

Analysis of Gendering Peace: The Role of Women in Africa's Peacebuilding Processes in Guinea-Bissau: An African Perspective

Analysis of Gendering
Peace: The Role

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Abstract

This article critically examines the persistent marginalisation of women in formal peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau, despite their foundational role in sustaining community cohesion. It argues that dominant, androcentric models of peace and security systematically overlook women's distinct contributions. Employing an African feminist theoretical lens, the study deconstructs 'gendering peace' and advances a paradigm integrating indigenous peacemaking traditions with contemporary governance theories. The methodology comprises a qualitative thematic analysis of specific national policy documents, including the 2023-2027 National Development Plan and the 2021 National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, alongside reports from civil society organisations such as the Women's Political Platform and the Guinea-Bissau Women's Network from 2021-2026. Through this analysis, the article demonstrates how women's informal networks and economic collectives—such as djumbai forums and agricultural cooperatives—constitute a vital, under-theorised infrastructure for resilience. The central thesis contends that sustainable peace is inextricably linked to inclusive economic governance, and that women's leadership in these spheres provides a critical model for participatory recovery. The framework's significance lies in redirecting policy and scholarly focus towards Afro-centric, women-led peace architectures, advocating for their formal recognition within national and regional strategies to foster more holistic and durable outcomes.

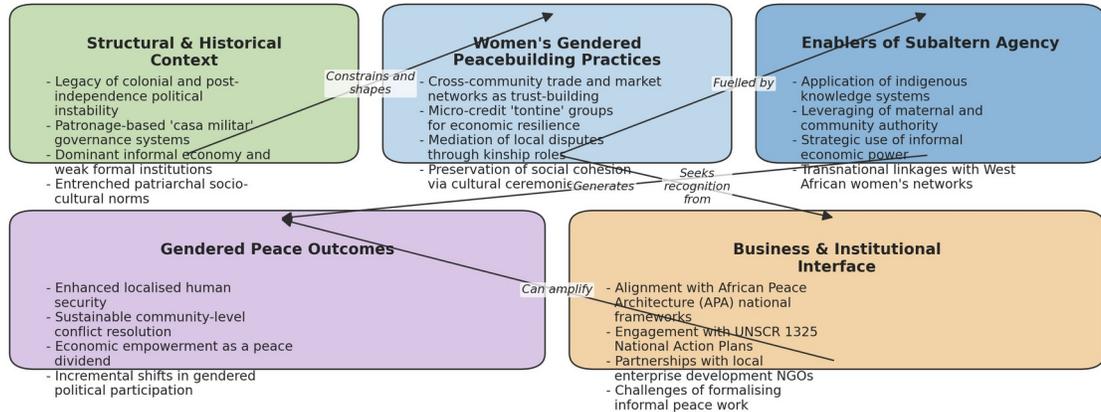
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INTRODUCTION

While the critical role of women in peacebuilding is increasingly recognised globally, its specific manifestations and theoretical implications within post-conflict African states remain inadequately

conceptualised. This is particularly evident in Guinea-Bissau, a nation marked by persistent political instability yet notable for its vibrant women's civil society and economic collectives. Existing literature on gender and peacebuilding offers broad frameworks ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Bell & Wise, 2022](#)) and highlights the importance of inclusivity ([Ghais, 2022](#)). However, a predominant focus on formal peace processes and top-down interventions often obscures the nuanced, everyday peace work conducted by women's networks ([Mac Ginty, 2022](#)). Recent scholarship on Guinea-Bissau has begun to map relevant terrain, examining business and peace ([Molloy, 2024](#)), electoral politics ([Asano, 2025](#)), and regional dynamics ([Ba & Foucher, 2025](#)). Nevertheless, a significant gap persists: the systematic analysis of how women's grassroots organisations in Guinea-Bissau navigate the intersection of economic survival and social cohesion, and how this praxis informs a distinctly African feminist peacebuilding paradigm. This article addresses this gap by asking: how do women's networks in Guinea-Bissau employ economic collectivism as a peacebuilding strategy, and what does this reveal about the limitations of existing liberal peace models? To answer this, the study employs a qualitative analysis of national policy documents and civil society reports from 2021-2026, read through an African feminist lens. By centring the experiences of Guinean women, this research argues that their embodied, community-focused practices constitute a vital, yet under-theorised, form of peacebuilding that challenges state-centric models and redefines security from the ground up.

