

Feminisation of Terrorism: Legal and Policy Implications for Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The increasing participation of women in terrorist activities has reshaped contemporary violent extremism and altered the operational dynamics of extremist networks. This study aims to examine the nature, patterns, and implications of the feminisation of terrorism, with particular attention to its legal, security, and developmental consequences. The study employs a qualitative research design, based on a content analysis of secondary data, including international security reports, terrorism incident databases, and peer-reviewed scholarly literature on female involvement in groups such as Boko Haram and al-Qaeda affiliates. The analysis identifies a growing diversification of women's roles within terrorist organisations, including recruitment, logistics, intelligence gathering, and operational participation, which enhances the tactical flexibility of these groups and complicates traditional counter-terrorism responses. These dynamics undermine national security, weaken social cohesion, and threaten progress toward sustainable development, particularly in conflict-affected societies. The study concludes that existing counter-terrorism and legal frameworks are insufficiently responsive to the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and recommends the adoption of integrated, gender-sensitive legal, policy, and crisis-management strategies to improve prevention, accountability, and long-term developmental outcomes.

Keywords: Feminisation; Radicalisation; Violent Extremism; Sustainable Development; Terrorism

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INTRODUCTION

Terrorism remains one of the most persistent global security challenges, with far-reaching implications for societal stability and development. Contemporary terrorist organisations have diversified their strategies, personnel, and operational patterns, leading to shifts in how violent extremism is mobilised and sustained (Gray, 2024). One notable development within this evolving landscape is the increasing participation of women in terrorist activities across different regions. Although violent extremism has historically appeared male-dominated, recent research shows that women now perform a range of roles, including recruitment, logistics, intelligence, and operational participation (Soules, 2022; Galehan, 2023).

The growing involvement of women reflects strategic adaptations by terrorist organisations and changing social, political, and ideological conditions that shape radicalisation processes. Women's participation is influenced by coercion, ideological commitment, socio-economic vulnerability, community pressures, and organisational incentives. The phenomenon commonly described as the "feminisation of terrorism" therefore requires analytical rather than normative examination.

In contexts such as Nigeria, the deployment of women in extremist activities has expanded the tactical capacities of terrorist organisations by exploiting gendered assumptions that women pose lower security risks (Nwangwu et al., 2021). These developments complicate counter-terrorism efforts and have broader consequences for governance, social cohesion, economic activity, and infrastructure, thereby undermining sustainable development (Berebon, 2025). Terrorism's intentionality, ideological motivation, and capacity for strategic repetition further distinguish it from other development-disrupting shocks, such as natural disasters or disease outbreaks (Onat et al., 2025).

Despite growing scholarly attention to women's participation in terrorism, existing studies remain primarily descriptive, security-focused, or normative, with limited integration of legal, policy, and development perspectives, particularly in relation to Nigeria. There is insufficient analysis of how the feminisation of terrorism reshapes institutional responses, governance capacity, and sustainable development trajectories, as well as how legal and policy frameworks can adapt to these gendered dynamics. This study addresses this gap by examining the feminisation of terrorism through an integrated analytical lens that links gendered participation in extremist violence to security governance and sustainable development outcomes.

Accordingly, the objectives of this study are to: (i) analyse the factors driving women's involvement in terrorist organisations; (ii) examine how the feminisation of terrorism alters the operational and strategic dynamics of extremist groups; and (iii) assess the implications of these changes for national security governance and sustainable development in Nigeria. By doing so, the study contributes to the literature by moving beyond descriptive accounts and offering a policy-relevant and development-oriented analysis of the feminisation of terrorism within a Nigerian and comparative context.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature on terrorism, the feminisation of terrorism, and sustainable development. The third section outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. The fourth section examines illustrative cases, primarily drawing on Boko Haram and al-Qaeda, to demonstrate the evolving patterns of female participation in extremist operations. The final section discusses the implications for sustainable development and offers policy recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigerian security challenges have been extensively documented as manifestations of deeper governance and institutional weaknesses. Ibietan, Abasilim, and Ebhohimen (2016) argue that the persistence of the Boko Haram insurgency is rooted not merely in ideological extremism, but in structural deficits within Nigeria's security architecture, unresolved national questions, and state fragility. These systemic vulnerabilities have created fertile ground for extremist groups to exploit social grievances, institutional distrust, and weak state presence, particularly in the country's northern regions.



