesion, and addressing widespread trauma.

The 2003 Constitution established a minimum 30 percent quota for women in decision-making institutions. Over time, Rwanda surpassed this benchmark, becoming the first country in the world where women constituted a parliamentary majority. By 2024, women occupied approximately 61 percent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, one of the highest rates globally.

Women also played important roles in the Gacaca community justice system, which operated between 2002 and 2012 to address genocide-related crimes. Female judges, witnesses, survivors' representatives, and community leaders participated extensively in truth-telling,

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accountability, and reconciliation processes. Beyond formal institutions, women's organizations such as Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe supported reconciliation projects, economic empowerment programmes, and community healing initiatives throughout Kigali, Huye, Musanze, and other districts.

From a functionalist perspective, Rwanda's institutionalization of gender inclusion strengthened both the normative and integrative functions of governance. Women's participation improved institutional legitimacy, broadened representation, and facilitated national reconciliation. Nevertheless, scholars continue to debate whether descriptive representation has translated into full substantive empowerment, highlighting the importance of examining the quality as well as the quantity of participation.

South Sudan: Community Peace-building Amid Institutional Fragility

Since gaining independence in 2011, South Sudan has experienced recurring cycles of violence, particularly following the outbreak of civil war in 2013 and renewed conflict in 2016. Communities in Juba, Bor, Bentiu, Malakal, Wau, and Yei experienced extensive displacement, economic collapse, and institutional breakdown.

Although women have frequently been excluded from formal political decision-making, they have played essential roles in community-level peace-building. Organizations such as the South Sudan Women Coalition for Peace, Eve Organization for Women's Development, and various church-based networks have facilitated mediation efforts, humanitarian assistance, and reconciliation initiatives.

During negotiations leading to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018, women activists campaigned for greater inclusion in governance structures. Their advocacy contributed to the incorporation of a 35 percent affirmative action quota for women in transitional government institutions.

Between 2020 and 2024, women participated in local peace dialogues supported by UNMISS and civil society organizations in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile States. In Bor and Bentiu, women's peace committees engaged in mediation efforts addressing cattle-raiding conflicts and inter-communal violence. In displacement camps around Malakal and Juba, women-led organizations provided psycho-social support and facilitated reconciliation activities among displaced communities.

Despite these achievements, implementation of gender commitments remains uneven. Women's representation in national political institutions continues to fall below agreed

targets, limiting institutional legitimacy and reducing the inclusiveness of peace-building processes. Functionalist analysis suggests that such exclusion weakens the capacity of governance institutions to perform their integrative functions effectively.

Liberia: Women's Collective Action and Democratic Transformation

Liberia provides one of the most influential examples of women's collective action in contemporary peace-building. During the Second Liberian Civil War (1999–2003), women's organizations mobilized across religious, ethnic, and social divisions to demand an end to violence.

The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace movement, led by activists including Leymah Gbowee, organized peaceful demonstrations, public advocacy campaigns, and interfaith mobilization efforts in Monrovia between 2002 and 2003. Thousands of Christian and Muslim women participated in nonviolent protests that pressured political leaders and armed factions to engage in negotiations.

Women's activism played a significant role in sustaining momentum for the Accra Peace Agreement signed in Ghana in 2003. Following the conflict, women continued to influence governance reforms and democratic participation. Liberia subsequently elected Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in 2005, symbolizing broader shifts in political participation and gender norms.

Women's organizations remained active in post-conflict reconstruction through civic education programmes, community reconciliation initiatives, and advocacy for legal reforms addressing gender-based violence. These efforts contributed to rebuilding institutional trust and strengthening social cohesion.

From a functionalist perspective, Liberia demonstrates how grassroots mobilization can strengthen institutional functionality by promoting social integration, generating political accountability, and facilitating normative transformation. Women's collective action contributed not only to ending conflict but also to reshaping societal expectations regarding leadership, citizenship, and participation.

