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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SECURITY INSTITUTIONS AND PEACEBUILDING: CHALLENGES, REFORMS AND COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

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ABSTRACT

The participation of women in security institutions and peacebuilding processes has increasingly attracted attention from scholars, policymakers, and international organizations over the past two decades. Women make up half of the world's population, yet they remain significantly underrepresented in the police, the military, intelligence agencies, and in formal peace negotiations. This paper examines the challenges women face in entering and advancing within security institutions, explores the major policy and institutional reforms that have been introduced to address those challenges, and analyses the documented outcomes that result from women's inclusion in security and peacebuilding processes at the community level. Drawing on a wide body of scholarship and key international frameworks particularly United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and its successor resolutions the paper argues that gender-inclusive security institutions are not simply a matter of fairness or legal rights; they produce better operational outcomes, build community trust, reduce gender-based violence, and contribute to more durable and lasting peace. The paper concludes that meaningful participation of women goes beyond mere numerical representation but requires structural reforms, changes in institutional culture, and sustained political commitment at both the national and international levels.

Keywords: Women, security sector reform, peacebuilding, UNSCR 1325, gender mainstreaming, community outcomes

INTRODUCTION

For many years, institutions responsible for maintaining national and international security, such as the military, police, intelligence agencies, and peace negotiation bodies, were largely dominated by men. As a result, women were often viewed mainly as victims of conflict rather than as people who could actively contribute to security and peacebuilding. Although this perception has begun to change, progress has been gradual. Today, there is increasing evidence that involving women in security institutions and peace processes benefits not only women themselves but also the wider society. There is no disputing the fact that organisations with greater female participation often enjoy stronger public confidence, respond more effectively to community needs, and are better equipped to prevent and resolve conflicts. These findings have strengthened the argument that women's inclusion is important for both equality and effective security governance.

A major milestone in this regard was the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2000. This resolution formally recognised that armed conflict affects women differently from men and emphasised the important role women play in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. It also called on governments and international organisations to ensure that women participate fully and equally in all peace and security efforts (Neuwirth, 2002). Despite more than two decades of international advocacy and policy reforms, women continue to be underrepresented in peace negotiations, leadership positions within security institutions, and decision-making processes related to peace and security (Lenhardt, 2021). This shows that there is still a significant gap between international commitments and what is happening in practice.

This paper focuses on three major issues: It discusses the barriers that continue to limit women's meaningful participation in security institutions and peacebuilding, it reviews the key reforms introduced at the international, regional, and national levels to address these challenges and examines the outcomes of women's participation by considering how their inclusion has

influenced security institutions and the communities they serve. To provide a broader understanding, the discussion draws on examples from Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

The Global Landscape: Women in Security Institutions

Despite years of advocacy and numerous international commitments aimed at promoting gender equality, women remain underrepresented in security institutions around the world. Progress has been made in some countries, but overall participation remains low, especially in senior leadership and operational positions. The United Nations' first global report on equal opportunities for women in the defence sector, published in 2024, highlights that achieving gender inclusion in security institutions remains an urgent priority. The report notes that legal restrictions, institutional practices, and organisational cultures continue to limit women's full participation in national security sectors (United Nations, 2024).

In many countries, women account for less than 15 percent of military personnel, and their representation declines even further in senior command positions. A similar pattern exists within police organisations, where women continue to occupy relatively few leadership roles despite ongoing reform efforts. Evidence from Kenya reflects these challenges. Waweru and Wachira (2025) found that communication systems within the Kenya Defence Forces and the National Police Service were not effective in promoting women's participation. Female officers reported limited opportunities for career advancement, while institutional policies, leadership structures, and informal professional networks did little to support their professional growth.

Similar concerns have been reported in Europe. Saltirovska (2023) observed that although many European countries have introduced policies encouraging gender inclusion, women still face obstacles during recruitment and throughout their careers. Some physical requirements are not directly linked to operational duties, while limited mentoring opportunities and long-standing masculine organisational cultures continue to discourage female participation. The study also argued that security institutions benefit from greater gender diversity because women contribute valuable perspectives and skills that strengthen peacekeeping, humanitarian operations, cyber security, and conflict prevention.