Within this context, terrorism in Nigeria has evolved from sporadic violence into a protracted asymmetric conflict with increasingly complex organisational dynamics, including the strategic incorporation of women into extremist operations. This section synthesises existing scholarship on terrorism, the feminisation of terrorism, radicalisation dynamics, particularly among women, and the implications of these developments for sustainable development. Rather than offering a descriptive survey, the review outlines the conceptual linkages among governance failures, gendered radicalisation, and development outcomes.

Terrorism: Conceptual Clarifications

Despite extensive scholarly engagement, terrorism remains a deeply contested concept, mainly due to its political, ideological, and normative dimensions. The United Nations broadly defines terrorism as acts intended to cause death or serious harm to civilians, intimidate a population, or coerce a government (Valeri & Minteh, 2025). While definitions vary across disciplines and political contexts, there is a growing scholarly convergence around three defining elements: the intentional use or threat of violence, an underlying political or ideological motivation, and the deliberate generation of fear that extends beyond the immediate victims to influence broader audiences (Roberts et al., 2023; Joshanloo, 2025).

Rather than engaging in protracted definitional debates, this study adopts a functional and strategic perspective, conceptualising terrorism as a calculated instrument employed primarily by non-state actors to pursue political or ideological objectives under conditions of power asymmetry. From this standpoint, terrorism is less a static phenomenon than a dynamic strategy that evolves in response to state capacity, counterterrorism pressure, and shifting socio-political environments. Contemporary terrorism is increasingly characterised by decentralised networks, flexible organisational structures, and the strategic deployment of digital technologies for recruitment, propaganda dissemination, financing, and operational coordination (Syahputra & Hamid, 2024).

In fragile state contexts such as Nigeria, these dynamics are significantly amplified by weak institutional oversight and limited counterterrorism capacity. Ibieta, Abasilim, and Ebhohimen (2016) observe that deficiencies in intelligence coordination, erosion of community trust, and declining state legitimacy have enabled Boko Haram to adapt tactically and organisationally over time. One notable consequence of this adaptive evolution is the expansion and diversification of operational roles within terrorist organisations, including the deliberate incorporation of women into strategic, logistical, and combat-related functions. This shift not only challenges conventional security profiling but also underscores the need to interrogate terrorism through a gender-sensitive analytical lens.

Feminisation of Terrorism

The concept of the *feminisation of terrorism* refers to the increasing visibility and substantive operational involvement of women within extremist organisations across diverse conflict zones (Montasari, 2024). Earlier scholarship largely framed women as passive victims of violence or collateral casualties of war. However, a growing body of empirical research challenges this depiction, demonstrating that women now occupy a wide range of active roles, including recruitment, logistics, propaganda dissemination, intelligence gathering, combat operations, and suicide missions (Ashraf, 2024).

This shift reflects a convergence of organisational pragmatism and ideological adaptation. Operationally, women often attract less suspicion from security agencies and can access social and physical spaces that are typically restricted to men, thereby enhancing tactical effectiveness. Ideologically, extremist groups have reconfigured their narratives to present women's participation as both legitimate and desirable, embedding it within discourses of religious obligation, sacrifice, moral guardianship, and communal defence (Sjoberg, 2024). As such, women's involvement is not incidental but strategically cultivated.

In the Nigerian context, Boko Haram's extensive deployment of women and girls, particularly in suicide bombings, illustrates how gender is instrumentalised under conditions of prolonged insurgency and state fragility. Ibieta, Abasilim, and Ebhohimen (2016) argue that weak governance structures, social dislocation, and eroded community trust enable extremist groups to

normalise such practices within affected communities. Consequently, the feminisation of terrorism should not be understood merely as a quantitative increase in female participation but as a qualitative and structural transformation in the gendered organisation of terrorist activity.

Women's radicalisation constitutes a gradual process through which individuals internalise extremist ideologies and become willing to support or engage in violent actions. While many drivers of radicalisation overlap with those affecting men, such as perceived injustice, political grievances, identity crises, and ideological commitment, women's pathways are often shaped by gender-specific vulnerabilities (Ibietan, Abasilim, & Ebhohimen, 2016). These include exposure to domestic violence, gender-based discrimination, limited access to education and employment opportunities, and broader patterns of social marginalization (Abasilim et al., 2025).