Comparative Insights

Several important patterns emerge across these cases. First, women's participation consistently strengthened institutional performance by enhancing trust, communication, reconciliation, and social cohesion. Whether through grassroots mobilization in Liberia, local

mediation efforts in Nigeria and South Sudan, or formal political representation in Rwanda, women's contributions supported the integrative functions necessary for sustainable peace. Second, the exclusion of women from formal decision-making processes weakened institutional legitimacy and reduced the effectiveness of peace-building interventions. This pattern is particularly evident in Nigeria and South Sudan, where women often perform significant peace-building functions at the community level but remain under-represented in national governance structures.

Third, successful gender inclusion depends not only on participation but also on supportive institutional frameworks. Rwanda's constitutional quotas and South Sudan's 35 percent representation commitment demonstrate how institutional design can facilitate inclusion, although implementation remains uneven.

Finally, the cases reveal that gender inclusion contributes not only to social justice but also to institutional effectiveness. From a functionalist perspective, women are not merely beneficiaries of peace-building programmes; they are essential actors whose participation enhances the capacity of institutions to perform the integrative, normative, and stabilizing functions required for long-term peace.

Contemporary Evidence (2020–2025)

Recent scholarship and policy reports reinforce these findings. UN Women reported in 2024 that women remain significantly under-represented in formal peace negotiations globally, despite evidence showing that peace agreements are more likely to endure when women participate meaningfully in negotiation and implementation processes. Similarly, studies conducted between 2020 and 2025 demonstrate that women's involvement in community-based mediation, early-warning systems, and local governance initiatives improves conflict prevention outcomes and strengthens public trust in institutions.

In Nigeria, implementation of the third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2025–2029) has expanded opportunities for women's participation in conflict prevention and recovery initiatives. In South Sudan, women continue to advocate for full implementation of the 35 percent representation target established under the R-ARCSS. Rwanda remains a global benchmark for female political representation, while Liberia continues to serve as a prominent example of how grassroots women's movements can influence national peace processes.

Contemporary research has also highlighted the importance of intersectionality, demonstrating that gender interacts with ethnicity, class, age, disability, and geographical

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location to shape peace-building experiences. Additionally, programmes that engage men and boys in promoting gender equality and nonviolent conflict resolution have received increasing attention. Such initiatives seek to transform harmful social norms and strengthen the cultural foundations of sustainable peace.

Taken together, the evidence from 2020–2025 provides strong support for the argument that gender inclusion enhances institutional functionality, social cohesion, and the durability of peace-building outcomes. These findings reinforce the central proposition of this study: gender inclusion is not merely a normative aspiration but a functional requirement for sustainable peace and effective post-conflict reconstruction.

Recent scholarship and policy reports provide strong empirical support for the argument that gender inclusion is central to effective peace-building while simultaneously revealing persistent gaps between international commitments and practical implementation. Emerging evidence from Africa and other conflict-affected regions demonstrates that inclusive institutions are generally more effective at promoting legitimacy, social cohesion, and long-term stability. However, progress remains uneven, particularly in contexts where structural inequalities and weak governance institutions continue to limit meaningful participation.

One of the most significant challenges identified in recent studies is the continued under-representation of women in formal peace processes. Despite more than two decades of implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, women remain substantially under-represented as negotiators, mediators, and signatories in peace agreements worldwide. Recent UN Women reports indicate that although women's participation in peace-building initiatives has increased, representation in high-level negotiations remains disproportionately low. This gap has practical consequences because peace agreements that fail to incorporate diverse perspectives are often less responsive to community needs and therefore more vulnerable to implementation challenges.

The experiences of Nigeria and South Sudan illustrate these dynamics. In Nigeria, the implementation of the Third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2025–2029) seeks to expand women's participation in conflict prevention, peace-building, humanitarian response, and post-conflict recovery. In Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, women's organizations have increasingly participated in community peace committees, early-warning systems, and reconciliation programmes aimed at addressing the consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency. In Maiduguri, Bama, Gwoza, and Damboa, women have played critical roles in facilitating dialogue between displaced populations, host communities, and

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local authorities. These initiatives demonstrate how grassroots participation contributes to rebuilding trust and restoring institutional legitimacy.

