

Women's Participation in Transitional Justice and the Response to Conflict-Related GBV in Northeast Nigeria.

Evidence from Monguno (Borno), Michika
(Adamawa), and Gujba (Yobe)

Tech-Driven Transitional Justice Project

An Output of the Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa
Project, with Support from the European Union.



About The Initiative For Transitional Justice In Africa

The Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa (ITJA) is a joint project of the African Union and European Union designed to support member states and civil society organizations in implementing the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) and its Roadmap. The initiative promotes the domestic application of the AUTJP by providing technical assistance, strengthening knowledge production and management, and building the capacity of civil society and victims' groups.

Through the ITJA project, subgrants are provided via the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF). Grantees from across the continent implement projects that advance transitional justice in Africa and promote the indicative elements of the AUTJP as home-grown mechanisms tailored to African contexts.

About The Tech-Driven Transitional Justice Project

The tech-driven transitional justice project is implemented by Invictus Africa as part of the African Union–European Union Initiative for Transitional Justice in Africa. The project aims to establish a secure digital documentation system that preserves the testimonies of over 100 survivors, amplifies their voices through multimedia storytelling, and tracks at least 100 gender-based violence (GBV) cases. It also aims to increase public awareness, promote survivor protection, and advocate for gender-responsive policy reforms in transitional justice processes.



About Invictus Africa

Invictus Africa is a civic-tech organisation that leverages data and technology to drive inclusive policies and programmes, equitable resource utilisation, and institutional accountability. The Invictus Africa team comprises Adebukola (Bukky) Shonibare, Adenike Adeoye-Oyewale, Ebunoluwa Adegbe, Edidiong Inyang, Gabriel Chuks Mobuogwu, Hadassah Joseph, Ikechukwu Prince, Japheth Stephen, Joy Edo, Margaret Chrisantus, Olorunnisola Abe, Oluwasesan Adewusi, Perpetua Aende, Toba Caleb Akanmu, and Witson Onipe.

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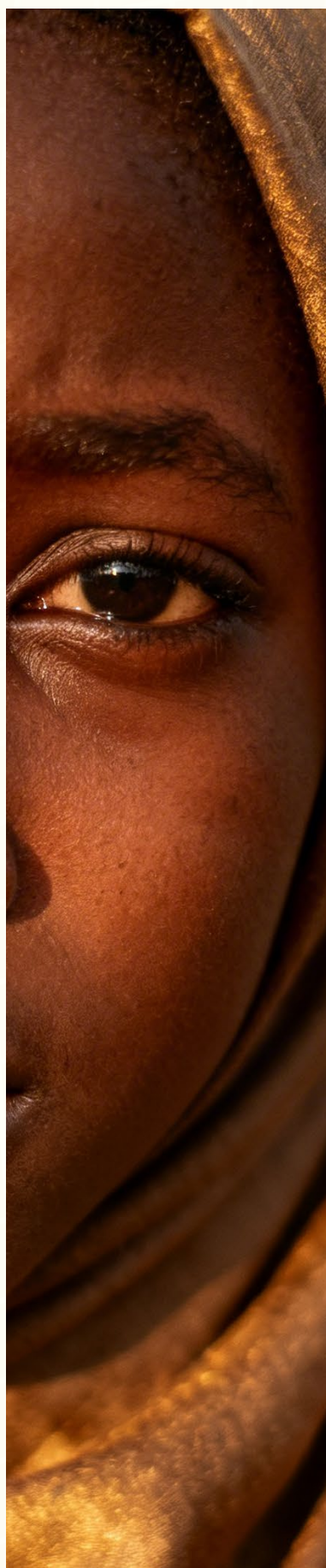


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Key terms

Conflict-Related Gender-Based Violence (GBV):

Acts of violence directed at a person based on their gender, where the violence occurred in the context of, or was enabled by, armed conflict. In this study, conflict-related GBV includes sexual violence, forced marriage, abduction for sexual exploitation, and other gendered violations linked to the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria.

Feminist Interpretive Framework:

The analytical lens applied to qualitative data in this study. It centres women's own accounts as primary evidence, attends to power relations within and around TJ processes, and treats gender not as a background variable but as a structuring force shaping who participates, on what terms, and with what outcomes.

Marital Gatekeeping:

The exercise of spousal control, almost always by husbands, over whether a woman may attend, participate in, or sustain engagement with transitional justice processes. Identified in this study as the most immediate structural barrier to women's participation across all three LGAs.

Meaningful Participation:

Participation that goes beyond physical presence or nominal inclusion. A woman is meaningfully participating in a TJ process when her voice shapes decisions, her experiences inform how the process is designed, and she holds a recognized role with actual influence over outcomes. Meaningful participation is distinguished throughout this report from attendance, which confers presence without authority.

Psychosocial Support:

Structured, ongoing assistance provided by trained personnel that addresses the emotional, psychological, and social needs of individuals affected by conflict and violence. In this report, psychosocial support is treated as a core component of reparative justice rather than a supplementary programme activity, consistent with the AUTJP framework.

Reparations:

Measures taken to redress harm suffered by victims of human rights violations. Reparations may be material, including monetary compensation, property restitution, and access to services, or non-material, including public acknowledgement, apology, and memorialisation.

Transitional Justice Mechanism:

Any formal or informal process, institution, or initiative designed to address past human rights violations, promote accountability, facilitate reconciliation, or support victims in post-conflict settings. This includes government programmes, traditional justice systems, truth-telling initiatives, reparations programmes, and community-based reconciliation processes.



Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ATJLF	African Transitional Justice Legacy Fund
AU	African Union
AUTJP	African Union Transitional Justice Policy
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
ICTR	International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGA	Local Government Area
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
OSC	Operation Safe Corridor
SEMA	State Emergency Management Agency
TJ	Transitional Justice
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WCCSF	Women and Children of Conflict Survivors' Foundation





Executive summary

Transitional justice works only when the people most harmed by conflict are included in the processes designed to address that harm. In Northeast Nigeria, women and girls have borne the heaviest burden of the Boko Haram insurgency through abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage, and the destruction of homes and livelihoods. Yet the transitional justice response has not kept pace with the scale of that harm. Women are included in justice and reconciliation processes, but rarely on terms that give them real influence. The formal justice system holds no record of a single conflict-related gender-based violence (GBV) prosecution across the three communities this study examined. These are not incidental failures. They are structural, and they will not change without deliberate intervention.

This study was conducted as part of the Tech-Driven Transitional Justice Project, implemented by Invictus Africa with support from the African Union and the European Union through the African Transitional Justice Legacy Fund. It examined women's participation in transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms and tracked conflict-related GBV cases in the formal justice system across three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Northeast Nigeria: Monguno (Borno State), Michika (Adamawa State), and Gujba (Yobe State). Data were collected through 36 key informant interviews with women participants, TJ mechanism leaders, community and religious leaders, civil society actors, and justice sector professionals, supplemented by a court case tracking exercise at police stations, prosecution offices, and courts in each LGA. Findings are assessed against the standards of the 2019 African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP), which provides the normative framework for the study's conclusions and recommendations.