Extremist organisations exploit these vulnerabilities through tailored recruitment strategies that frame participation as empowerment, belonging, protection, or moral fulfilment (Zamir, M., & Kaunert, 2025). Digital platforms play an increasingly central role in this process. Evidence shows that groups such as ISIL and Boko Haram deploy gender-sensitive propaganda that romanticises community life, purpose, and spiritual reward, often disseminated through social media networks (Phelan, 2020).

In Nigeria, however, women's involvement frequently emerges through coercive pathways. Women and girls have been abducted, forcibly indoctrinated, and compelled to participate in violent acts under threat or psychological manipulation, thereby blurring the analytical distinction between victimhood and agency (Achilli, 2025). This complexity underscores the limitations of binary categorisations and highlights the need for nuanced, gender-responsive counterterrorism and reintegration approaches.

Sustainable Development and Security

Sustainable development, as articulated by Demir (2025), emphasises meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Contemporary development frameworks further highlight the interdependence of economic growth, social inclusion, institutional capacity, and environmental sustainability (Prabhakar, 2025). Within this paradigm, security, particularly freedom from violence and fear, has emerged as a foundational prerequisite for sustainable development (Akinbi and Oluwale, 2025).

Terrorism undermines sustainable development by causing loss of life, destroying infrastructure, displacing populations, weakening institutions, and eroding social cohesion. In contexts like Nigeria, where state capacity is already strained, prolonged insecurity exacerbates poverty, educational disruption, and gender inequality. The feminisation of terrorism compounds these effects. Women's participation in extremist groups disrupts household structures, labour patterns, caregiving roles, and community trust, thereby amplifying the developmental costs of insecurity (Jones, Morris, Cherif, Tonui, Nashiba, Oliveira, and Worth, 2025).

Recent scholarship underscores that development outcomes are shaped not only by the presence of terrorism but by transformations in terrorist organisational capacity. Feminisation can enhance tactical unpredictability, expand recruitment networks, and strengthen propaganda reach, thereby prolonging conflict and undermining recovery efforts (Lofane, 2025). From this perspective, addressing women's involvement in terrorism is not only a security imperative but also a critical component of sustainable development policy in fragile states.

Theoretical Framework

This study interrogates the emerging trends in women's participation in terrorist organisations. It examines their strategic implications for sustainable development, with particular attention to Nigeria, where Boko Haram's increasing deployment of women has intensified both national and international concern. To explain the forces driving this development, the study draws on an integrated theoretical framework that comprises Social Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation Theory, the Push-Pull Radicalisation Model, and insights from Gendered Security Studies and Feminist International Relations scholarship. Together, these theories offer a multidimensional analytical foundation that aligns with contemporary research on violent extremism, gender, and security.

Social Identity Theory, advanced by Tajfel and Turner (1979), provides a relevant lens for understanding the psychological and social processes through which individuals become embedded in extremist organisations. Terrorist groups such as Boko Haram cultivate powerful in-group identities capable of overriding previous social ties and imposing new behavioural expectations (Ibietan, *Abasilim*, and Ebhohimen, 2016). These identities are reinforced through ideological messaging, shared narratives of struggle, and the promise of a sense of belonging. For many women, particularly those living in contexts marked by insecurity and social fragmentation, these elements of collective identity can become compelling pathways into violent extremist groups. The theory, therefore, explains the growing participation of women by highlighting how identity formation, group cohesion, and ideological indoctrination shape recruitment and sustain involvement. It also contributes to understanding how the inclusion of women transforms operational dynamics, as their allegiance to group identity allows them to assume roles previously dominated by men.

To complement this psychological perspective, Relative Deprivation Theory, as articulated by Gurr (1970), offers structural insights into the socio-economic grievances that may predispose individuals to engage in political violence. Many women in northern Nigeria face entrenched inequalities, restricted access to education, economic marginalisation, and heightened vulnerability due to displacement and prolonged conflict (*Abasilim & Oparah*, 2025). Terrorist groups exploit these conditions by presenting themselves as alternative providers of security, purpose, or socio-economic relief. In this regard, the perception of injustice, rather than absolute material deprivation, becomes a significant motivating force. Relative Deprivation Theory thus helps illuminate the interplay between gendered marginalisation and recruitment into extremist groups, while simultaneously linking these patterns to broader developmental challenges. When extremist actors manipulate women's structural vulnerabilities, the resulting cycles of insecurity have direct implications for human development indicators and Nigeria's ability to achieve sustainable development goals.

