

# Sustainable Peace from Learning to Unlearn

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## **Abstract**

Our attitudes and behaviors are shaped by influences of social, environmental, formal, and informal learning in addition to other factors. It is therefore no surprise that our individual and sometimes collective positions align only with what we have been exposed to and tend to be deeply rooted because they form an essential part of our identities. When challenged by life events and changes in the world around us, our responses could include discomfort, confusion, and possibly strong resistance. However, even in the midst of such disruption, we are receiving an invaluable gift – the space to learn, unlearn, and relearn.

In this article, we go on a journey with Aisha, as she navigates barriers to change, associated risks and the elements of a change cycle model. This cycle includes awareness of the need to change, the desire to participate in and support change, building knowledge on how to change; and applying the skills needed to implement and sustain change. It is a journey of building peace and invites us to examine and challenge ourselves to be open to learn, and unlearn enabling us to gain new perspectives, and give ourselves the opportunity to grow in ways we may have never thought possible.

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### **LEARNING, CHANGE, EMPOWERMENT, CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION, PEACEBUILDING**

“The mere mention of communities like Narayi, Sabo, and the likes, gave me a shiver as these are Christian dominated areas in the southern part of Kaduna and for people like me, a Hausa Muslim who had never been outside my community, it means a death zone”.  
Aisha Yahaya – participant, *Generations For Peace Empowerment For Peace Programme* 2016-2017.

### **Introduction**

Learning is “a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning” (Ambrose et al., 2010). The change in the learner may happen at the level of knowledge, attitude, or behaviour. As a result of learning, learners come to see concepts, ideas, and/or the world differently. We learn to grow, improve, and carry out tasks effectively and efficiently – whether at home or externally. For example, as a child grows and begins to practice expected actions like talking and walking, parents are delighted because that child has started displaying skills that will be needed for life, which essentially means the child is learning and putting that learning into practice.

As we grow, we learn even more things that are meant to benefit us and are influential in the shaping of our worldviews, attitudes, and behaviours.

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These can become either positive, negative, but, at the very least, they are expected to enable us to conform to social expectations within our identity groups, with the cultures and structures dictating our expected behaviour. What happens, however, when we are faced with doubts, or see the harm our learned approaches cause? What happens when we start to question what we know and have accepted as the natural and right way to do things in our lives? How do we bring about change on a personal or larger level if we are not ready to let go of what we have known to be absolutely true? Can learning to unlearn take us through the painful process of change?

Such internal conflict is a natural part of life and can produce new insights, growth, and even increased productivity. It should therefore be embraced as an opportunity. However, because conflict sometimes requires us to see things differently and question what we have learned, the courage needed to learn to unlearn is an important element of conflict transformation and overall change. Conflict transformation acknowledges the necessity of conflict because it does provide opportunities for growth and most of all, it offers the potential for lasting change, which can only happen when we are ready to unlearn. Being ready to question our positions and thinking means opening ourselves to the possibility of new narratives and experiences that, by doing so, enable wide-reaching change and transformation. This article briefly unpacks how our attitudes and behaviours are formed and influenced, why we naturally resist change, and, finally, details a process that can be followed to “learn to unlearn”.

To do so, the article will focus on Aisha. One can only imagine how afraid Aisha was at the first meeting of the Empowerment For Peace Programme. It took courage not only to be there, but to be open to challenge her perceptions and stereotypes that had been ingrained by experiences and learned histories. In this article, we will explore how Aisha was able to “learn to unlearn” through her participation in Generations For Peace’s Empowerment For Peace Programmes (EPPs). From 2013 to 2017, Generations For Peace implemented four cycles of EPPs engaging 60 women aged 25 and above, from eight ethnic groups, two religions; and from 20 selected

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communities in the northern and southern parts of Kaduna state. This article will focus on an EPP in the north where girls and women are disparately affected by violent conflict and devastating losses from that violent conflict in the region.

How then can we learn to unlearn in such difficult circumstances of active violent conflict and stereotypes that have been formed? What does it take to begin such a change? It takes courage and the willingness to learn and unlearn.

Let us attempt this journey of learning how we can unlearn from courageous women who live within these difficult circumstances and enshrined structural and cultural violence.

### **The Case of the Empowerment For Peace Programmes in Kaduna, North-West Nigeria**

We will start by exploring the context.

Nigeria is known as the Giant of Africa. Why?