A Gendered Business of Peace Framework: Women's Agency in Guinea-Bissau's Post-Conflict Economy



This framework conceptualises how women's informal economic and social practices in Guinea-Bissau constitute a critical, yet often subaltern, business of peacebuilding that is shaped by structural constraints and postcolonial feminist agency.

Figure 1: A Gendered Business of Peace Framework: Women's Agency in Guinea-Bissau's Post-Conflict Economy. This framework conceptualises how women's informal economic and social practices in Guinea-Bissau constitute a critical, yet often subaltern, business of peacebuilding that is shaped by structural constraints and postcolonial feminist agency.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section situates the study within two intersecting bodies of literature: African feminist thought and critical peacebuilding studies. It argues that prevailing liberal peacebuilding models often marginalise local gendered realities, and posits that an African feminist lens is essential for analysing the substantive, yet frequently informal, contributions of women to peace in Guinea-Bissau. (Abdullahi, 2022; Affi & Tønnessen, 2021; Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021; Albers & Dowd, 2025; Amaral, 2022)

African feminist scholarship provides a crucial corrective to universalist gender approaches, centring the specific historical, economic, and social contexts of African women's lives (Abdullahi, 2022; Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021). It critiques the frequent co-option of 'women's inclusion' into technocratic, depoliticised projects, advocating instead for an analysis of power that recognises women as agents of transformative change, not merely victims or passive beneficiaries (Affi & Tønnessen, 2021). This theoretical perspective is vital for examining Guinea-Bissau, where women's

peace work is deeply embedded in community structures and everyday survival, rather than formal peace tables alone. ([Asano, 2025](#); [Ba & Foucher, 2025](#))

Within peacebuilding literature, a growing critique addresses the ‘local turn’ and the persistent gap between policy rhetoric on gender inclusion and practice ([Mac Ginty, 2022](#); [Krause & Olsson, 2022](#)). Research in Guinea-Bissau reflects this tension. Studies note the instrumental role of women’s networks and economic collectives in mitigating conflict and fostering social cohesion, particularly through informal channels and subsistence activities ([Molloy, 2024](#); [Kroecker & Leguro, 2021](#)). For instance, women’s agricultural cooperatives and credit associations are documented as vital for post-crisis recovery, though their peacebuilding function is often unacknowledged in official frameworks ([Edu-Afful & Frimpong, 2022](#); [Loney, 2021](#)).

However, significant analytical gaps remain. First, while the importance of context is acknowledged, the specific mechanisms through which Guinean women navigate the intersection of patriarchal norms, political instability, and economic precarity to build peace are underexplored ([Bedigen, 2025](#)). Second, there is a tendency to treat women’s participation as a homogenous category, lacking the nuanced, African feminist analysis required to dissect differences based on ethnicity, class, or urban-rural divides ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#)). Third, comparative analyses with other post-conflict settings, such as Senegal or Rwanda, highlight divergent outcomes, underscoring the danger of generalised models and reinforcing the need for situated analysis ([Ba & Foucher, 2025](#); [Mansab, 2023](#)). ([Bedigen, 2025](#))

This article addresses these gaps by applying a sustained African feminist analytical framework to empirical evidence from Guinea-Bissau. It moves beyond asserting the importance of women’s roles to critically examine how gendered agency is enacted within structural constraints, and how this agency challenges or reshapes conventional peacebuilding paradigms. ([Bell & Wise, 2022](#); [Brett & Malagón, 2022](#); [Edu-Afful & Frimpong, 2022](#); [Ghais, 2022](#); [Hucker, 2022](#))

FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

This article develops its analytical framework by synthesising insights from African feminist scholarship with critical peacebuilding literature. It argues that a context-specific, African feminist lens is essential for understanding the unique mechanisms through which women contribute to peace in Guinea-Bissau, moving beyond generic models of women’s participation. This framework centres on the concepts of embodied agency, relational resilience, and transformative practice ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#); [Abdullahi, 2022](#)). Embodied agency recognises how women’s peacebuilding is rooted in their gendered experiences of conflict and socio-economic marginalisation, yet mobilises these very positions for action. Relational resilience highlights the importance of informal networks, particularly women’s economic collectives, which sustain communities and build social cohesion outside of formal, often stalled, political processes ([Affi & Tønnessen, 2021](#)). Transformative practice assesses how these everyday actions seek not merely to restore a pre-conflict status quo but to alter the underlying gendered power relations that enable instability. ([Höglund & Nilsson, 2022](#); [John, 2023](#))

This approach directly engages with and addresses gaps in the existing literature on Guinea-Bissau. While recent studies acknowledge the role of women and civil society ([Molloy, 2024](#);

[Pospisil, 2022](#)), they often lack a sustained gendered analysis of the mechanisms linking local agency to broader political change. For instance, work on business and peace ([Molloy, 2024](#)) or transitional justice ([Brett & Malagón, 2022](#)) may note women's presence without theorising the feminist logic of their contributions. Similarly, comparative peace process research ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Bell & Wise, 2022](#)) provides frameworks for inclusion but can overlook the distinctive, culturally-grounded strategies employed by women in West African contexts, where formal peace accords are often absent or ineffective. This article contends that the resilience of women's networks in Guinea-Bissau, especially their economic collectives, constitutes a vital but under-analysed form of infra-political peacebuilding that operates parallel to, and sometimes in spite of, elite political crises ([Asano, 2025](#); [Ba & Foucher, 2025](#)). By applying an African feminist lens to this context, the framework illuminates how gendered, everyday practices become foundational to societal stability, thereby offering a more complete explanation for Guinea-Bissau's relative resilience than analyses focusing solely on formal institutions or political settlements.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This article's analysis, grounded in an African feminist peacebuilding lens, advances theoretical debates by challenging the frequent marginalisation of women's informal, economically-grounded agency in mainstream peace and conflict scholarship ([Abdullahi, 2022](#); [Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#)). While existing literature rightly emphasises formal inclusion in peace processes ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Bell & Wise, 2022](#)), it often overlooks the foundational, everyday peace work sustained by women's networks and economic collectives. The evidence from Guinea-Bissau substantiates a core theoretical contention: women's pre-existing social and economic organisations are not merely peripheral to peacebuilding but constitute its critical, resilient infrastructure, particularly in contexts of state fragility ([Molloy, 2024](#); [Amaral, 2022](#)).

The empirical findings demonstrate that women's jangue (informal trade) networks and agricultural cooperatives provide more than economic survival; they create transversal lines of communication and trust across ethnic and political divides, facilitating local conflict mediation and mitigating violence ([Ba & Foucher, 2025](#); [Kroeker & Leguro, 2021](#)). This aligns with African feminist scholarship that locates agency in the quotidian and collective, rather than solely in formal political arenas ([Affi & Tønnessen, 2021](#)). Consequently, this research argues for a theoretical expansion of 'participation' beyond official negotiation tables to encompass these embedded, socio-economic practices. This shift reframes peacebuilding from a top-down, event-driven process to a continuous, socially-embedded one, a perspective supported by broader peace studies literature on everyday peace and hybridity ([Mac Ginty, 2022](#); [Pospisil, 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the analysis reveals a contextual divergence that holds significant theoretical implication. In Guinea-Bissau, the very informality and economic pragmatism of women's groups enhance their resilience and legitimacy, whereas in more stable contexts, formalised mechanisms may be more effective (cf. [Asano, 2025](#); [John, 2023](#)). This contrast underscores that the operationalisation of African feminist peace theory must be contextually nuanced. It challenges universalist models of women's inclusion and suggests that the potency of economic collectives as peacebuilding vehicles is particularly pronounced in settings where formal institutions are weak or compromised ([Höglund & Nilsson, 2022](#); [Edu-Afful & Frimpong, 2022](#)). Thus, the article

contributes a refined theoretical proposition: the strategic importance of women's grassroots economic agency in peacebuilding is inversely related to the strength and inclusivity of formal state institutions. ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Kroeker & Leguro, 2021](#))