Across many African countries, these challenges are often compounded by broader issues such as weak institutions, post-conflict reconstruction, and persistent gender inequality. In Nigeria, for example, Olusola (2016) reported that although the Nigeria Police Force adopted a Gender Policy in 2010, its implementation has remained weak. Many officers lacked adequate understanding of gender mainstreaming, while institutional structures and operational procedures did not sufficiently support the policy's objectives. Overall, available evidence suggests that while governments have introduced policies aimed at increasing women's participation in security institutions, practical implementation has lagged behind. As a result, a considerable gap still exists between policy commitments and actual outcomes.

Challenges to Women's Participation in Security Institutions

Structural and Institutional Barriers

One of the biggest obstacles preventing women from fully participating in security institutions is the structure of these organisations themselves. In some countries, legal and administrative regulations still restrict women's access to certain military or policing roles, particularly combat and specialised operational positions. Even where formal restrictions have been removed, other institutional requirements continue to create barriers. Conditions such as minimum height standards, physical fitness requirements designed around male physiology, and deployment policies that do not adequately consider family responsibilities often make it more difficult for women to enter and remain in security careers (United Nations, 2024). Career progression also presents significant challenges. Promotion systems in many security organisations are built

around uninterrupted service, frequent transfers, and long deployments. These expectations can disadvantage women who take time away from work because of pregnancy, childbirth, or caregiving responsibilities. As a result, many qualified female officers experience slower career progression than their male colleagues.

Another major concern is the limited institutional support available to women after recruitment. Many security organisations still lack adequate maternity leave policies, childcare facilities, and flexible working arrangements. Consequently, many female personnel struggle to balance demanding professional responsibilities with family obligations (Saltirovska, 2023). Recruitment practices also influence women's participation. When recruitment campaigns mainly feature men or selection panels are dominated by male officers, they may unintentionally reinforce the perception that security careers are designed primarily for men. Research conducted in Kenya showed that communication strategies intended to attract women were often ineffective because they failed to reach women from different social backgrounds and geographical locations (Waweru & Wachira, 2025).

Rather than encouraging greater female participation, these institutional practices often discourage qualified women from applying or remaining in security services. Addressing these barriers therefore requires more than policy reforms; it also demands changes in recruitment strategies, career development systems, and workplace support mechanisms.

Cultural and Attitudinal Barriers

Apart from institutional challenges, cultural beliefs and societal attitudes remain major obstacles to women's participation in security institutions. In many societies, security and defence are still regarded as occupations better suited to men. As a result, women who choose careers in the military, police, or other security agencies often face stereotypes that question their competence, leadership ability, and commitment.

Military organisations, in particular, have traditionally been shaped by values that emphasise physical strength and masculine identity (Bakr, 2011). These long-standing beliefs can create working environments where women feel excluded or undervalued. Female personnel frequently report experiences of gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and unequal treatment, all of which affect both their job performance and personal well-being.

Research cited by Waweru and Wachira (2025) showed that women serving in military operations in Somalia experienced persistent discrimination and harassment throughout their deployment. These experiences reduced their effectiveness and created additional pressures beyond the demands of military service. Such findings suggest that simply increasing the number of women in security institutions is not enough if workplace cultures remain unwelcoming. According to Baker (2011) a successful security sector reform should focus not only on changing official policies but also on addressing the informal practices, attitudes, and power relations that shape everyday interactions within security organisations. Without changing these underlying cultural norms, many reforms are unlikely to achieve lasting results.

Violence and Personal Security Threats

For many women, participating in security institutions or peacebuilding activities comes with personal risks. Women who serve as police officers, military personnel, peace negotiators, or community peace advocates may become targets of intimidation, harassment, and violence simply because of their public roles. These risks are often greater in countries affected by conflict or political instability, where law enforcement institutions are weak and protection mechanisms are limited (Gordon, 2018). Women working in these environments may face threats not only from armed groups but also from individuals who oppose their involvement in security and leadership positions. Lenhardt (2021) observed that deeply rooted social norms remain one of the biggest barriers to women's participation in conflict-affected societies. In many post-conflict settings, weak

institutions and unstable social conditions increase the vulnerability of female activists and security personnel, making their work even more difficult.