Nigeria is 300 million strong with one of every five people of African descent being of Nigerian origin and one in every four Africans being Nigerian. She bears the proud title of the most populous Black nation in the world and most populous country in Africa. The United Nations estimates that as of January 2023, Nigeria's population was 219,207,865. Nigeria is set to be the fourth most populous nation in the world over the next three decades, after India, China, and the United States.

Nigeria is richly blessed with a variety of resources, not just a large population. In 2022, Nigeria was the seventh on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) crude oil production, is extremely rich in liquified natural gas (said to have the largest reserves on the African continent), and has an abundance of minerals like zinc,

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lead, limestone, coal, iron ore, tin, and precious metals as well as a range of fertile land capable of producing a wide range of agricultural products. It is a country also blessed with at least 250 ethnic groups, 500 languages and multiple religions. Nigeria's diversity has served to be both a blessing due to the potential that diversity can bring and a deterrent to unity and peaceful co-existence when differences are not managed well.

Despite its many riches, the key divisions of north and south of the country went through periods of turmoil. In 1804, the north of Nigeria was subjugated to a holy war led by the Islamic preacher Othman dan Fodio, resulting in a strong Caliphate. In the southern region, colonialism started to take root. The industrial revolution in Europe spurred on the slave trade as well as trade in agricultural and mineral commodities. Colonization, which began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, also brought Christian missionaries. Many attribute the beginning of major troubles of the country to the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914, after being governed separately by the British. In addition, a system of chieftaincies and traditional rule was imposed upon various ethnicities as a way to better control the citizens of the now united colony and, within these systems, men were the majority of such chiefs and traditional heads. "It was in this colonial era that many of the rivalries that were to later explode in conflicts were fostered", says historian Emeka Uzoatu (Uzoatu, 2003).

By the time Nigeria gained her independence from the British in 1960, the situation had become dire. It was obvious that violence would not be far off. Beginning in 1962, ethnic groups started to revolt and, in 1966, the first coup was carried out. This was followed very closely by a bloody "revenge" coup. Then the Biafra region declared itself an independent state in 1967. A civil war followed which did not end until 1970 and claimed more than one million lives. This Biafra issue remains a sensitive and influential conflict issue in Nigeria today.

And it seems violent conflict became a consistent fact of life after these events, since various episodes of violence continued to occur afterwards. Emake Nwafor, a

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sociologist states that, “Years of misrule, massive corruption, and squandering of development opportunities by successive governments have not only pauperized large segments of the population, they have also left frayed nerves, forcing frustrated Nigerians to bare fangs against erstwhile peaceful neighbours at the individual and communal levels” (Uzoatu, 2003). Indeed, violence has stemmed from ethnic, religious, resource, social, and political differences, to mention a few. These violent conflicts have led to the loss of tens of thousands of lives, making various locations in Nigeria internationally designated flashpoints for violence and insecurity. And in more recent times, the list of violent conflicts is populated by violent extremism, security forces brutality, kidnapping and abductions, banditry, herdsman and farmers conflict, resource control in the Niger-Delta, political unrest, and the list continues.

As Nwafor notes, one of the key drivers of violence in Nigeria is corruption and non-accountable governance. From the colonial precedent, Nigeria decided to adopt a governmental system that aimed to cater for its citizens on several levels. Nigeria is based on a three-tier government system; national, state, and local governments. Within the three-tier government model, local governments are seen as the closest structure to the people. However, even closer to the people are the subdivisions of wards or districts with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 15 for each Local Government Area. In these structures of wards and districts, traditional rulers oversee the welfare of their communities, who then report higher up the chain of the traditional/chieftaincy route all the way to the traditional rulers and chiefs. Put in place by the colonialists, this system has endured to this day with first class traditional rulers being extremely powerful in the structure that is Nigeria.

Despite her resources, Nigeria has not managed to provide the quality of life that one would expect from such a resource rich nation. Despite being a signatory to various legal and development instruments and treaties, the true localisation and implementation of these policies and laws have yet to be experienced by the citizenry. Whether the issue is security and the National Action Plan; the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent instruments; the

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strategic direction, planning and coordination, advocacy and partnership development; resource mobilisation and management; and monitoring, evaluation, documentation and reporting of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP-SDGs), development data shows that the nation is lagging behind in the performance measures of the SDGs.