The Transitional Justice Landscape

None of the three LGAs has a government-led, consistently resourced transitional justice architecture. What exists has been built and sustained by communities themselves, without state support and, in most cases, without financial security. In Michika, the Sulhu Committee conducts reconciliation sessions covering

domestic violence, land disputes, and community conflict. Al-Amru bil-Ma'ruf, a women-led organisation under the Muslim Council, is the only mechanism in the study where women hold genuine decision-making authority. In Gujba, the UNDP/NHRC Transitional Justice and Conflict Resolution Programme is the most structurally developed mechanism across the three sites, offering truth-telling, reconciliation, compensation assessment, and case referral, but it has stalled due to funding failure. The Women and Children of Conflict Survivors' Foundation (WCCSF), led by a conflict survivor, fills critical gaps in victim support and community reconciliation. Monguno presents the starkest case: no structured TJ mechanism exists there at all. Informal reconciliation by traditional and religious leaders is the only process available to survivors. Across all three sites, the state is largely absent from transitional justice.

Women's Participation: Present but Not Empowered

Women participate in TJ processes across all three LGAs, but their participation is characterised by presence without authority. They attend sessions, provide information, and in some cases advocate for particular outcomes, but decisions are made by men. A district head representative stated plainly that women should not outnumber men in decision-making structures. A woman leader noted that women are invited to attend but not to decide. This pattern holds across most mechanisms in all three LGAs, with Al-Amru bil-Ma'ruf in Michika as the clearest exception.

Where women do hold meaningful roles, the evidence shows that their presence produces better outcomes, not symbolically, but operationally. In Gujba, the WCCSF coordinator proposed a procedural change that was formally adopted and resolved a case that had previously been unresolvable. A Hisba officer described a case in which a woman's presence in the committee enabled a disclosure that male members could not have obtained. Women's participation is not only a rights requirement; it is a practical necessity for these mechanisms to function effectively.



Attitudes toward women's participation have genuinely shifted since the conflict. But this shift has not been institutionalised. It depends on individual goodwill rather than formal roles, defined rights, or accountability mechanisms, and without deliberate investment, it risks being reversed as the urgency of the post-conflict period fades.

Barriers to Meaningful Participation

The barriers preventing the meaningful participation of women operate at structural, social, and personal levels simultaneously. Marital gatekeeping is the most immediate barrier: husbands control whether wives attend TJ processes, and some women report having to hide their participation from their own spouses. Economic dependency compounds this: women who rely financially on husbands or partners who may be causing them harm cannot easily sustain participation that those men oppose. Logistical barriers, including inconvenient meeting times, transport, and childcare, are solvable but are only addressed where mechanisms consult women about what would make participation possible. Cultural and religious norms permit women's inclusion but set a ceiling on their authority: participation is allowed, but leadership is not. Stigma, particularly toward returned abductees, excludes the women most harmed by the conflict from community life and, consequently, from the processes designed to address that harm.

Gaps in Protection, Support, and Follow-Through

Women who navigate these barriers and engage with TJ processes frequently encounter mechanisms that are not equipped to protect them, support them, or deliver on what they were promised. The most acute documented failure is in Gujba, where the UNDP/NHRC programme facilitated reconciliation agreements and assessed compensation for twenty GBV cases, and nothing was paid. The coordinator who accompanied those survivors observed that it is better not to promise at all than to promise and fail. This failure does not affect only the twenty cases directly involved. In communities where women already weigh the risks of participation

against uncertain returns, the knowledge that others engaged and received nothing functions as a broader deterrent.

Psychosocial support is absent across all three LGAs. No mechanism offers systematic, long-term mental health support to participants or survivors. The emotional cost of participation is borne entirely by individuals already carrying unaddressed trauma. There is also a specific safety risk that the study documents: perpetrators being reintegrated into communities through programmes such as Operation Safe Corridor are returning with unresolved anger and trauma. Reconciliation agreements do not, by themselves, make communities safe for the survivors who live in them.

The Formal Justice System: A Zero Finding

The court case tracking exercise found no formally recorded conflict-related GBV prosecutions across all three LGAs: no charge sheets, no case files, no court records at any stage of the judicial process. This is not a documentation gap. It is the cumulative result of a system that loses cases at every stage.

Most cases never reach the formal system. A mandatory community gateway requires a complaint to pass through traditional or religious leaders before police involvement, and most GBV cases are resolved or suppressed at this stage. Cases that do reach police face evidentiary barriers that are often structurally impossible to overcome: Boko Haram perpetrators are unidentified or unreachable, and forensic evidence is destroyed by delayed reporting. Cases that survive the evidentiary stage face witness withdrawal driven by fear of retaliation in communities where Boko Haram informants are known to operate, and no witness protection exists. Cases that reach court face lawyer-driven adjournments that stretch proceedings over years, corruption that ends cases quietly, and sentencing practices that do not reflect the seriousness of GBV. The zero finding is the outcome of all these failures operating together.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The communities studied are not without transitional justice resources. They have built mechanisms, developed practices, and produced leaders committed to this work under difficult conditions. What they lack is state investment, institutional accountability, and the structural reforms needed to make those resources reliable and sustainable. The gap between the AUTJP standards and the reality documented in this study is wide, but this gap can be closed. Closing it requires political will and a genuine commitment to placing survivors at the centre of every decision.

The study makes seven recommendations directed at implementing partners, state governments, federal institutions, and the African Union and European Union as co-sponsors of this work:

- 01** Move women from attendance to decision-making by establishing binding minimum standards for women's representation in leadership roles within all supported TJ mechanisms, consistent with the AUTJP's affirmative action provisions.
- 02** Engage men and boys as active partners in TJ processes, with deliberate focus on marital gatekeeping as the primary structural barrier to women's participation.
- 03** Deliver psychosocial support as a core TJ programme component, funded as a dedicated budget line, staffed by trained personnel, and sustained beyond the active phase of programming.
- 04** Honour commitments to survivors by securing funds and verifying the full disbursement pathway before any compensation commitment is made and by considering interim reparations where a full programme cannot be immediately implemented.
- 05** Fund community TJ mechanisms through state recurrent budget lines, consistent with the AUTJP's national ownership principle, rather than perpetuating donor-dependent structures that collapse when funding cycles end.
- 06** Establish dedicated GBV police and prosecution capacity at LGA level, with female officers in sufficient numbers to receive disclosures that women will not make to male officers.
- 07** Establish a formal referral protocol between community mechanisms and the formal justice system, specifying which cases should be referred, by whom, to which institution, and within what timeframe, with accountability provisions for cases that are referred but not acted upon.