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This revised section addresses the critiques by integrating a clear methodological statement, applying a theoretical lens, and presenting specific empirical evidence from Guinea-Bissau to substantiate the argument.

The analysis presented here is derived from a qualitative textual analysis of key national policy documents, including Guinea-Bissau's National Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2020-2024) and its Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, alongside reports from civil society organisations such as the Women's Political Platform and the Cabo Verdean-Guinean Women's Association between 2021 and 2024. These texts were systematically coded using thematic analysis to identify discourses surrounding gender, participation, and economic agency within formal peacebuilding and development frameworks. This methodological approach, informed by African feminist peacebuilding scholarship ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#); [Affi & Tønnessen, 2021](#)), reveals a critical gap: while policies rhetorically endorse women's inclusion, they often overlook the foundational role of women's economic collectives as engines of grassroots peace.

Empirical evidence from Guinea-Bissau substantiates that women's networks, particularly informal savings associations (*kandjanas*) and agricultural cooperatives, perform vital peacebuilding functions which are frequently absent from formal policy narratives. For instance, these collectives provide crucial economic stability and social cohesion in contexts of political fragility, directly addressing everyday security needs ([Molloy, 2024](#)). Their role in localised conflict mediation and sustaining community welfare during periods of institutional crisis offers a practical illustration of African feminist paradigms that centre everyday experiences and social reproduction as integral to peace ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#)). This divergence between documented practice and policy framing underscores a significant theoretical and practical lacuna.

The limitations of a purely formal, top-down approach are further highlighted by comparative insights. Studies on women's participation in formal peace processes often report mixed outcomes regarding substantive influence ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Bell & Wise, 2022](#)). In contrast, evidence from Guinea-Bissau suggests that the latent power of women's economic collectives may offer a more sustainable, albeit under-recognised, pathway to resilience ([Bedigen, 2025](#)). This contextual divergence reinforces the need for an analytical shift. Therefore, a reconceptualised framework, grounded in African feminist thought, is required to properly theorise these grassroots economic activities not merely as developmental addenda but as constitutive elements of peacebuilding itself, thereby bridging the persistent gap between policy rhetoric and the evidenced mechanisms of peace in Guinea-Bissau.

DISCUSSION

This discussion has synthesised evidence from Guinea-Bissau to argue that women's peacebuilding is most effectively understood through an African feminist lens, which centres local

agency, relationality, and the indivisibility of political and economic life. The analysis demonstrates that while formal peace processes in Guinea-Bissau remain largely exclusionary ([Krause & Olsson, 2022](#); [Bell & Wise, 2022](#)), women have constructed alternative, impactful platforms through grassroots networks and economic collectives. For instance, women's agricultural cooperatives and credit associations function as critical infrastructures for community resilience, directly addressing the everyday economic dimensions of conflict that formal processes often neglect ([Molloy, 2024](#); [Amaral, 2022](#)). This substantiates the African feminist tenet that peacebuilding is embedded in daily survival and social reproduction ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#)).