Similarly, in South Sudan, women's organizations continue to advocate for the implementation of the 35 percent affirmative action target established under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) signed in 2018. Although progress has been made, implementation remains inconsistent. Between 2022 and 2025, women-led organizations in Juba, Bor, Bentiu, and Malakal participated in local peace dialogues addressing inter-communal violence, displacement, and resource conflicts. These initiatives have strengthened community-level conflict resolution mechanisms, even as women remain under-represented in some national decision-making structures.

Recent research also highlights the importance of informal and grassroots peace-building mechanisms. Community-based organizations frequently operate in environments where formal institutions are weak, inaccessible, or lack public trust. In both Nigeria and South Sudan, women-led mediation networks, faith-based organizations, and local civil society groups have played crucial roles in preventing violence, facilitating reconciliation, and supporting post-conflict recovery. Such activities reinforce the functionalist argument that stability depends not only on formal institutions but also on informal social structures that maintain social cohesion and regulate community relations.

Another major development in contemporary peace-building scholarship is the growing emphasis on intersectionality. Researchers increasingly recognize that gender intersects with ethnicity, class, age, disability, displacement status, and geographical location to shape experiences of conflict and recovery. In Nigeria, internally displaced women living in camps around Maiduguri face distinct challenges related to security, livelihoods, and access to services. Similarly, women in rural areas of Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile States in South Sudan experience vulnerabilities that differ significantly from those of women living in urban centers such as Juba. Recognizing these intersecting inequalities has become essential for designing inclusive and effective peace-building interventions.

The role of masculinity has also attracted increasing attention in recent research. Contemporary peace-building programmes increasingly engage men and boys in efforts to challenge harmful gender norms, reduce gender-based violence, and promote nonviolent forms of conflict resolution. In North-East Nigeria, several community-based initiatives implemented between 2021 and 2025 incorporated male religious leaders, youth groups, and traditional authorities into discussions about gender equality and peaceful coexistence.

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Similar programmes have been implemented in South Sudan through local civil society organizations and faith-based networks. These interventions seek to transform social norms that contribute to violence and exclusion, thereby strengthening the cultural foundations of sustainable peace.

In addition, there is growing recognition of the importance of integrating human rights frameworks into peace-building strategies. Gender equality is increasingly viewed not only as a development objective but also as a fundamental human rights issue. Institutions that uphold principles of equality, participation, accountability, and non-discrimination are generally more likely to gain public trust and legitimacy. In Rwanda, for example, constitutional reforms and gender quotas introduced after the 1994 genocide contributed to greater female representation in governance and strengthened perceptions of institutional inclusiveness. Similar efforts in Liberia following the civil war contributed to expanded opportunities for women's political participation and civic engagement.

Emerging research further demonstrates the growing relevance of climate-related and economic factors in shaping conflict dynamics and peace-building outcomes. Environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and economic inequality have become increasingly important drivers of insecurity, particularly in vulnerable regions. Around the Lake Chad Basin, which includes parts of Borno State in Nigeria, climate change has contributed to shrinking water resources, livelihood insecurity, and increased competition over land and natural resources. Women have played important roles in local resource-management initiatives and community resilience programmes aimed at reducing these pressures.

Comparable challenges exist in South Sudan, where climate-induced flooding and competition over grazing land have intensified inter-communal tensions in Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile States. Women's organizations have increasingly participated in mediation efforts addressing disputes related to cattle migration, access to water, and agricultural resources. These interventions highlight how gender-responsive peace-building can strengthen community resilience and improve institutional adaptability in the face of environmental change.