01

Introduction

Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has inflicted devastating harm on communities across Northeast Nigeria. Women and girls have borne a disproportionate share of that harm through abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage, and the deliberate destruction of the social structures that ordinarily provide protection. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2024) recorded 4.4 million internally displaced persons between 2009 and 2023, and Human Rights Watch (2021) documented that Boko Haram abducted more than 1,500 women and girls between 2013 and 2020. That figure almost certainly understates the true scale, given the stigma, fear, and documentation failures that suppress reporting. Despite the scale of these violations, the experiences of women survivors remain poorly documented. Their participation in the transitional justice mechanisms operating in conflict-affected communities remains poorly understood. This study was designed to address that gap, and the consequences of leaving it unaddressed are significant. When women are excluded from the design and implementation of transitional justice processes, the violations they experienced are less likely to be documented, the remedies they need are less likely to be developed, and the justice they are owed is less likely to be delivered.

Northeast Nigeria is not an isolated case. It reflects a broader and well-documented pattern in which women are systematically excluded from the processes meant to address conflict-related harm. Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes worldwide (Emmanuel & Mshelia, 2025).

UN Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000, mandated women's full and equal participation in all aspects of peace and security, yet more than two decades later, that goal has not been met. The African experience illustrates both what is possible and what remains the norm. The 1998 Akayesu judgment at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the first international recognition of rape as an act of genocide, demonstrated what deliberate and systematic pursuit of gender-based violations can achieve. But it has remained an exception. Across the continent, truth commissions have repeatedly failed to centre women's experiences. Ghana's National Reconciliation Commission rendered gender-based violations largely invisible by mainstreaming gender without focused documentation strategies, resulting in women submitting less than 20% of testimonies (Scanlon, 2007). Without deliberate design, women's participation in transitional justice remains nominal, and their experiences remain unrecorded.

Nigeria fits firmly within this continental pattern, with its own specific history of transitional justice shortfalls. The post-1999 democratic transition produced the Oputa Panel and several state-level truth commissions, but non-publication of reports and non-implementation of recommendations became consistent outcomes, generating trust deficits that persist to the present (Hassan, 2024). More recent responses to the Boko Haram insurgency, including criminal prosecutions of suspects and the Operation Safe Corridor deradicalisation programme, have produced limited results. Conviction rates for conflict-related



prosecutions remain below 10% (Federal Ministry of Justice, Nigeria, 2022), and state-led programmes have focused predominantly on perpetrator rehabilitation rather than survivor redress. The participation of women, particularly survivors of conflict-related gender-based violence, in formal justice and reconciliation processes has remained marginal throughout (Hassan, 2024; UNDP & UN Women, 2022). Nigeria illustrates a pattern common across the continent: transitional justice frameworks that exist on paper but fail to reach the people who need them most.

The 2019 African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) represents the continent's most comprehensive normative response to these failures. It establishes a framework encompassing truth, justice, reparations, reconciliation, institutional reform, and traditional justice mechanisms, and explicitly requires gender-responsive implementation at every stage. It calls for affirmative measures to ensure women's active participation, for special attention to sexual and gender-based violence in both criminal and truth-telling processes, and for psychosocial support to be treated as a core component of reparative justice rather than a supplementary activity. The AUTJP sets the standard against which transitional justice practice across AU member states should be assessed. It is the normative framework against which this study's findings are evaluated.

This study examines what transitional justice mechanisms currently exist in three conflict-affected Local Government Areas in Northeast Nigeria: Monguno in Borno State, Michika in Adamawa State, and Gujba in Yobe State. It asks how women are participating in those mechanisms, what barriers prevent meaningful participation, and whether the formal justice system is processing conflict-related GBV cases at all. These are not abstract questions. The answers determine whether women who survived some of the worst violence of the Boko Haram insurgency will have any meaningful access to justice, recognition, or redress.

The report is organised into four sections. Following this introduction, the methodology section describes the research design, analytical framework, data collection approach, and ethical considerations. The findings section presents the evidence in two parts: Part 1 examines the transitional justice landscape, the nature and quality of women's participation, the barriers to meaningful participation, and the gaps in protection, support, and follow-through within existing mechanisms; Part 2 presents the results of the court case tracking exercise and examines the systemic reasons why conflict-related GBV cases are not reaching or surviving the formal justice system. The conclusions and recommendations section draws these findings together and proposes concrete actions grounded in both the evidence and the AUTJP framework.



02

Research objective and methodology

2.1. Research Overview and Objectives

This study examined women's participation in transitional justice mechanisms and tracked conflict-related gender-based violence cases in the formal justice system across three local government areas in Northeast Nigeria that were significantly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency: Monguno in Borno State, Michika in Adamawa State, and Gujba in Yobe State.

The study was guided by five research objectives:

1. To identify and describe the transitional justice (TJ) mechanisms, both formal and informal, operating in the three LGAs since the onset of the Boko Haram insurgency.
2. To examine the nature and quality of women's participation in those mechanisms.
3. To identify the barriers that prevent women from participating meaningfully in TJ processes.
4. To track conflict-related GBV cases within the formal justice system in the three LGAs and assess the formal justice system's response to such cases.
5. To develop evidence-based recommendations for improving women's participation in TJ mechanisms and strengthening the formal and informal justice response to conflict-related GBV.

2.2. Study Design

The study used a mixed-methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component involved systematically tracking GBV-related cases within the formal justice system. The qualitative component explored survivors' experiences navigating the justice system and examined the barriers they

faced, alongside investigating women's participation in transitional justice processes and what obstacles prevent their meaningful engagement.

For the qualitative component, a hybrid deductive-inductive approach was adopted. The deductive element was provided by a pre-defined thematic framework drawn from the study's five objectives and from established transitional justice theory, which oriented data collection and initial coding. The inductive element allowed themes to emerge from the data itself, particularly where respondents raised issues not anticipated by the initial framework.

2.3. Study Population

The study focused on five respondent groups, each corresponding to a distinct stakeholder category in the TJ and GBV response landscape:

- Women who participated in transitional justice mechanisms as community representatives.
- Leaders and executive members of existing transitional justice initiatives operating within the selected LGAs.
- Community and religious leaders involved in justice processes.
- Civil society actors involved in justice processes.
- Justice sector professionals.

2.4. Sampling Strategy and Data Sources

The study used purposive sampling to identify participants and data sources most relevant to the research objectives.



2.4.1. Quantitative Component

For the court case tracking exercise, field officers conducted structured searches at courts, police stations, and prosecution offices in each LGA. Searches were guided by consultations with court registrars, police officers, and prosecution staff, using the predefined inclusion criteria below to determine eligibility.

Case Tracking Inclusion Criteria

Cases were included in the tracking database if they met all of the following conditions:

- Filed between January 2010 and December 2024.
- Involved allegations of sexual violence, forced marriage, trafficking for sexual exploitation, or other forms of conflict-related GBV.
- Incident occurred within one of the three selected LGAs.
- Demonstrated a clear link to the Boko Haram insurgency through at least one of the following: the perpetrator was identified as a Boko Haram member or affiliate; the incident occurred during a Boko Haram attack or occupation; the victim was abducted or detained by Boko Haram; or the incident took place in a displacement or refugee context linked to the conflict.
- Included minimum documentation consisting of a charge sheet and at least one court proceeding record.