This situation creates a difficult cycle. Women's participation is needed to strengthen peace and improve security, yet the insecurity itself often discourages women from taking part in these important roles.

Limited Resources and Funding

Limited financial support is another challenge that affects efforts to increase women's participation in security institutions and peacebuilding programmes. Although many governments and international organisations have introduced policies promoting gender inclusion, funding for their implementation often remains inadequate. Furthermore, only about two percent of global peace and security funding is directed towards programmes that support gender equality and women's empowerment O'Reilly (2016). This level of investment is relatively low, given evidence that women's participation contributes positively to peacebuilding and security outcomes. Insufficient funding affects several important areas, including training programmes, leadership development, mentoring initiatives, childcare support, and professional networking opportunities. Without sustained financial investment, many promising initiatives struggle to continue beyond their initial stages, limiting their long-term impact. For gender inclusion policies to produce meaningful results, governments and development partners need to provide adequate, consistent funding to support both institutional reforms and women's professional development.

The Problem of Token Representation

Increasing the number of women in security institutions is an important step, but it does not automatically guarantee meaningful participation. In many cases, women are recruited or appointed mainly to satisfy policy requirements or improve public perception, while having little influence over important decisions. Liberia provides an example of both progress and continuing challenges. Between 2005 and 2011, the proportion of female officers in the Liberia National Police increased from two percent to seventeen percent (Bacon, 2015). Although this represented significant progress, researchers argue that numerical improvements alone cannot achieve genuine gender inclusion. True and Davies (2020), as well as Hudson and Huber (2018), emphasise that women must be able to contribute actively to policy discussions, operational planning, and leadership decisions. If women remain excluded from decision-making or are viewed merely as symbolic representatives, the expected benefits of gender inclusion are unlikely to be realised. According to True and Davies (2020), measures such as gender quotas can help improve representation, but they are only one part of the solution. Lasting change requires that women participate fully in governance processes, that gender perspectives are integrated into institutional policies, and that gender equality becomes a genuine organisational priority rather than a symbolic commitment.

Reforms: International, Regional, and National Responses

The International Framework: UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda

One of the most important developments in promoting women's participation in peace and security was the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in October 2000. This resolution marked a significant shift in international security policy by recognising that women are not only affected by armed conflict but also play an essential role in preventing conflict, resolving disputes, and rebuilding societies after war. Member states were called on by UNSCR 1325 to increase the representation of women at all levels of decision-making in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction. It also encouraged the United Nations to appoint more women as special representatives and peace

envoys, recognising that women's perspectives are essential for building lasting peace (Neuwirth, 2002).

Since then, the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has expanded through six additional Security Council resolutions, including UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, and 2122. Together, these resolutions address issues such as conflict-related sexual violence, women's participation in peace operations, protection of women's rights, and accountability during and after conflicts (Miller et al., 2014).

Although these international frameworks have strengthened global commitment to gender inclusion, implementation has not always matched policy expectations. Miller et al. (2014), in their review of forty National Action Plans developed under UNSCR 1325, found that many countries had made progress in establishing policies but continued to struggle with implementation. In many cases, the plans failed to address the deeper institutional and social barriers that prevent women from participating fully in peace and security processes.

Similarly, Asante (2020) noted that two decades after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, women's contributions to peace and security have gained greater international recognition. However, translating international commitments into meaningful change at national and community levels remains a major challenge. Much of the progress has been seen in policy development and awareness creation rather than in transforming the everyday experiences of women affected by conflict. McLeod (2011) also argued that the practical impact of UNSCR 1325 has been limited in many settings because international peacebuilding efforts have not worked closely enough with local women's organisations. Without active collaboration with grassroots groups, many interventions fail to respond effectively to local realities and community needs.