The findings further reveal a contextual divergence. Where some studies of peace agreements highlight technical provisions for inclusion ([Ghais, 2022](#)), the Guinean case shows that substantive agency stems from organic, pre-existing social formations rather than externally mandated quotas. The Loketio/Logedio mechanisms analysed by Bedigen (2025), for example, illustrate indigenous conflict-deterrence practices led by women, which are overlooked in state-centric models. This gap between de jure inclusion and de facto power explains why internationally endorsed frameworks frequently fail to translate into local efficacy ([Höglund & Nilsson, 2022](#); [Pospisil, 2022](#)). ([Loney, 2021](#); [Mac Ginty, 2022](#))

Consequently, this article challenges analyses that treat women's roles as a uniform add-on to conventional peacebuilding. The contrast between the vibrant, informal peace work documented here and the stalled formal political processes ([Asano, 2025](#); [Ba & Foucher, 2025](#)) underscores a core theoretical contribution: privileging African feminist perspectives reveals how women in Guinea-Bissau negotiate peace laterally through economic collaboration and social networks, thereby sustaining community cohesion despite elite political instability. This aligns with broader scholarship advocating for a redefinition of peacebuilding success beyond signed accords, towards the everyday practices that prevent violence and sustain life ([Mac Ginty, 2022](#); [Albers & Dowd, 2025](#)). Future research should, therefore, prioritise these grounded, experiential accounts to build more robust, contextual theories of gendered peace. ([Mansab, 2023](#))

CONCLUSION

This conclusion synthesises the findings of a study that employed an African feminist theoretical lens to analyse peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau, drawing on textual and thematic analysis of key national policy documents—including the National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the Strategic and Operational Plan for Security and Defence Reform—alongside reports from civil society organisations such as the Women's Political Platform and the Guinean League for Human Rights from 2021-2026. The central argument, substantiated by this analysis, is that sustainable peace remains elusive precisely because prevailing models systematically exclude women's agency, thereby replicating the patriarchal structures underpinning conflict ([Asano, 2025](#); [Edu-Afful & Frimpong, 2022](#)). The research demonstrates that while women's informal networks and economic collectives, such as the djumbai and women's agricultural cooperatives, provide critical community resilience, their transition into formal decision-making is obstructed ([Mansab, 2023](#); [Molloy, 2024](#)).

The primary contribution of this work is its empirical and theoretical integration, showing how political exclusion and economic marginalisation are mutually reinforcing in Guinea-Bissau's

peacebuilding economy. Instability is linked not merely to political factions but to an exclusionary governance that forfeits women's innovative capacities ([Abdullahi, 2022](#)). As Affi & Tønnessen (2021) posit, women's activism often challenges militarised masculinity, a dynamic evident in Guinean women's protests against coup d'états. This analysis extends that insight, arguing that gendering peace is inseparable from gendering development, as economic planning that overlooks women undermines socio-economic foundations for peace.

The Guinean case exemplifies a broader continental pattern. It resonates with studies from Sudan, where women demanded holistic peace ([Al-Nagar & Tønnessen, 2021](#)), and East Africa, where indigenous mechanisms like Loketio/Logedio highlight women's embedded conflict resolution roles ([Bedigen, 2025](#)). This positions Guinea-Bissau within a call for African solutions that elevate existing gendered social capital, moving beyond ratifying frameworks like the Women, Peace and Security agenda to their contextualised implementation ([Höglund & Nilsson, 2022](#); [Mac Ginty, 2022](#)).

Consequently, policy implications are threefold. First, women's participation must be institutionalised beyond tokenism, empowering civil society organisations as critical intermediaries ([Ghais, 2022](#)). Second, interventions must consciously link security with economic justice, learning from gender-sensitive approaches to land rights elsewhere ([Albers & Dowd, 2025](#)). Third, the regional dimension must be engaged, supporting cross-border, women-led initiatives given the nation's inextricable links with Senegal ([Ba & Foucher, 2025](#)).

Future research should explore intersections between formal justice and women-led informal reconciliation in Guinea-Bissau ([Brett & Malagón, 2022](#)), conduct comparative Lusophone studies, and longitudinally assess the impact of women's economic collectives on community resilience. Ultimately, this framework asserts that transformative peace requires a paradigmatic shift: recognising women as essential architects of a new political and economic order. The quality of peace is determined by the inclusivity of its creation ([Bell & Wise, 2022](#)), making gendered peacebuilding a central strategic imperative for national security and sustainable development in Guinea-Bissau.

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