It is within this context that the political and economic status of women has been determined. The 2013 Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics' *Statistical Report on Women and Men in Nigeria* which covers six key areas of policy (health, education, work, power, decision-making, as well as violence and crime), surfaces findings on the differences between the status of girls and boys, women and men. It states:

1. "Although women make up about half of the electorate and have attained the right to vote and hold public offices in almost all states of the federation, they continue to be underrepresented at the national, state, and local government levels. At the national parliament in 2011, 93.6 per cent of seats were occupied by men compared to mere 6.4 per cent recorded for women. Similar patterns were depicted at the state and local government levels. The judiciary at the state level was also predominantly male. The proportion of female judges was below 28 per cent in the period under reference (2010-2013). Women were also underrepresented among high-ranking government administrators with decision-making power.
  2. The proportion of females violated physically and sexually in 2013 for the age bracket 20-24 years was 22.6 per cent and 2.1 per cent respectively according to the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey. Available statistics from the same source indicate that females in the age bracket 15-19 experience female genital cutting most (90.2 per cent) in 2013 when they were less than 5 years old compared to 89.6 per cent in 2008. The proportion of women in prison from 2010 to 2013 was 1.9 per cent on the average. Trafficking in persons in
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the period 2010-2013 was female dominated. For instance, the proportion of females trafficked for prostitution was highest for age group 18-27 years (70.8 per cent) in 2013” (Kale, 2014).

Here it is important to note that as of 2013, an estimate of the total national population was 174 million, with the ratio of women to men was 49.5/50.5 per cents respectively. Given an almost 50/50 ratio, it would be expected that the gaps between women and men should be minimal. Unfortunately, the 2013 Global Gender Gap Report lists Nigeria with an overall rank of 104 out of 136 (where 136 is the lowest score) based on gaps between women and men in economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2013). Additional reports continue to provide similar dismal statistics and continue to paint a bleak picture. The World Bank’s 2014 Nigeria Economic Report (NER) derives information from several sources including a survey which states,

“[T]hat 33.1 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line in 2012/2013. The NER also documents major differences in poverty and living standards by macro-region in Nigeria. While the South of Nigeria has relatively low poverty rates, ranging from 16 per cent in the South West to 28.8 per cent in the South East, poverty rates in the North West and North East are 45.9 per cent and 50.2 per cent, respectively (World Bank, 2017).

While the South of Nigeria (especially the South West) has experienced a strong positive dynamic in poverty reduction in recent years, the poverty rate in the North West has remained stagnant, while poverty has actually increased in the North East. Thus, disparities between the North (North West, North East) and South of Nigeria in poverty and living standards have increased.

This is no doubt related to the recent security challenges in the Northern part of Nigeria. Explanatory factors for the high differences in living standards by geographical region

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are likely related to differences in the provision of public services and the degree of connectedness to larger markets.

The North/South divide in poverty and poverty reduction is a regrettable trend and is likely related to the security situation in this part of the country. This particularly concerns the visible deterioration in living standards in the North East. The much higher absolute levels of poverty in the North also reflect other differences: (a) a relatively low level of many public services and (b) a relative remoteness from ports and current points of economic agglomeration in Nigeria. Research in economics continues to stress the high value of basic education for increasing the probability of productive employment. Over 90% of children in the Southern part of Nigeria between ages 6 to 16 attend school, while this is only true for less than half of children in the North West and North East. Health indicators show a similar divide. For example, immunisation rates of 14% and 21% in the North West and North East, respectively, can be compared with over 70% immunisation rates in the South. Infrastructure that could better connect markets in Nigeria or measures to facilitate higher productivity in agriculture could also have a measurable impact on poverty reduction in the North (World Bank, 2017)".

It is evident from the above information therefore that northern Nigeria is economically and educationally disadvantaged. Not by choice, but a combination of multiple factors including literacy levels, norms which hinder health and well-being interventions due to limited understanding of benefits and, in some cases misinformation, as well as the culture of dependence on resources from other parts of the country contributing to less initiative or drive to self-develop. The data above shows that the North-West and North-East are badly affected by some of these factors.