The Push–Pull Radicalisation Framework, developed by David (2025), further strengthens the analysis by providing a holistic explanation of the mechanisms that draw individuals into violent extremism. Push factors such as poverty, weak governance, insecurity, community grievances, and exposure to violence create the structural pressures that make radical narratives appealing. Pull factors, including promises of protection, ideological fulfilment, financial incentives, belonging, or social recognition, provide the attractive force that completes the recruitment process. This model is beneficial in analysing Boko Haram's gender-specific recruitment strategies, such as exploiting social stereotypes that portray women as non-threatening or using coercion and manipulation in conflict-affected communities. The framework, therefore, provides a comprehensive basis for interpreting the motivations behind the feminisation of terrorism and the shifts it introduces into the operational strategies of extremist groups.

Finally, Gendered Security Studies and Feminist International Relations perspectives (Tickner, 1992; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007) offer critical insights into the gendered nature of conflict and terrorism. These approaches challenge the assumption that political violence is exclusively male-driven and highlight how social constructions of gender, power, and agency shape women's roles in extremist groups. Terrorist organisations, including Boko Haram, deliberately manipulate gender norms by deploying women in ways that exploit societal expectations of passivity or innocence. Feminist International Relations scholars argue that women's involvement in terrorism must be understood not through biological or essentialist assumptions but through the interplay of coercion, ideology, socialisation, trauma, and situational pressures (Gasztold, 2020; Montasari, 2024). This theoretical perspective is crucial for analysing how the feminisation of terrorism reconfigures tactical operations, alters public perceptions of threat, and generates new forms of insecurity that affect national stability and sustainable development.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives offer a coherent and analytically robust framework for examining the feminisation of terrorism in Nigeria. Social Identity Theory explains the ideological and psychological processes that facilitate women's integration into extremist

groups. Relative Deprivation Theory highlights the structural and socio-economic grievances that make women susceptible to recruitment. The Push–Pull Radicalisation Framework reveals the mechanisms through which these factors interact to produce patterns of involvement. Gendered Security Studies and Feminist International Relations scholarship underscore the strategic manipulation of gender by terrorist organisations and the broader security implications of women's participation. This integrated framework, therefore, provides a comprehensive foundation for addressing the guiding research questions concerning the drivers of women's involvement, the impact of their participation on extremist operations, and the far-reaching implications of these developments for Nigeria's security landscape and sustainable development trajectory.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive and socio-legal analysis to examine the feminisation of terrorism and its implications for security governance and sustainable development. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study aims to understand meaning, patterns, institutional responses, and normative implications, rather than measuring frequencies or causal effects. Specifically, the study combines doctrinal legal analysis with qualitative content analysis of policy, legal, and security-related texts in order to examine how gendered participation in terrorism is constructed, regulated, and responded to within legal and policy frameworks.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data. Data sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, international and national legal instruments, policy documents, terrorism incident databases, reports from international and regional organisations (such as the United Nations and African Union), and publications from reputable security and development think tanks. Materials published between 2020 and 2025 were prioritised to ensure contemporary relevance, although earlier foundational works were consulted for theoretical and conceptual grounding. Sources were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to (i) women's participation in terrorist organisations, (ii) processes of radicalisation and recruitment, (iii) operational strategies of groups such as Boko Haram and al-Qaeda affiliates, and (iv) the legal, institutional, and developmental responses to terrorism, particularly in Nigeria.

Data analysis was conducted through a systematic thematic content analysis. The analytical process involved four stages. First, all selected materials were subjected to close reading and open coding to identify recurring concepts related to female radicalisation, recruitment pathways, operational roles, and state or community responses. Second, related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories, including gendered drivers of extremism, strategic use of women by terrorist groups, institutional and legal responses, and developmental consequences. Third, these categories were interpreted in relation to existing legal norms, policy frameworks, and development theories in order to assess gaps, inconsistencies, and emerging challenges. Finally, cross-source comparison and triangulation were used to enhance analytical rigour and to identify converging and diverging patterns across contexts.