Taken together, contemporary evidence demonstrates that gender inclusion enhances institutional effectiveness, strengthens social cohesion, and contributes to the sustainability of peace-building outcomes. At the same time, significant implementation gaps remain. Bridging these gaps requires moving beyond symbolic representation toward meaningful participation, institutional reform, and the redistribution of power within peace-building

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processes. The evidence therefore reinforces the central argument of this study: gender inclusion is not an optional component of peace-building but a functional requirement for sustainable peace and resilient institutions.

Critiques and Limitations

Despite its analytical value, the functionalist approach to peace-building has important limitations that we must acknowledge. While functionalism provides a useful framework for understanding institutional interdependence, social cohesion, and systemic stability, critics argue that it often prioritizes order over justice and underestimates the significance of power relations, inequality, and conflict in shaping social systems.

One of the most enduring criticisms of functionalism is its assumption of social consensus. Classical functionalist theory tends to portray society as an integrated system whose various institutions work together to maintain equilibrium. However, post-conflict societies are rarely characterized by consensus. Instead, they are often marked by competing interests, historical grievances, ethnic divisions, and unequal distributions of power. In contexts such as South Sudan, recurring tensions between political elites and ethnic communities demonstrate that instability is not simply a temporary dysfunction but often reflects deeper structural conflicts embedded within social and political institutions.

A related limitation concerns the treatment of power. Functionalist analysis generally focuses on the contribution institutions make to system stability without adequately examining how power is distributed within those institutions. This can obscure the ways in which peace-building processes reproduce existing inequalities. For example, although South Sudan's 2018 peace agreement established a 35 percent quota for women's representation, implementation has frequently fallen short of this target. From a purely functionalist perspective, the existence of formal institutions may suggest progress toward stability; however, a critical perspective reveals that unequal power relations continue to limit meaningful participation and institutional legitimacy.

Similarly, in Nigeria, women have played central roles in grassroots peace-building initiatives throughout the North-East, yet their participation in high-level security governance and formal decision-making remains relatively limited. This disconnect illustrates how institutional stability can coexist with significant inequalities in representation and influence. Without addressing these inequalities, peace-building efforts risk reproducing exclusionary structures that undermine long-term stability.

Functionalism has also been criticized for its conservative orientation. By emphasizing stability and order, it may inadvertently privilege the restoration of existing institutions without adequately questioning whether those institutions are equitable or inclusive. In post-conflict settings, restoring institutional functionality alone may be insufficient if the structural conditions that contributed to violence remain unchanged. Sustainable peace requires not only stability but also justice, accountability, and social transformation.

The integration of gender perspectives addresses some of these shortcomings but does not eliminate them entirely. Gender-sensitive functionalism recognizes that exclusion undermines institutional effectiveness and social cohesion. However, there remains a risk of instrumentalizing gender equality by valuing women's participation primarily because it improves institutional performance rather than because equality constitutes a fundamental human right. This raises an important normative question regarding whether gender inclusion should be justified primarily in terms of efficiency or justice. A comprehensive approach must acknowledge both dimensions.

Another limitation involves the application of functionalist frameworks to highly fragmented and fluid social environments. Many peace-building processes occur outside formal institutions and rely heavily on informal networks, community organizations, and traditional authorities. In North-East Nigeria and South Sudan, women-led grassroots organizations frequently perform functions that formal institutions cannot effectively deliver. Such realities challenge assumptions of systemic coherence and suggest that functionalist models must be adapted to account for informal governance arrangements.

Despite these limitations, functionalism remains a valuable analytical framework when applied critically and in combination with complementary perspectives. Its emphasis on institutional coordination, social integration, and systemic resilience provides important insights into the conditions necessary for sustainable peace. However, its explanatory power is significantly enhanced when combined with feminist, critical, human-rights-based, and inter-sectional approaches that address power asymmetries and structural inequalities.

Ultimately, understanding peace-building requires theoretical integration rather than theoretical exclusivity. By combining the strengths of functionalism with insights from feminist and critical peace-building scholarship, researchers and practitioners can develop more comprehensive frameworks capable of addressing both the institutional and structural dimensions of sustainable peace.