Case Tracking Exclusion Criteria

Cases were excluded if they:

- Did not involve any GBV elements.
- Had no demonstrable link to the Boko Haram conflict.
- Had case files that were inaccessible or lacked essential information.
- Involved incidents that occurred outside the designated LGAs.

2.4.2. Qualitative Component

Participants within each respondent group were selected through purposive sampling based on their specific knowledge, roles, or experiences relevant to the study's objectives. Criteria for selection included respondents who:

- were actively involved in or had direct knowledge of transitional justice mechanisms or GBV response processes.
- had a minimum of two years of experience in their current role.
- were available and willing to participate.
- were able to participate in interviews conducted in English, Hausa, or Kanuri.

2.5. Data Collection Methods and Tools

The study used two primary data collection methods: a structured court case tracking exercise and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

2.5.1. Court Case Tracking Exercise

Field officers visited courts, police stations, and prosecution offices in each LGA and searched for documented records of conflict-related GBV cases, including cases of sexual violence, forced marriage, and other gender crimes committed in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency. They used a structured data collection template to capture key information, including incident details such as the nature of the GBV offense, its link to the conflict, and the timeline and location; anonymised victim or survivor demographics and status; perpetrator characteristics including number, affiliation, relationship to the victim, and current status; case progression including major milestones and duration; and final outcomes such as investigation findings, trial results, sentencing, and appeals.

A Court Visit Documentation Form was completed for each institution visited, providing a verifiable record of the search process, including the institutions visited, the officials consulted, the time period searched, and any cases identified.

2.5.2. Key Informant Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants using an interview guide designed to explore women's participation in transitional justice mechanisms, their influence on decision-making, and the barriers they encounter. A total of 36 KIIs were completed across the three LGAs, as shown in Table 1.



Table 1. Distribution of Key Informant Interviews by State, Respondent Group, and Gender of Key Informant

Key Informant	Borno (Monguno)		Adamawa (Michika)		Yobe (Gujba)		Total
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Women representatives	4	0	4	0	4	0	12
Leaders of TJ mechanisms	0	0	0	2	0	2	4
Community and religious leaders	0	4	0	2	0	2	8
Civil society actors	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
Justice sector professionals	0	2	0	2	0	2	6
Total	5	7	5	7	5	7	36

Five separate interview guides were developed, one for each of the first four respondent groups. Each guide was structured around five thematic sections: background; identification of TJ mechanisms; women's participation; barriers and challenges; and recommendations. The guides were designed to follow the logic of the study's objectives while allowing interviewers sufficient flexibility to probe responses and pursue emerging lines of inquiry. Questions were framed in plain language and translated into Hausa where necessary, given the linguistic contexts of the study sites.

Interview Conduct and Recording

All interviews were conducted in person at locations convenient and safe for each participant. Informed consent was sought and confirmed at the start of every interview before recording began. All interviews were audio recorded, with participants' permission, and subsequently transcribed. Transcripts were produced in English, with interviews originally conducted in Hausa translated into English by the field interviewer or a designated translator. Interviews were conducted between October and November 2025.

2.6. Analytical Framework

For the quantitative component, the analytical framework was evaluative. Case tracking data was assessed against predefined inclusion criteria to determine whether conflict-related GBV cases had entered and progressed through the formal justice system. The absence of qualifying cases was treated as a substantive finding requiring explanation, rather than a null result to be dismissed.

For the qualitative component, the analysis was guided by a feminist interpretive framework. This approach centres women's own accounts as primary evidence, foregrounds power relations within social

and institutional contexts, and treats gender not as a background variable but as a structuring force shaping how justice processes are designed, accessed, and experienced. This framework informed not only the analysis but also the data collection process, the decision to include women participants as a distinct respondent group, the framing of interview questions to draw out women's own assessments of their influence and constraints, and the deliberate effort to triangulate women's accounts against those of community leaders and practitioners. The feminist interpretive framework was applied alongside a transitional justice framework, which evaluates mechanisms according to core TJ functions: truth-telling, accountability, reparations, institutional reform, and reconciliation, and asks how effectively these functions serve conflict-affected women.

2.7. Data Analysis

All KII transcripts were reviewed in full by the lead analyst. A thematic coding process was applied, in which significant statements, observations, and examples from each transcript were coded against the study's pre-defined thematic framework and against emergent themes identified during the reading process. Findings are organized by theme, with all groups contributing to each theme. Direct quotations from KII transcripts



are used throughout the report to ground the analysis in respondents' own words. Quotations have been lightly edited for grammatical clarity where necessary, without altering meaning.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not directly engage GBV survivors, several ethical safeguards were implemented to protect participants, maintain data integrity, and ensure responsible research conduct. All participants received a full explanation of the study's procedures in a language they understood. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, and all personal identifiers were removed from interview transcripts. Consistent with the study's confidentiality commitments, respondents are referenced only by their role and location rather than by name throughout this report.

2.9. Limitations

The study involved 36 KIIs across three LGAs. While this sample is appropriate for a qualitative study of this kind, it cannot be taken as representative of the full population of women participants, TJ practitioners, community leaders, or justice professionals in Northeast Nigeria. The findings describe patterns that are consistent and well-evidenced

within the study's scope but should be interpreted with this boundary in mind.

Respondents, particularly community and religious leaders and TJ mechanism leaders, may have presented their practices and attitudes in a more positive light than the actual situation warrants, particularly on questions relating to women's inclusion and GBV response. This risk is mitigated by triangulation across respondent groups. In several instances, positive accounts given by leaders are directly contradicted by the accounts of women participants and civil society actors, and both sets of accounts are reported.

The court case tracking exercise was limited to records held at the LGA level. It did not extend to state-level courts, federal courts, or military tribunals, where some conflict-related cases may have been filed. The zero-case finding is therefore specific to LGA-level formal justice processes and should not be read as a claim that no conflict-related GBV case has ever been prosecuted anywhere in the Nigerian justice system. Within the LGA-level scope, however, the finding is robust and is consistent with all the qualitative evidence gathered through the KIIs.





03

Findings

Findings from the five respondent groups and the court case tracking exercise point to a consistent and troubling picture. Women in the three study communities are taking part in transitional justice processes, but they are doing so on terms set by others, within structures that were not designed with their needs in mind, and without the decision-making authority or legal protection that genuine participation requires.

The Boko Haram insurgency caused profound harm to women through abduction, sexual violence, forced marriage, and the destruction of homes and livelihoods, yet the formal justice system holds no record of a single conflict-related GBV case having been brought to court in any of the three local government areas studied. This absence is not a data gap; it is the direct result of a justice system that fails survivors at every stage, from community structures that absorb cases before they are ever reported, to evidentiary failures that prevent prosecution, to the corruption and delay that wear down those who try to persist.