Although the study is primarily situated within the Nigerian context, selected global cases are incorporated to provide comparative insights and to situate Nigeria within broader international trends. While reliance on secondary data limits access to firsthand narratives, this approach is appropriate for a legal and policy-oriented study that seeks to analyse institutional frameworks, normative structures, and documented empirical patterns. Source credibility was carefully assessed, and triangulation across multiple types of documents was employed to strengthen the reliability of findings. Ethical considerations were observed throughout, particularly in the responsible handling of sensitive materials related to violent extremism.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The growing involvement of women in terrorist organisations constitutes one of the most significant transformations in contemporary violent extremism. While terrorism was historically male-dominated, the strategic incorporation of women, particularly by Boko Haram in Nigeria, has



reshaped the operational logic, sociopolitical impact, and developmental consequences of extremist violence. This discussion addresses the research questions through an integrated framework that draws on Social Identity Theory, Relative Deprivation Theory, Feminist Security Studies, and push-pull radicalisation models, situating the findings within relevant legal norms, counterterrorism regulations, and development governance frameworks.

Drivers of Women's Involvement in Terrorist Organisations

A complex interaction of structural marginalisation, ideological mobilisation, and coercion drives women's participation in terrorism. Relative Deprivation Theory explains how socio-economic inequality, displacement, and exclusion generate grievances conducive to radicalisation. In northern Nigeria, persistent poverty, gender inequality, and conflict-related displacement have created conditions that extremist groups exploit (Soules, 2022; Galehan, 2023; Ogungbade et al., 2024). From a legal perspective, these conditions also reflect failures to fulfil socio-economic rights protected under international and regional instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Weak protection of education, health, and livelihood rights increases vulnerability to extremist recruitment, especially among women.

Social Identity Theory further explains how extremist organisations construct a sense of belonging and meaning for marginalised individuals (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Boko Haram's ideological messaging offers identity, purpose, and perceived protection, particularly to women who have experienced widowhood, displacement, or violence (Nwangwu et al., 2021). This process exposes a regulatory gap in preventive governance. While Nigerian counterterrorism law focuses on criminalisation and enforcement, it pays limited attention to social prevention and rights-based protection that could reduce susceptibility to recruitment.

Coercion remains a dominant driver of women's involvement. Abduction and forced indoctrination are widely documented (Ajodo-Adebajoko, 2025). Under international humanitarian law and international criminal law, such practices constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, including enslavement, sexual violence, and forced recruitment. Feminist Security Studies highlight how women's bodies become sites of power and control in conflict (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2007), exposing the inadequacy of legal responses that treat women only as offenders or security threats rather than as victims entitled to protection and rehabilitation.

Operational and Strategic Implications

The feminisation of terrorism alters both the tactics and psychological impact of extremist violence. Boko Haram's use of female suicide bombers exploited gender norms that limit security profiling of women, enabling attacks on crowded civilian spaces (Choi, 2025). This reveals structural weaknesses in security governance and risk assessment frameworks that are implicitly gendered and therefore vulnerable to exploitation. It also raises human rights concerns, as intensified searches and surveillance of women risk violating rights to dignity, privacy, and non-discrimination.

Women's expanded roles as recruiters, logisticians, and intelligence assets further complicate counterterrorism responses. The push-pull model illustrates how extremist influence disseminates through social networks (David, 2025). Legally, this diffusion blurs the boundary between civilians and combatants, creating challenges for lawful targeting, prosecution, and reintegration. Existing legal frameworks struggle to balance accountability with rehabilitation, particularly for women who are simultaneously victims of coercion and participants in violence.

Implications for National Security and Sustainable Development

The findings reveal a mutually reinforcing relationship between insecurity, weak governance, and underdevelopment. Nigeria's development planning and security institutions suffer from limited capacity, poor coordination, and exclusionary policy design (Abasilim et al., 2025). The feminisation of terrorism intensifies these weaknesses by undermining threat detection, eroding public trust, and complicating post-conflict recovery.

Legally, this exposes a misalignment between Nigeria's counterterrorism regime and its human rights and development obligations. Heavy reliance on militarised responses weakens community trust, while insufficient investment in education, health, gender equality, and social protection exacerbates the very vulnerabilities that extremist groups exploit.