Remember Aisha who shared her concerns about interacting with others who were different from a different part of the state? She lives in Kaduna State, which is one among the 36 States in Nigeria, located in the North West geographical zone. It is the third most populous state in Nigeria as of 2006 with a landmass of 45,567 square

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kilometres. It has an estimated population of 6,066,562, of which 2,954,543 are women and 3,11,028 are men. In a state like Kaduna, often referred to as a mini-Nigeria, due to its cosmopolitan nature and positioning as a national political powerhouse, one would expect that the almost equal ratio of women to men would offer more opportunities for equitable distribution of resources and participation in decision making as well as leadership. This is not the case. In their everyday lives, women and girls in Kaduna state are constantly relegated to the background and in some cases have no confidence in their ability or agency which inevitably affects their ability to stand up and be part of the system that drives development and prosperity. They are also faced with many challenges that hinder their self-expression and agency. These challenges include low self-esteem, absence of (or limited) leadership skills, and lack of income-generating as well as livelihood skills. Existing barriers to girls and women education remain across the country. And both girls and women have continued to endure levels of sexual violence and assault, along with related HIV infections, involuntary pregnancies, and health complications as a result of abuse.

Women and girls in Kaduna also continue to be affected by wider conflict trends in the state, including activity by armed non-state actors and intercommunal violence between herders and farmer communities. While these two categories (crime and insecurity, and intercommunal violence) comprised less than 10% of all reported cases from the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) Observatory Platform sources from 2014-2016, Nigeria Watch reports these two categories were responsible for nearly 95% of reported lethal incidents involving women and girls (Visual One).

“The immediate impacts of inter-communal violence on women and children, including the spate in late 2016 of herdsmen-farmer attacks, can be devastating; but is often lost in the reporting either by not being reported at all or being consistently underreported.

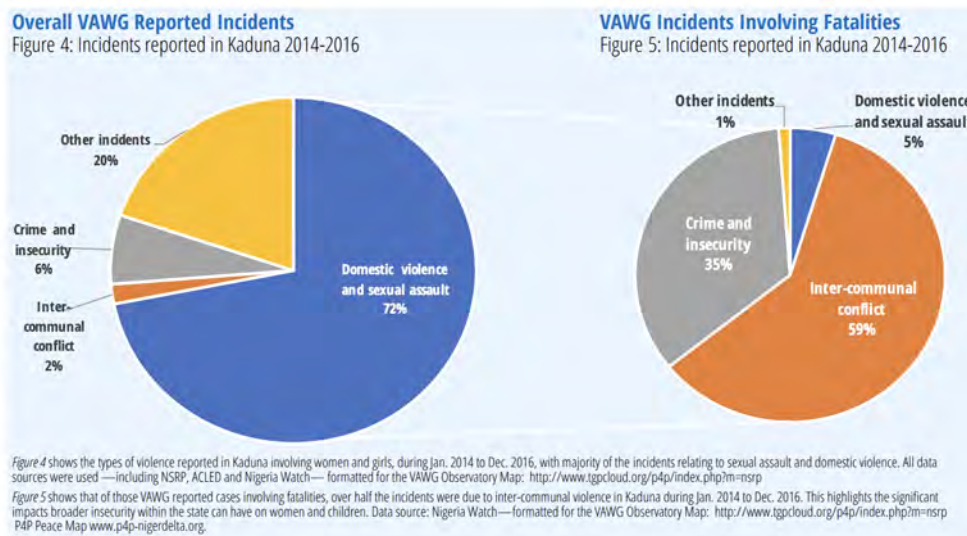
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One such incident occurred between 15 and 16 October 2016, in which an estimated 20 people were killed in Jema'a after herdsmen reportedly attacked a farming settlement called Godogodo, according to NSRP Observatory sources and the Vanguard newspaper.

While there are occasional reports that women and girls are raped or sexually assaulted in intercommunal attacks perpetrated by each side, the exact numbers are rarely given, or details provided which might allow for more follow-up or a better understanding of the actual impact that these attacks are having on women and girls in the short term.

In the longer term, however, the impacts of intercommunal violence can be easier to gauge. Insecurity can affect women and girls in many ways, including through displacement, loss of livelihood (their own or that of a male family member), or direct violence. Economic and social disenfranchisement experienced by women and girls affected by conflict can in turn increase their vulnerability to sexual and economic predation. In reports received by the Kaduna Observatory, the displacement of women and children following intercommunal clashes between herdsmen and farmers is more often cited, either at the time of the attack or in later reports. In later reports, frequently these issues are intertwined with wider societal issues around women and girls being evicted from lands by relatives after husbands or brothers are killed or have lost their farms in attacks. It can often be tricky to create a direct causal relationship between the intercommunal violence and the impacts on women and girls as research on this issue, in particular, has not been extensively published (Blyth, Murphy and Taft, 2017).”