Despite these limitations, respondents across all groups and all three sites confirm that a genuine shift in attitudes toward women's participation has occurred since the conflict. However, this shift remains fragile, uneven, and dependent on individual goodwill rather than institutional commitment. Without deliberate investment in women's decision-making roles, survivor-centred justice, and accountability across both formal and informal mechanisms, the gains observed to date may not be sustained.

3.1. Women's Participation in Transitional Justice Mechanisms

Theme 1: The Transitional Justice Landscape

The TJ landscape across the three LGAs is uneven, underfunded, and heavily dependent on community initiative rather than on state investment. No LGA has a government-led, dedicated TJ architecture that is consistently resourced and operational. What exists instead is a set of community-based and religiously anchored mechanisms, some pre-dating the conflict, others established in direct response to it, that are performing TJ functions with varying degrees of structure, capacity, and connection to formal institutions.

1.1 Formal and Semi-Formal Mechanisms

The most structurally developed TJ mechanism in the entire study was found in Gujba (Yobe): the Transitional Justice and Conflict Resolution Programme, supported by UNDP through the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). This program brings repentant combatants and victims together in structured reconciliation sessions, documents testimony, facilitates forgiveness and compensation agreements, and refers criminal cases to police and civil defence. One leader described the process: *"Someone may come and say: 'I burned someone's house, or I took someone's belongings, and this is troubling my mind, it is stopping me from reintegrating comfortably into the community.' We invite him to explain his actions, then invite the people he wronged and sit with them."* The program also addressed GBV-specific cases, including forced marriages during the conflict and disputes arising from the return of ex-combatants whose wives had remarried



in their absence.

Also, in Gujba, the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) body, established by the Yobe State Government in collaboration with the traditional council and SEMA, serves as a semi-formal reconciliation mechanism to address the effects of the Boko Haram insurgency. Alongside this initiative, Hisba operates as a government-established, but community-embedded dispute resolution body responsible for reconciliation, GBV mediation, and referrals. Although Hisba predates the Boko Haram conflict, respondents emphasised that its role expanded significantly during the post-insurgency period as communities began to resettle. As one participant explained, *“The Hisba group has been in place since before the Boko Haram conflict, even though more of their work started strongly after the conflict when people resettled back to their communities.”*

This evolution positions Hisba as a key semi-formal community actor carrying out TJ-related functions.

1.2 Community and Religiously Anchored Mechanisms

In Michika (Adamawa), the primary TJ mechanism is the Sulhu Committee, a reconciliation body established around 2016–2017 under the Muslim Council. Its chairman described its founding purpose clearly: *“We established it for reconciliation among our people — Muslims and non-Muslims, elders and members of our community in Michika LGA. If conflicts happen, to reduce the number of cases going to court.”* The Sulhu Committee is self-funded, meets weekly, and operates an advisory and mediation function, referring cases that require

criminal sanction to the court. Its work covers dispute resolution and GBV cases, though its capacity is severely constrained by the absence of any external financial support: *“We have no source of income. We fund everything ourselves.”*

Also operating in Michika is Al-Amru bil-Ma'ruf, a women-led Islamic organization under the Muslim Council whose mandate, in the words of its secretary, is *“to help people to promote peace and unity among the community.”* Unlike most mechanisms in this study, Al-Amru bil-Ma'ruf is both women-led and women-governed: decisions are made by women, for women, particularly in cases involving reconciliation. Its existence represents the clearest example in Michika of a TJ mechanism in which women exercise genuine decision-making authority rather than token participation.

The Hunters' Association in Michika, originally formed for hunting and meat supply, has evolved into a community protection group performing functions that parallel transitional justice in a context of weak state presence. In the absence of police or military forces, they intervene in cases of gender-based violence, escort survivors to health facilities, detain alleged perpetrators until formal authorities arrive, and advocate for the reintegration of conflict returnees. As one leader explained, *“The original intention was hunting. Over time, because of gaps in government response, either due to absence or overwhelming demand, we had to protect lives and property and respond swiftly before the government takes over.”* The association also conducts ongoing community sensitization aimed at





reducing stigma toward former Boko Haram captives. *“We keep sensitising the community about Boko Haram victims. It was a sad experience they found themselves in. They were forced, not willing. Our constant advocacy has helped the community accept them and live in peace with them.”*

1.3 Civil Society and Survivor-Led Initiatives

The Women and Children of Conflict Survivors' Foundation (WCCSF), founded by a conflict survivor, serves as a community-based victim support and reconciliation initiative whose purpose and activities reflect core transitional justice functions, particularly victim participation and psychosocial healing. Its leader described the initiative as a space where survivors can collectively process harm and rebuild social bonds: *“We established it so that we can sit together, discuss our worries and the difficulties we experienced, and find ways to move forward, because this is not the end of our lives.”* The WCCSF is significant not only for what it does, but for who leads and governs it. It is one of the few mechanisms in the study where survivors themselves hold decision-making authority over the processes that affect them.

Monguno presents the starkest case of TJ absence in the study. No formally structured transitional justice mechanism, such as those dedicated to accountability, truth-telling, reparations, or victim redress, was identified. The local landscape is instead dominated by the humanitarian response architecture, framed largely around livelihood support, psychosocial services, and

GBV response rather than formal TJ processes. Reconciliation dialogues and peacebuilding forums do exist, organised through community leaders, religious leaders, and women-led community organisations, with support from international actors including NCA and UNICEF. These informal practices align with the principles of community-based reconciliation, yet they remain non-institutionalised, lacking a formal structure, mandate, or system for documentation. A civil society actor with over three years of experience in Monguno underscored this gap, stating, *“I am not aware of transitional justice activities.”*

The landscape described above shapes not only what transitional justice looks like in these three LGAs, but who gets to participate in it, on what terms, and with what degree of influence. Where mechanisms lack formal structure and state backing, decision-making authority tends to default to those who already hold social power: community elders, religious leaders, and male-dominated institutions. It is within this context that women's participation must be understood, not as a standalone question of inclusion, but as a question of who controls the spaces that exist, and whether those spaces were designed with women's needs and authority in mind.

Theme 2: The Nature and Quality of Women's Participation

Across all mechanisms and all three LGAs, women's participation in transitional justice processes is real but conditional. Women are included,





but their influence depends heavily on the mechanism, the setting, and who controls decision-making spaces. Inclusion often stops short of genuine authority.