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Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper demonstrates that gender inclusion is not merely a normative aspiration but a practical requirement for effective institutional functioning and sustainable peace. The study was carried out using qualitative research method utilizing secondary data source served as the limitation of the study, but still relevant for policy makers, academicians, researchers for guide and it will help in further study for generating primary or field work data collections. However, achieving this objective requires moving beyond broad commitments toward concrete implementation strategies. The paper has clearly identifying responsible institutions, implementation mechanisms, timelines, and accountability structures, these recommendations provide a practical road-map for strengthening gender-responsive peace-building in Nigeria, South Sudan, and other post-conflict societies. Their successful implementation would enhance institutional legitimacy, strengthen social cohesion, and improve the long-term sustainability of peace-building outcomes.

Policy Recommendations

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen gender-responsive peace-building within a functionalist framework. Unlike general policy prescriptions, these recommendations identify key implementing actors, operational strategies, and expected outcomes to facilitate practical application, particularly in conflict-affected contexts such as Nigeria and South Sudan.

1. Institutionalize Gender-Responsive Peace-building Training Across Security and Governance Institutions

Lead Institutions: Ministries of Women Affairs, Ministries of Interior, National Peace Commissions, Security Sector Training Institutions, and Civil Service Training Academies.

Supporting Actors: UN Women, UNDP, African Union, ECOWAS (for Nigeria), IGAD (for South Sudan), and local civil society organizations.

Governments should establish mandatory gender-responsive peace-building training programmes for security personnel, local government officials, traditional leaders, judges, mediators, and peace committee members. In Nigeria, the National Orientation Agency, National Human Rights Commission, and National Centre for Women Development should collaborate with state governments in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe to deliver annual training programmes. In South Sudan, similar initiatives should be coordinated through the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the National Transitional Government.

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Expected Outcome: Increased institutional capacity to identify and address gender-related drivers of conflict and improved responsiveness of peace-building institutions to community needs.

2. Enforce Women's Representation in Peace Negotiation and Governance Structures

Lead Institutions: National Assemblies, Electoral Commissions, Ministries of Justice, and Peace Agreement Monitoring Bodies.

Supporting Actors: Women's coalitions, civil society organizations, UN Women, and international peace-building partners.

Governments should move beyond symbolic representation by enforcing legally binding participation targets. In South Sudan, implementation of the 35 percent quota established under the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) should be monitored annually through independent compliance reports. In Nigeria, federal and state governments should integrate minimum representation requirements for women within peace committees, security advisory councils, and conflict-management structures operating in conflict-prone states.

Expected Outcome: Increased participation of women in decision-making processes and improved legitimacy of peace-building institutions.

3. Establish Formal Community Peace-building Partnerships with Women's Organizations

Lead Institutions: National Peace Commissions, Local Government Authorities, and State Ministries of Local Government.

Supporting Actors: Women's organizations, faith-based groups, traditional institutions, and humanitarian agencies. Governments should create formal mechanisms linking grassroots women's organizations to local and national peace-building structures. In North-East Nigeria, organizations such as Fitiyanul Islam of Nigeria, FOMWAN, Women Mediators Network, and Women Without Walls Initiative should be represented within state-level peace and reconciliation committees. In South Sudan, women's associations operating in Juba, Bor, Bentiu, Malakal, and Wau should be integrated into local peace councils and reconciliation forums.

Expected Outcome: Improved coordination between formal institutions and community-based actors, leading to stronger conflict prevention and reconciliation outcomes.

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4. Strengthen Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Systems

Lead Institutions: Ministries of Justice, Ministries of Health, Police Services, and National Human Rights Institutions.

Supporting Actors: UNFPA, UNICEF, women's rights organizations, hospitals, and legal aid providers. Governments should establish integrated referral systems connecting law enforcement agencies, healthcare providers, psycho-social support centres, and legal services. Dedicated gender-based violence response units should be created in conflict-affected areas, particularly in Maiduguri, Damboa, Gwoza, Juba, Bentiu, and Malakal.