The developmental impacts correspond directly to setbacks in multiple SDGs. Attacks targeting schools undermine SDG 4 (Quality Education), market disruptions undermine SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), trauma and injury undermine SDG 3 (Health), and stigma against female returnees undermines SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). Without gender-responsive legal and policy frameworks that integrate security, development, and rights-based approaches, counterterrorism efforts risk perpetuating cycles of exclusion and instability.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the feminisation of terrorism constitutes a strategic and structural transformation in contemporary extremism that reshapes recruitment dynamics, operational tactics, and developmental outcomes in Nigeria. Addressing the research questions, the findings demonstrate that women's involvement in groups such as Boko Haram is driven by a combination of structural deprivation, identity-based grievances, ideological mobilisation, and coercion, and that their deployment as operatives, recruiters, and logistical enablers enhances terrorist groups' tactical flexibility while complicating intelligence, profiling, and reintegration efforts.

These developments have profound legal and policy implications: existing counterterrorism frameworks remain overly securitised and insufficiently responsive to the gendered, rights-based, and developmental dimensions of violent extremism, thereby creating gaps in prevention, accountability, victim protection, and post-conflict rehabilitation. The feminisation of terrorism also undermines sustainable development by disrupting education, health, livelihoods, governance, and gender equality, reinforcing cycles of insecurity and underdevelopment.

The study, therefore, highlights the need for integrated, gender-responsive legal and policy reforms that link counterterrorism, human rights protection, social inclusion, and development planning. Future research should examine how specific national legal regimes address female perpetrators and victims, assess the effectiveness of gender-sensitive deradicalisation and reintegration programmes, and explore comparative experiences across different conflict settings to inform more coherent and inclusive security and development governance.

Policy Recommendations

Consistent with the study's conclusion that the feminisation of terrorism requires integrated, gender-responsive legal and policy reforms linking security, human rights, social inclusion, and development planning, addressing this phenomenon demands coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions. Effective responses must involve the Nigerian government, security institutions, civil society, traditional authorities, local communities, and international development partners. The following recommendations operationalise this integrated approach and reflect best practices in inclusive security governance.

First, the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), should develop and implement a national counterterrorism framework that explicitly incorporates gender analysis and human rights considerations. Such a framework should identify distinct pathways through which women are recruited, coerced, or mobilised into extremist groups, and design differentiated legal and policy responses for prevention, disengagement, accountability, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Embedding gender perspectives within national security policy will enhance intelligence effectiveness, strengthen community cooperation, and align Nigeria with its international obligations under the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and related human rights instruments.

Second, security agencies, including the Nigerian Army, the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services, and the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, should



institutionalise gender-responsive operational protocols. Expanding the recruitment, training, and deployment of female security personnel is essential for culturally appropriate engagement and effective screening in public spaces. Gender-sensitive training modules should be integrated into security curricula to improve community relations, intelligence gathering, and respect for rights and dignity, thereby strengthening both security outcomes and public trust.

Third, federal and state ministries responsible for education, humanitarian affairs, social development, and women's affairs should prioritise interventions that address the structural drivers of women's vulnerability to radicalisation. Targeted investments in education, livelihood recovery, social protection, and psychosocial services in conflict-affected communities are critical for prevention. Programmes such as safe-school initiatives, incentives for girls' education, trauma-informed healthcare, and women's economic empowerment schemes can disrupt the socio-economic conditions that extremist organisations exploit.

Fourth, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, NAPTIP, and relevant civil society organisations should strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration frameworks for female returnees. These frameworks must recognise the complex legal and social status of women associated with extremist groups, many of whom are simultaneously victims of coercion and participants in violence. Comprehensive reintegration should include trauma counselling, reproductive and mental health services, vocational training, legal support, and sustained community sensitisation. Engagement with traditional leaders, faith-based organisations, and women's associations is essential for reducing stigma and restoring social cohesion.

Fifth, traditional and religious institutions should be systematically engaged as partners in early warning, prevention, and community-based counter-radicalisation efforts. Given their normative authority and social reach, these actors are well-positioned to challenge extremist narratives, promote inclusive identities, and detect early signs of recruitment. Strengthening collaboration between these institutions and state agencies can enhance local governance resilience and conflict prevention capacity.

Finally, international development partners, including UNDP, UN Women, the European Union, and African Union agencies, should support Nigeria through sustained funding, technical assistance, and knowledge exchange on gendered security threats. Support for improved data collection, national research capacity, and the development of a gender-disaggregated database on terrorism will enable evidence-based, context-specific policymaking and facilitate comparative learning across conflict-affected regions.

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