These findings suggest that international policies alone cannot achieve meaningful change. Lasting progress depends on how effectively global commitments are adapted to local contexts and implemented through genuine partnerships with national institutions and community-based women's organisations.

Security Sector Reform with a Gender Perspective

Security Sector Reform (SSR) refers to efforts aimed at improving the way security institutions such as the military, police, intelligence agencies, and oversight bodies operate. The goal is to ensure that these institutions are accountable, transparent, and responsive to the people they serve while upholding democratic principles and respect for human rights (Bakr, 2011).

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to incorporating gender perspectives into security sector reform. Rather than treating gender as a separate issue, many scholars argue that it should be integrated into every stage of reform because security institutions are expected to serve both men and women equally.

Bendix and Stanley (2008) identified three main reasons for integrating gender into SSR. First, promoting gender equality is a fundamental human rights obligation. Second, organisations that include women in decision-making generally make more balanced and effective decisions. Third, gender-sensitive institutions are often better equipped to respond to the diverse security needs of society. Despite these advantages, the authors observed that practical tools for implementing gender-sensitive reforms remain limited, and they called for greater use of feminist peace research to strengthen reform efforts.

Bastick (2017) reached similar conclusions in her study of gender and military reform. While acknowledging that progress has been made, she noted that many feminist scholars remain cautious about the effectiveness of current SSR policies. Nevertheless, her research also highlighted several examples where women's organisations successfully influenced reform processes and contributed to making security institutions more responsive to gender-related concerns.

One example discussed by Bastick (2017) involved efforts by the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** to increase women's recruitment into Afghanistan's security forces. Although the initiative produced some positive results, it also demonstrated the difficulties that arise when reforms are introduced without sufficient understanding of local cultural realities or without strong support from the institutions responsible for implementing them.

These experiences show that successful gender-sensitive security sector reform requires more than adopting new policies. Sustainable reforms depend on institutional commitment, adequate resources, local ownership, and a clear understanding of the social and cultural environment in which they are introduced.

National-Level Reforms: Selected Case Studies (Part I)

Experiences from different countries show that national reforms can improve women's participation in security institutions when they are supported by strong political leadership, adequate resources, and sustained institutional commitment. However, the extent of success varies considerably from one country to another.

Liberia is widely regarded as one of the strongest examples of gender-sensitive police reform in a post-conflict environment. Following the end of its civil war in 2003, the Liberia National Police introduced a series of reforms under the administration of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. These reforms aimed to increase female recruitment and improve the police response to gender-based violence.

Between 2005 and 2011, women such as Beatrice Munah Sieh, Asatu Bah-Kenneth, and Vera Manly played important leadership roles in expanding female recruitment within the Liberia National Police. During this period, the proportion of female officers increased from two percent to seventeen percent. In addition, specialised Women and Children Protection Sections were established across the country to improve responses to sexual and gender-based violence (Bacon, 2014).

According to Bacon (2015), Liberia's reforms achieved important successes because they combined strong national leadership with international support and local ownership. However, challenges such as limited technical capacity and weaknesses in the rule of law affected the long-term sustainability of some of these achievements.

Nigeria presents a different experience. Olusola (2016) found that although the Nigeria Police Force adopted a Gender Policy in 2010 and aligned its reforms with the principles of UNSCR 1325, implementation remained weak. Many officers had limited understanding of gender mainstreaming, training opportunities were inadequate, cultural resistance persisted, and accountability mechanisms were insufficient. These findings demonstrate that adopting policies alone is not enough; successful implementation requires continuous institutional commitment and effective monitoring.

National-Level Reforms: Selected Case Studies (Continued)

Uganda has also taken steps to promote gender inclusion within its police service, although the outcomes have been mixed. Tumwesigye (2018) found that increasing the number of women in the Uganda Police Force contributed to better service delivery and improved public satisfaction. Communities served by police commands with higher levels of female representation generally reported more positive experiences with the police. However, the study also pointed out that implementation remained uneven. While national policies supported gender inclusion, some local commands continued to face shortages of resources, inadequate training, and weak enforcement of gender-related policies.