Annual funding allocations should be earmarked specifically for survivor support services, legal assistance, and community awareness campaigns.

Expected Outcome: Reduced incidence of gender-based violence, increased reporting rates, and enhanced public trust in justice institutions.

5. Develop Inter-sectional Peace-building Frameworks for Vulnerable Populations

Lead Institutions: Ministries of Planning, Ministries of Humanitarian Affairs, and National Statistical Agencies.

Supporting Actors: Research institutions, universities, civil society organizations, and development partners.

Peace-building programmes should be designed using vulnerability assessments that account for gender, ethnicity, displacement status, age, disability, and economic conditions. In Nigeria, interventions targeting internally displaced women in camps around Maiduguri should differ from programmes designed for rural farming communities in Adamawa. Similarly, peace-building programmes in South Sudan should be tailored to the specific realities of women in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity States.

Expected Outcome: More inclusive and context-specific peace-building interventions capable of addressing multiple forms of marginalization.

6. Establish National Gender and Peace-building Coordination Platforms

Lead Institutions: Offices of the President, National Peace Commissions, and Ministries of Women Affairs.

Supporting Actors: Civil society organizations, donor agencies, regional organizations, and development partners. Governments should establish multi-stakeholder coordination platforms that meet quarterly to review progress on Women, Peace and Security commitments. In Nigeria, this platform should oversee implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (2025–2029). In South Sudan, the platform should monitor implementation of gender commitments under the R-ARCSS framework.

The platforms should publish annual public reports evaluating progress, challenges, and resource gaps.

Expected Outcome: Improved policy coordination, reduced duplication of interventions, and enhanced accountability.

7. Invest in Gender-Disaggregated Data Collection and Monitoring Systems

Lead Institutions: National Bureau of Statistics (Nigeria), National Bureau of Statistics (South Sudan), Ministries of Planning, and National Research Institutes.

Supporting Actors: Universities, UN Women, UNDP, PRIO, and local research organizations.

Governments should establish gender-sensitive monitoring systems to track women's participation in peace negotiations, local peace committees, mediation efforts, governance institutions, and post-conflict recovery programmes.

Annual peace-building scorecards should be developed to measure progress in women's representation, conflict prevention, and institutional performance.

Expected Outcome: Improved evidence-based policy-making and stronger evaluation of peace-building outcomes.

8. Integrate Climate Security and Women's Economic Empowerment into Peace-building Strategies

Lead Institutions: Ministries of Environment, Agriculture, Water Resources, and Economic Planning.

Supporting Actors: UNDP, FAO, African Development Bank, women's cooperatives, and community development organizations. Governments should integrate women into climate-security initiatives, natural resource management programmes, and livelihood recovery projects. In the Lake Chad Basin region of Nigeria, women should be represented in local

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resource-management committees addressing water scarcity and farmer-herder conflicts. In South Sudan, women should participate in community-level mechanisms managing grazing routes, flood response, and access to agricultural resources.

Additionally, peace-building programmes should include vocational training, microfinance initiatives, and economic recovery projects targeting conflict-affected women.

Expected Outcome: Increased community resilience, reduced resource-based conflict, and strengthened economic security for women.

9. Create Independent Accountability Mechanisms for Gender Commitments in Peace-building

Lead Institutions: National Human Rights Commissions, Parliamentary Oversight Committees, and Independent Audit Agencies.

Supporting Actors: Civil society organizations, media organizations, women's advocacy groups, and international partners.

Independent monitoring bodies should conduct biennial reviews of government commitments relating to gender inclusion in peace-building. Findings should be publicly released and linked to budgetary and policy review processes.

In Nigeria and South Sudan, these reviews should specifically assess compliance with Women, Peace and Security commitments, women's representation targets, and implementation of peace agreement provisions.

Expected Outcome: Greater transparency, stronger accountability, and more effective implementation of gender-responsive peace-building policies.

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