2.1 Presence Without Authority

Community and religious leaders frequently described women's participation in positive terms. Yet their accounts, when compared with women's own testimonies, reveal a clear gap between inclusion as a stated value and inclusion as a structural reality. A representative in Gujba confirmed that women are now part of decision-making processes, but immediately added, *"Women should not be more than the men."* This ceiling, presented as reasonable, shows that participation is allowed only within limits that preserve male dominance. Women themselves highlighted this gap between presence and influence. As the Gujba women leader put it, *"Women should be carried along in decision-making committees, not just invited to attend, because some decisions are also applied to women too."*

Participation also varies sharply by mechanism. In Michika, women exercise real authority in Al Amru bilMa'ruf, which is women-led. Its leader stated plainly, *"In Al Amru bilMa'ruf, which is women-led, we do not face such challenges."* In contrast, within the Sulhu Committee and the broader Muslim Council, women are included as members but rarely hold leadership roles. A civil society actor noted that women are *"increasingly gaining confidence and contributing actively during discussions,"* but *"women's participation in decision-making is still limited, as key decisions are often made by*

community leaders or programme facilitators."

This captures the central challenge: women are developing the capacity to participate, but the structures within which they participate have not expanded to accommodate their contributions.

2.2 Where Participation Matters: Evidence of Meaningful Influence

Despite the structural constraints described above, there are notable examples of women's participation producing better outcomes, not simply increasing representation. These examples are analytically important because they show that the argument for women's inclusion in TJ processes is not only a rights argument but an operational one.

In the Gujba TJ programme, the WCCSF coordinator described a procedural change she proposed that was formally adopted. In cases where a woman had to choose between two husbands following an ex-combatant's return, she recommended that the two men be seen separately rather than together, allowing the woman to speak freely before any confrontation took place. *"When we tried it, it worked perfectly. Without women present, such matters cannot be handled properly."* This is a direct instance of women's participation improving case outcomes.

A Hisba representative described a similar dynamic. He recalled a case in which a woman coerced into marriage could not disclose the true nature of her problem to the male members of the committee: *"At the end, it was a woman in Hisba who made her open up with what exactly*



the problem is. If it were men, she wouldn't have opened up." Women's presence in that setting was not symbolic; it was the condition that made the case resolvable at all.

2.3 A Real but Fragile Shift

Respondents across all groups and all three LGAs confirmed that attitudes toward women's participation in TJ processes have changed since the conflict. A Gujba woman leader noted: *"Initially, they didn't work with women in decision-making before the Boko Haram conflict, but now things have changed, even though we are not up to the required numbers."* Another woman leader described the same trajectory from a different angle: *"Before now, they didn't work with us simply because we are women, but now the men feel and understand that some cases have to be engaging women, else they are not getting it right."*

This shift is genuine and should not be understated. But it is sustained by individual goodwill rather than institutional commitment. It has not been formalised into defined leadership roles, enforceable participation standards, or accountability mechanisms within TJ bodies. Without deliberate investment in women's formal authority, the gains remain potentially reversible.

Theme 3: Barriers to Meaningful Participation

The barriers that prevent women from participating meaningfully in TJ mechanisms are structural, social, and personal. They operate together rather than in isolation and were identified consistently across all respondent

groups and all three LGAs.

3.1. Structural Barriers

Marital gatekeeping was the most consistently named first-order barrier. The WCCSF coordinator stated it plainly: *"A married woman may not get approval from her husband to join the program, but there are some that get approved to participate."* A representative in Gujba confirmed the structural reality: *"Not every married woman is allowed to always attend public gatherings."* A civil society actor in Michika offered the most vivid illustration: *"Some of them actually sneak out to come here in order to attend MHPSS sessions."* When women must hide their participation from their own husbands, the claim that TJ processes are accessible to women requires serious qualification.

Economic dependency further restricts women's ability to participate. Women who are economically dependent on those who may be harming them, or who shoulder the majority of household responsibilities in post-conflict poverty, cannot easily afford the time, energy, or social risk that TJ participation requires. A civil society respondent described women who cannot leave abusive situations because they lack financial independence: *"Most of these women are merely survivors in their homes because they don't have the financial capacity to leave and be on their own."*

Logistical barriers were named consistently across groups, including transport, inconvenient meeting times, and childcare. These are solvable when mechanisms respond to women's feedback. A ward head described a





simple accommodation: *“A woman suggested that meetings be held in the afternoon so women could attend after finishing household chores, and that idea was accepted.”*

Cultural and religious norms shape women's participation across all three LGAs, but their relationship to exclusion is more complex than simple prohibition. A religious leader offered the clearest articulation of the conditional inclusion model that characterizes TJ participation: *“Our religion is a very civilized religion; it didn't forbid women from making their contributions. The only thing that religion forbade is making a woman the leader.”* This framing simultaneously opens space for participation and sets a ceiling on it. Community leaders across all sites confirmed that both cultural and religious norms have shifted since the conflict, though not consistently or irreversibly.

3.2. Social Barriers

Stigma, especially toward returned abductees and women who seek help publicly, operates as a powerful constraint, particularly in Gujba. The WCCSF coordinator described returned abductees as effectively excluded from ordinary community life: *“Female survivors of abduction rarely socialize with other women. They avoid gatherings unless it is one of their own because people speak badly about them behind their backs.”* This matters directly for TJ participation: the women most harmed by the conflict, and therefore most able to contribute to truth-telling and reconciliation, are also the women most likely to be excluded.

3.3. Personal and Interpersonal Barriers

A confidentiality deficit was raised by women respondents themselves, showing that exclusion is not only externally imposed. One woman leader explained: *“Some women have running mouths; they don't keep secrets. Whatever happens during the dialogue setting, they go out and spread the news around, which is not right. GBV-related cases are confidential and must be kept secret.”* This internal trust problem is a programme design challenge that must be addressed for women to participate safely.

Lack of confidence in mixed gender settings was another barrier identified by women. One respondent stated: *“Lack of confidence is a major barrier. Some women lack confidence to speak, especially in mixed groups.”* A community and religious leader added that cultural expectations compound this: *“Women fear being dismissed.”* Yet a woman leader offered an important counter-observation: *“Even before this program, our mothers were guiding and sensitising women. If given the opportunity, they would do very well.”* The barrier is not women's incapacity but the structural and social conditions that prevent their capacity from being expressed.

Theme 4: Gaps in Protection, Support, and Follow-Through

Across the three LGAs, the barriers documented in Theme 3 mean that many women never reach TJ mechanisms at all. But the evidence from this study raises an equally important question: what happens



to those who do? The findings suggest that women who engage with TJ processes frequently encounter mechanisms that are not adequately equipped to protect them during the process, support them through it, or follow through on what they were promised at its conclusion.

4.1 When Promises Are Made and Not Kept

The most acute documented failure of TJ delivery is the compensation failure in Gujba. The UNDP/NHRC Transitional Justice and Conflict Resolution Programme facilitated reconciliation agreements in twenty GBV cases, assessed compensation for each, and submitted names, but no payment was made. As the WCCSF coordinator explained, *“We resolved twenty cases and agreed on compensation, twenty names were submitted, but nothing was done. It is better not to promise at all than to promise and fail.”*

The significance of this failure extends well beyond the twenty cases directly affected. In communities where women are already weighing the risks of participation against uncertain returns, the knowledge that others engaged, waited, and received nothing functions as a structural deterrent. The compensation failure is therefore simultaneously a reparative justice failure and a participation barrier, compounding the structural exclusion documented throughout this study.