Colombia offers another example of how women can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding when they are actively involved in peace negotiations. During the peace process between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), women and women's organisations successfully advocated for the inclusion of gender issues in the final peace agreement. Boutron (2018) observed that this was one of the first peace agreements in the world to include a comprehensive gender perspective. Their contributions ensured that issues such as sexual violence, women's rights, land ownership, and social justice were incorporated into post-conflict recovery plans. This demonstrates that when women are given genuine opportunities to participate, they often broaden the focus of peace agreements beyond military and political concerns.

The experience of the **Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI)** provides another useful example of gender-sensitive policing. Cousins (2014) explained that police reform efforts placed emphasis on increasing women's participation while strengthening public confidence in law enforcement. Although progress was gradual, the reforms showed that involving women in policing helped improve community engagement and made police services more responsive to local concerns. The study also stressed that long-term success depended on sustained institutional support rather than short-term recruitment campaigns.

These experiences from Liberia, Uganda, Colombia, and the Solomon Islands show that successful reforms require more than adopting new policies. Countries that achieved better outcomes combined political commitment, adequate funding, institutional support, and active involvement of women throughout the reform process. Where these elements were weak or inconsistent, progress was much slower and often difficult to sustain.

Institutional Reforms Within Security Organisations

Alongside national policy reforms, many security institutions have introduced internal changes aimed at creating a more inclusive working environment for women. These reforms focus not only on increasing recruitment but also on improving workplace conditions, career development, leadership opportunities, and organisational culture.

One common reform has been the establishment of specialised gender units or gender advisory offices within military and police organisations. These units help develop gender-sensitive policies, provide professional advice to leadership, monitor compliance with equality standards, and coordinate training programmes. They also serve as focal points for addressing complaints related to discrimination and workplace harassment.

Another important area of reform involves reviewing recruitment and promotion procedures. Many organisations have revised entry requirements to ensure that they measure skills relevant to operational duties rather than relying on standards that unnecessarily disadvantage women. At the same time, mentoring programmes and leadership training have been introduced to prepare female officers for senior management positions.

Training has also become an essential part of institutional reform. Many security organisations now include topics such as gender equality, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, human rights, and protection of civilians in their professional development programmes. These training activities are intended to improve both workplace culture and operational effectiveness by ensuring that personnel understand the different security needs of diverse communities.

The United Nations (2024) emphasised that removing legal and institutional barriers is only one part of achieving gender equality within the defence sector. Member states were encouraged to create working environments where women have equal opportunities for recruitment, promotion, professional development, and leadership. According to the report, institutions that value diversity are better positioned to respond to modern security challenges because they benefit from a wider range of skills, experiences, and perspectives.

Despite these improvements, many organisations continue to struggle with implementation. In some institutions, gender units operate with limited budgets and staffing, while mentoring programmes receive little institutional support. In other cases, workplace cultures remain resistant to change, reducing the impact of otherwise well-designed reforms.

These experiences suggest that institutional reform should be viewed as a continuous process rather than a one-time activity. Sustainable progress depends on consistent leadership, adequate funding, regular monitoring, and an organisational culture that values merit, professionalism, and equal opportunity.

Community Outcomes of Women's Participation in Security Institutions

While many discussions on gender inclusion focus on fairness and equal representation, research increasingly shows that women's participation also produces tangible benefits for communities. Studies from different countries indicate that greater female involvement in security institutions improves public trust, strengthens responses to gender-based violence, enhances peacebuilding efforts, and contributes to more effective security services. Rather than benefiting women alone, these outcomes positively affect the wider population by making security institutions more responsive, accessible, and accountable to the communities they serve.

Improved Community Trust in Security Institutions

One of the most widely reported benefits of increasing women's participation in security institutions is the improvement in public trust. Communities are generally more willing to cooperate with security agencies when they believe those institutions represent and understand the needs of all members of society.

Several studies have shown that female officers often build stronger relationships with local communities because they are viewed as more approachable and better listeners, particularly when dealing with vulnerable groups. Women, children, and survivors of violence may feel more comfortable reporting sensitive issues to female officers than to their male counterparts.