4.2. Unaddressed Harm and Unmanaged Risk

No TJ mechanism documented in this study offers systematic, long-term psychosocial support to women participants or GBV survivors. Across all three LGAs, the emotional cost of participation is borne entirely by individuals who are, in many cases, already carrying unaddressed trauma. A respondent described the scale of what is going unaddressed: *“Many women are suffering emotionally, and it affects their families.”*

The absence of psychosocial support is not only a welfare failure, but also a participation barrier. Women who cannot access support for the emotional consequences of engagement are less able to sustain that engagement over the time it takes for TJ processes to reach resolution. Genuine attitudinal change is difficult

to consolidate in communities where the emotional wounds of conflict remain open and unattended. There is also a specific and underappreciated safety risk at the intersection of reintegration and survivor protection. A woman leader described attending a programme where an ex-combatant being reintegrated into the community disclosed the following: *“He explained his anger issues, that he easily gets triggered, and if he cannot retaliate, he faints.”* When perpetrators returning through reintegration programmes carry unaddressed trauma and documented anger responses, the safety of survivors living in those same communities is not secured by reconciliation agreements alone.

3.2. Conflict-Related GBV and the Formal Justice System's Response

The court case tracking exercise conducted through field visits to courts, police stations, and prosecution offices in Michika, Monguno, and Gujba, returned zero formally recorded conflict-related GBV cases across all three LGAs. No charge sheets, case files, or court records of conflict-related GBV prosecutions were found at the LGA level in any of the three sites.

This finding does not mean that sexual violence, forced marriage, and other conflict-related gender crimes did not occur in these communities. All six justice sector professionals interviewed, as well as the observations of other respondent groups confirmed, from direct experience, that such crimes took place and that cases had come to their attention. What the finding means is that none of those cases produced a formal court record in any of the three LGAs studied.

The analysis below examines why this absence exists and what it means for the women who survived conflict-related GBV and have not yet received justice.

Theme 1: How Cases Never Reach the System

Before a case can reach the police or the court, it must first pass through the community. In all three LGAs, traditional and religious leaders serve as the first point of contact for any dispute or complaint. A prosecutor in Gujba explained the process *clearly: “In this area, they*



cannot come to the police station without informing the Bulama or community leaders. The community leader will take the case to the police.”

In practice, this means that every GBV case requires approval from a community authority, almost always a male elder, before it can enter the formal system at all. As one justice actor put it: *“They hardly involve the police in cases, and if the police are not involved, we cannot talk about court, because the police, after their investigation, charge the case to court.”* No police involvement means no charge. No charge means no court record. The result is that most cases are settled or suppressed at the community gateway and never generate a formal record.

Theme 2: Why Cases Collapse Before They Begin

Even when a survivor reaches the police and a report is filed, the evidentiary requirements of prosecution present a second, compounding barrier. All six justice sector respondents identified evidence failure as a primary reason cases collapse.

The most intractable evidence problem concerns Boko Haram perpetrators: they cannot be identified or located. An area court judge described the challenge clearly: *“When Boko Haram commits a crime like rape, where will you go and find them? They are heavily armed with weapons higher than those our security personnel have. How can we go about that? There is no proof, and even if we could capture them, the survivor cannot identify them because their faces are always covered, and they live in the bush.”*

The Gujba prosecutor confirmed the same conclusion: *“Survivors may delay reporting, evidence is lost, and perpetrators are sometimes unidentified insurgents.”*

A second evidence problem is forensic. Sexual violence cases require medical examination results that confirm penetration and, where possible, identify the perpetrator. But survivors in these communities rarely report immediately, due to stigma, family pressure, and fear of retaliation. By the time a survivor reaches a health facility, the forensic window has often closed: *“Evidence collection is weak. Medical reports are often missing.”*

Theme 3: Witnesses, Fear, And the Culture of Silence

Cases that survive the community gateway and have sufficient medical evidence still face a third barrier: the withdrawal of witnesses. This pattern was confirmed across all respondent groups and is deeply rooted in the social conditions of post-conflict communities where perpetrators and survivors live side by side. Fear of retaliation is particularly acute in Boko Haram-linked cases. One respondent described the threat environment starkly: *“Survivors do not want to appear in court because of fear. Boko Haram usually have their informants in town, and they report back to them. Also, if care is not taken, the prosecutor might even be eliminated at night for the case not to proceed.”* In this context, silence is a rational response to a real threat that the state has not neutralised and for which it offers no protection.

A judge explained how this fear translates into witness withdrawal: *“The witness tends to run away from appearing in court for the simple reason of not wanting to create enmity between them and the perpetrators, or sometimes the perpetrator is their relation, so instead of testifying against him they rather keep quiet.”* Family concerns about a survivor's marriage prospects add another layer of pressure. A Police Corporal named this directly as a prosecution barrier: *“Relatives delay the process, insisting it will affect their daughters from getting married.”* The Gujba prosecutor captured the consequence: *“Survivors need assurance that justice will be done. Without trust in the system, they will not come forward.”* The system as it currently operates does not provide that assurance.

Theme 4: Corruption, Delay, And the Erosion of Trust

Survivors who persist through the community gateway, survive the evidentiary barriers, and maintain witness support still face a court process that may take one to two years, without any financial, logistical, or psychosocial support to sustain them through it. Delay is the most common procedural barrier. A judge described how it operates: *“Where delays normally come is when a lawyer sits on a case, the case suffers adjournment due to personal interest, because to them it is business.”* A case that should conclude in two weeks can stretch to a year



through successive adjournments. Another respondent confirmed the same dynamic: *“Cases drag on. Convictions are rare, and many cases collapse due to lack of evidence or witness withdrawal.”*

Corruption, while not universal, was identified by multiple respondents as a real and damaging factor. One described it plainly: *“Some judges are corrupt... rather than helping the survivors, they delay prosecution and collect bribes, mostly from rich parents of the accused. If the case falls into the hands of a corrupt judge, the case will just die silently.”* Another respondent added: *“Sentences can be lenient, and some judges*

do not fully appreciate the seriousness of sexual violence.”

Together, delay, weak sentencing, and corruption erode survivors' trust in the justice system. Even when a case reaches court, the process itself becomes another barrier, one that many survivors cannot endure.





04

Conclusions and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusion

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy makes clear that post-conflict reconstruction is incomplete when it fails to address the specific harms experienced by women or to include them as active agents in justice and reconciliation. Meaningful participation requires more than physical presence. It requires that women's voices shape decisions, that their experiences inform the design of processes, and that justice mechanisms deliver accountability for the violations committed against them. The findings of this study demonstrate a wide and consequential gap between that standard and the reality in Michika, Monguno, and Gujba — a gap that is not accidental, but structural, and that will not close without deliberate intervention.

The transitional justice landscape across the three LGAs is active but fragmented. It is driven by communities, not by the state. No LGA has a government-led, consistently resourced TJ mechanism. What exists has been built and sustained by communities themselves: the Sulhu Committee and Al Amru bilMa'ruf in Michika; the UNDP/NHRC Transitional Justice and Conflict Resolution Programme, the ADR body, Hisba, and the WCCSF in Gujba; and informal reconciliation practices in Monguno. These mechanisms are doing important work, but they operate without state support, without financial security, and in some cases without follow-through on commitments made to survivors. A transitional justice landscape

that depends entirely on community initiative and external goodwill is one that cannot guarantee consistency, sustainability, or accountability for survivors or for the processes themselves.

Women participate in these mechanisms, but meaningful participation remains limited. In a few spaces such as the Al-Amru bil-Ma'ruf in Michika and the WCCSF in Gujba, women hold real decision-making authority, and the evidence shows that their influence directly improves outcomes. In most other mechanisms, women are present but not empowered. Attitudes toward women's participation have improved since the conflict, and this shift is genuine. But it has not been institutionalised. It depends on individual goodwill rather than formal roles, defined rights, or accountability mechanisms. A shift in attitudes that has not been converted into structural change is a shift that can be reversed, and without deliberate investment, reversal is a real risk as the urgency of the post-conflict period fades.

Women's participation is further constrained by barriers that operate simultaneously at structural, social, and personal levels. Marital gatekeeping, economic dependency, and restrictive cultural norms limit women's ability to take part in the first place. Stigma, particularly toward returned abductees, isolates those most harmed by the conflict from the very processes designed to address that harm. Internal barriers, including confidentiality concerns and lack of confidence in mixed-gender settings, reflect the wider social environment in which women must navigate participation. Taken together, these barriers do not simply reduce the number of women who participate, they determine whose voices are heard, whose experiences are recorded, and whose needs shape the design of justice processes. Until they are addressed directly, inclusion will remain selective and authority will remain conditional.

The court case tracking exercise found zero formally recorded prosecutions across all three LGAs, not because the crimes did not occur, but because a chain of structural failures ensures that most cases never reach the formal system or produce a record. Survivors face barriers at every stage: community gatekeeping that prevents cases from reaching the police; evidentiary requirements that cannot be met when perpetrators are unidentified insurgents or protected actors; witness withdrawal driven by fear and lack



of protection; court processes that last years without support; and, in some cases, corruption that ends cases quietly. Each barrier reinforces the others. The result is a complete absence of formal accountability for conflict-related GBV, leaving the most harmed women without redress and signalling to communities that sexual violence during conflict carries no legal consequence.

The recommendations that follow are grounded in a cross-cutting principle of survivor-centred design: the understanding, consistent with the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP, 2019), that victims and survivors must participate not only as beneficiaries of transitional justice processes but as active agents in their design and implementation. They also reflect the AUTJP's emphasis on national and local ownership: the changes required are not technical adjustments to donor programming, but structural and political commitments that only the Nigerian state and its institutions can make and sustain. The recommendations are directed at implementing partners, state governments, federal institutions, and the African Union and European Union as co-sponsors of this work.

4.2. Recommendations

Move women from being attendees to decision-makers

Symbolic inclusion is not meaningful participation. Across all three LGAs, women are present in TJ mechanisms but rarely in positions where their voices determine outcomes. Project implementing partners should establish binding minimum standards for women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles within all TJ mechanisms they support and should make compliance with these standards a condition of continued engagement. Traditional and religious leaders who chair these mechanisms should be engaged directly on this standard, using the operational case that women's authority in these processes improves case outcomes, as demonstrated in this study's own findings.

Engage men and boys as partners, not as targets

Marital gatekeeping is the most immediate structural barrier to women's participation identified in this study. Husbands control whether wives attend programs,

speak at meetings, or pursue justice claims. This will not change through programs directed only at women. Deliberate engagement of men and boys should be built into programme design, framing inclusion as beneficial to the effectiveness of TJ processes rather than as a values imposition. Community and religious leaders are well-positioned to carry this message and should be supported to do so.

Deliver psychosocial support as a TJ programme component, not an afterthought

Psychosocial support is identified in the AUTJP as an essential element of reparative justice and of the specific measures required for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (AUTJP, paras 65, 103). It is currently absent across all three LGAs. Survivors who are carrying unaddressed trauma cannot participate meaningfully in reconciliation processes, cannot testify effectively in court proceedings, and cannot rebuild their lives and livelihoods in ways that make community reintegration sustainable. Psychosocial support should be funded as a core component of any TJ programme, staffed by trained personnel, and sustained beyond the active phase of programming. Particular attention must be given to returned abductees, who face severe community stigmatisation and who are currently excluded from community life rather than reintegrated into it.

Honour commitments to survivors, or do not make them

The AUTJP requires that reparation programmes have a clear strategy for resource mobilisation and that resources be secured before commitments are made to victims (AUTJP, para 66). The Gujba experience, where twenty survivors received written determinations and then received nothing, represents a direct violation of this standard, and of the basic principle that TJ processes must not cause additional harm to those they are designed to serve. No compensation commitments should be made to survivors until funds are confirmed as disburseable. Where a full reparation programme cannot be implemented immediately, interim reparations should be considered as provided for under the AUTJP framework.



Fund community TJ mechanisms through government recurrent budget lines

The AUTJP requires that national budget allocations be made for TJ programmes as an essential expression of national ownership (AUTJP, para 131). Community TJ mechanisms in all three LGAs are operating without state support, sustained by community goodwill and, where they exist, by short-cycle donor funding. State governments should identify existing community TJ mechanisms that meet basic standards of accountability and process integrity and should fund them through recurrent budget lines. Donor organisations should use their leverage to advocate for this transition rather than perpetuating parallel, donor-funded programme structures.

Establish dedicated GBV police and prosecution capacity at LGA level

The absence of dedicated GBV police units and prosecution capacity at the LGA level is a structural gap. Addressing it requires dedicated, specialised capacity: GBV units within police structures at LGA level, prosecutors with specific GBV training and caseload

accountability, and female officers in sufficient numbers to receive disclosures that women will not make to male officers. This capacity should be funded through state and federal government budget lines, not donor projects, in keeping with the AUTJP's principle of national ownership and the requirement that justice sector institutions be independent and adequately resourced.

Establish a formal referral protocol between community mechanisms and the formal system

Community TJ mechanisms currently operate in isolation from the formal justice system. The AUTJP envisions traditional and formal mechanisms working in complementary fashion (AUTJP, para 56). In practice, this requires a written, binding referral protocol that specifies which categories of cases should be referred, by whom, to which institution, and within what timeframe. The protocol should be developed with community mechanism leaders and justice sector professionals jointly and should include accountability provisions for cases that are referred but not acted upon.





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