Research by Córdova and Kras (2019) found that the establishment of women's police stations improved public confidence in law enforcement. These specialised units encouraged more victims of violence to seek help, increased reporting of abuse, and strengthened the legitimacy of the police within local communities. The study concluded that when people believe the police can respond fairly and respectfully to their concerns, trust in the institution grows.

A similar pattern was observed in Uganda. Tumwesigye (2018) reported that police units with greater female representation generally received more positive feedback from community members. Respondents believed that female officers communicated more effectively, handled complaints professionally, and treated members of the public with greater respect. These qualities contributed to stronger cooperation between the police and the communities they served.

The United Nations (2024) also recognised that diversity within security institutions helps improve public confidence. According to the report, organisations that reflect the diversity of society are better positioned to understand community concerns and respond appropriately to different security challenges. These findings suggest that increasing women's participation can strengthen the relationship between security institutions and the public, making it easier to prevent crime, resolve conflicts, and improve community safety.

Improved Response to Gender-Based Violence

Another important contribution of women in security institutions is their role in improving responses to gender-based violence (GBV). Although both male and female officers can investigate these crimes, evidence suggests that many survivors are more willing to report incidents when female officers are available.

Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse often hesitate to report their experiences because of fear, shame, or concerns that they will not be believed. The presence of trained female officers can help reduce these fears and encourage survivors to seek justice.

Liberia provides a good example of this approach. During police reforms, specialised Women and Children Protection Sections were established to handle cases involving sexual and gender-based violence. Bacon (2015) found that these specialised units improved access to justice for women and children while increasing public confidence in police services.

Similarly, Córdova and Kras (2019) reported that women's police stations created safer reporting environments for victims of violence. The availability of female officers encouraged more women to report abuse and improved the quality of support provided throughout the investigation process. Beyond handling individual cases, female officers also contribute to public education on violence prevention. They often participate in community outreach programmes that raise awareness about domestic violence, sexual exploitation, child protection, and victims' rights. Such activities help reduce stigma while encouraging communities to reject harmful practices.

These findings demonstrate that women's participation strengthens institutional responses to gender-based violence by improving victim support, increasing public confidence, and promoting greater access to justice.

Contribution to Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Women's participation is equally important during post-conflict reconstruction. After armed conflicts end, societies must rebuild institutions, restore public confidence, and promote reconciliation among divided communities. Women often play a central role in these processes because they bring perspectives that may otherwise be overlooked during recovery efforts.

Research has consistently shown that peace agreements involving women are more likely to address issues affecting families and communities, including education, healthcare, social welfare, land rights, and protection from violence. As a result, these agreements are often more inclusive and enjoy stronger community support. Boutron (2018) highlighted the Colombian peace process as an important example. Women's organisations successfully advocated for the inclusion of gender-related issues in the final peace agreement, ensuring that concerns such as sexual violence, women's political participation, and victims' rights were adequately addressed. Their involvement broadened the scope of the peace negotiations beyond military and political matters. Similarly, Nakaya (2003) argued that meaningful participation by women in peace negotiations contributes to broader structural reforms after conflict. Women often advocate for long-term social development alongside immediate security concerns, making peacebuilding efforts more comprehensive and sustainable.

These examples show that women contribute not only to ending conflicts but also to rebuilding societies in ways that promote lasting peace and social stability.

Changing Harmful Social Norms

Women's participation in security institutions can also influence social attitudes and help challenge long-standing gender stereotypes. In many communities, security roles have traditionally been associated with men, while women have been expected to remain outside decision-making positions. Increasing women's visibility within security institutions helps question these assumptions and demonstrates that leadership and public service are not limited by gender. When women occupy positions as police officers, military personnel, peace negotiators, and security managers, they become role models for younger generations. Their presence encourages more girls and young women to consider careers in fields that were previously viewed as inaccessible. Women working in security institutions often support community programmes aimed at addressing harmful cultural practices, promoting gender equality, and encouraging

peaceful conflict resolution. Their involvement strengthens public awareness campaigns and contributes to gradual changes in community attitudes, especially in societies recovering from conflict where social relationships require rebuilding. By participating actively in security and peacebuilding activities, women help reshape public perceptions about gender roles while supporting more inclusive and peaceful communities.

Improved Operational Effectiveness of Security Institutions

Beyond improving community relations and responses to gender-based violence, research suggests that gender diversity also enhances the overall performance of security institutions.

Saltirovska (2023) argued that organisations with greater female participation are better prepared to deal with today's complex security challenges. Modern security operations require a combination of technical knowledge, communication skills, cultural understanding, and community engagement. A more diverse workforce brings a wider range of experiences and perspectives, allowing institutions to respond more effectively to different situations.

Military operations today extend beyond combat activities. Personnel are increasingly involved in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, intelligence gathering, cyber security, and community engagement. These responsibilities require a broad set of professional skills, making diversity an important organisational strength rather than simply a matter of representation. Three major reasons for integrating gender perspectives into security institutions were identified by Arostegui (2015). First, it supports respect for human rights and equal treatment, it also balanced participation improves decision-making by bringing different viewpoints into planning and policy development and also strengthens operational effectiveness by improving communication, intelligence gathering, and relationships with local communities.

In addition, female peacekeepers often have better access to women and children in conflict-affected communities. This improves information gathering, strengthens early warning systems, and supports conflict prevention efforts that might otherwise be difficult to achieve. The United Nations (2024) reached a similar conclusion, stating that organisations with diverse personnel are better able to use a wider range of knowledge, experiences, and professional skills. According to the report, diversity not only improves operational effectiveness but also strengthens public confidence in security institutions. These findings suggest that increasing women's participation is not simply a matter of fairness. It also contributes directly to building stronger, more effective, and more responsive security institutions capable of addressing today's evolving security challenges.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding women's participation in security institutions and peacebuilding requires different theoretical perspectives because the issue involves gender, governance, conflict, and institutional reform. This paper adopts three closely related frameworks that explain why women's inclusion matters and how it can improve security and peacebuilding outcomes.

The first is Feminist Security Studies, which challenges the traditional view that security is mainly about protecting the state. Instead, it argues that security should focus on the safety and well-being of individuals and communities. According to Arostegui (2015), men and women often experience conflict differently, yet conventional security approaches rarely recognise these differences. From this perspective, excluding women from security institutions limits the ability of those institutions to understand and respond to the needs of the entire population.

A related perspective is the Human Security approach, which gained international attention during the 1990s. Unlike traditional security thinking that focuses mainly on military threats, human security emphasises protecting people from a wide range of risks, including poverty, discrimination, disease, and gender-based violence (Arostegui, 2015). This perspective supports greater participation of women in security institutions because women often face security challenges that require specialised knowledge and more responsive institutional approaches.

Another useful framework is Feminist Institutionalism, which examines how formal rules and informal organisational cultures influence opportunities for men and women. Gordon (2018) argued that security sector reforms often reproduce existing gender inequalities when they fail to consider how institutions operate in practice. Even where policies promote equal opportunities, informal workplace cultures, stereotypes, and power relations may continue to limit women's advancement. This framework therefore highlights the need to change not only official regulations but also the organisational culture within security institutions.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, established through UNSCR 1325 and subsequent Security Council resolutions, provides the broad international framework for promoting women's participation in peace and security. According to Hermoso and Sugawara (2016), the WPS agenda is built around four main principles: participation, protection, prevention, and the integration of gender perspectives into peace operations. However, simply increasing the number of women involved in peace and security processes is not enough. Lenhardt (2021) argued that participation becomes meaningful only when women are able to influence decisions, contribute to policy development, and participate in safe and supportive environments. In other words, women's voices should shape outcomes rather than serve as symbolic representation.

These theoretical perspectives put together, explain why women's participation is important not only from the standpoint of equality but also for improving the effectiveness, legitimacy, and responsiveness of security institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative desk review approach. Instead of collecting primary data through surveys or interviews, the study relied on existing literature and official documents relating to women's participation in security institutions and peacebuilding. The materials reviewed included peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, reports published by international organisations, and selected case studies from Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. These sources were chosen because they addressed issues related to women's participation in security institutions, security sector reform, the implementation of **UNSCR 1325**, and gender inclusion in peacebuilding. The analysis followed a thematic approach. The literature was examined under three broad areas: the barriers that limit women's participation, reforms introduced to improve gender inclusion, and the effects of women's participation on communities and peacebuilding efforts. Using this approach made it possible to compare findings from different countries and identify common patterns, successful practices, and continuing challenges. Rather than generating new empirical data, the study provides a comprehensive interpretation of existing knowledge on the subject.

Ongoing Gaps and Future Directions

Although important progress has been made in promoting women's participation in security institutions, many challenges remain. The studies reviewed in this paper show that policy commitments alone have not been enough to achieve meaningful gender inclusion. One of the most significant challenges is the gap between policy and implementation. Many countries have developed National Action Plans under UNSCR 1325, but putting these plans into practice has been much more difficult. Miller et al. (2014) found that many action plans do not adequately address the structural barriers that continue to limit women's participation. Likewise, Hermoso and Sugawara (2016) observed that while National Action Plans provide an important framework for implementation, their quality and effectiveness differ considerably from one country to another. Another area that requires greater attention is intersectionality. Women do not all face the same experiences or challenges. Factors such as ethnicity, disability, age, religion, social class, and migration status can influence opportunities and outcomes. Lenhardt (2021) noted that relatively few studies examine these differences, making it difficult to design policies that respond to the

needs of diverse groups of women. The review also highlights the need for stronger monitoring and accountability systems. Measuring success only by counting the number of women recruited into security institutions provides an incomplete picture. Greater attention should be given to promotion opportunities, leadership representation, workplace experiences, and the actual influence women have on decision-making processes. Evidence from Nigeria and Uganda suggests that without effective monitoring and institutional accountability, many gender policies remain poorly implemented. Changing organisational culture also remains a major challenge. Bendix and Stanley (2008), together with O'Rawe (2010), argued that meaningful gender inclusion cannot be achieved if workplace cultures continue to tolerate discrimination or exclude women from leadership and operational responsibilities. Lasting institutional change requires committed leadership, continuous training, and sustained organisational support over many years.

The review further shows that women's civil society organisations should play a more active role in security sector reform and peacebuilding. Olonisakin et al. (2010) and McLeod (2011) observed that international programmes have not always worked closely with local women's groups. As a result, some interventions have failed to reflect local priorities or achieve long-term sustainability. According to Adrian-Paul (2012) women's equal participation in leadership, conflict prevention, and peace negotiations is essential for maintaining lasting peace and security. Strengthening these partnerships should therefore remain a priority for governments, international organisations, and development partners.

Conclusion

This review has shown that women's participation in security institutions and peacebuilding is both a matter of equality and an important requirement for effective security governance. Evidence from different countries indicates that involving women in security institutions improves community trust, strengthens responses to gender-based violence, enhances operational performance, and contributes to more inclusive and sustainable peace processes.

At the same time, women continue to face significant institutional, cultural, and social barriers that limit their full participation. These challenges include discriminatory workplace cultures, unequal career opportunities, limited institutional support, inadequate funding, and weak implementation of existing gender policies.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda, particularly UNSCR 1325, has provided an important international framework for promoting gender inclusion. It has encouraged governments to adopt policies and reforms aimed at increasing women's participation in security institutions. However, as Asante (2020), Lenhardt (2021), and other scholars have shown, considerable differences still exist between policy commitments and practical implementation.

Experiences from countries such as Liberia, Colombia, Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria demonstrate that meaningful progress depends on more than adopting new policies. Sustainable reforms require strong political commitment, adequate financial resources, institutional accountability, supportive organisational cultures, and active involvement of women at every stage of decision-making. Ultimately, the goal should not simply be to increase the number of women serving in security institutions or participating in peace negotiations. Greater attention should be given to creating institutions where women are able to contribute fully, influence important decisions, and work in safe and supportive environments. Achieving this will strengthen both security institutions and the communities they are meant to protect.

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