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### Visual One: Types of Violence in Kaduna Involving Girls/Women 2014 – 2016; Fund for Peace 2017

“Of particular concern is the growing level of abductions and violence specifically targeted at girls and women. From the infamous 2014 Boko Haram kidnappings of more than 270 girls in Chibok, north-eastern Borno state, with some still in captivity and abductions still ongoing in Borno state, to the ever-increasing instances of armed banditry across north-west Nigeria, we have reached a critical stage where girls and women are in a constant state of fear and unease.

The effects of abductions on girls and women cannot be minimised. Additional problems of stigma, and economic difficulties which may have come about because of ransom money paid or general destabilisation of the family, ill health, and poor well-being of the family also as a result of the abduction are all factors that additionally play a significant role in the effect of abductions on abductees. Many communities tend to see survivors as outcasts and in some cases even as traitors (especially when linked to terrorism and such abductees come back with children or even a “repentant” husband). The weight of being an abductee is enormous and only with proper medical attention, connecting with loved ones, talking about or relating their experiences, and being in a safe and secure

environment can they even begin to experience some relief and potential healing from their ordeals (Ibn Garba, 2021)”.

As stated above, the wards and districts in Nigeria are headed by district heads with a local council of officials (chiefs) and advised by different interest groups within the community. As a result, in most communities in Kaduna State, women are not involved in decision making. Reasons for this, range from their economic status to the perceived level of skills for engagement and contribution to decision making; this has led to the exclusion of women in decision making in the community as well as the country at large.

Cumulatively, this exclusion from power has rippled into multiple areas of women and girls' lives. For example, this lack of leadership opportunities is compounded by a culture/system that does not fully educate women to their actual (limited) legal rights. Girls in the city have had limited access to secondary school education, with poverty and early marriages often forcing them to forgo their education. Unsafe abortions and limited access to family planning prevent safe sexual and reproductive health. A number of women are unaware of their inheritance rights and freedom to purchase land due to inconsistent religious interpretations concerning these rights. This has prevented them from benefitting from the ideals of gender equality and empowerment; as well as accessing leadership positions within the wider society. It is in this context that Aisha had to “unlearn” in order to learn how to protect her body, her future, and transform how she saw “others” – through the realization that in fact despite their differences, women in this context face some of the same challenges.

### **Barriers to Change**

It may come as a surprise to know that we are biologically wired to resist change and that fact explains our initial resistance to change. As Chris Pennington writes, “Part of the brain—the amygdala—interprets change as a threat and releases the hormones

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for fear, fight, or flight. Your body actually protects you from change (Pennington, 2018)”.

As such, a reaction of fear may make you freeze in the physical position or render you speechless. Fight makes you stand your ground and confront the change (or event) and flight, as the name implies, makes you run away as far as your legs can take you. And if you do not physically run, you are still not ready to engage on the issue and may choose to avoid the issue altogether. With this context in mind, it is no surprise that change is perceived as risky. We feel like we lose our identity, self-sufficiency and control. It has the potential to make us different people. A sense of control goes hand in hand with the familiar, and, as discussed earlier, the familiar comes from what we have been exposed to as acceptable and right over time, facilitating the formation of our worldviews and positions. From childhood, our worldviews are influenced by our environment, our socialization, our values, and our exposure to other cultures. If we are told something long enough and repeatedly, we believe it, consciously or subconsciously. It forms the very basis of sense and decision making, and therefore fuels the positions we take on different matters.

In Lederach’s Conflict Transformation Theory, these engrained ideas can manifest in all dimensions of conflict (personal, relational, structural and cultural) and interventions can address two dimensions at once. For the purposes of this essay, we will examine the structural and cultural dimensions of the identified conflict, gender discrimination in Kaduna. It is important to note that the process of individual change would start its manifestation within the personal dimension since it is possible to learn behaviors influenced by our own habits and how we feel about ourselves which consequently affects our interaction with others. We will focus, however, on the structural and cultural dimensions.

||| “The structural dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict, and stresses the ways in which social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. It is about the ways people build and

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organize social, economic, and institutional relationships to meet basic human needs and provide access to resources and decision-making. At the descriptive level transformation refers to the analysis of social conditions that give rise to conflict and the way that conflict affects social structural change in existing social, political and economic institutions.

At a prescriptive level, transformation represents efforts to provide insight into underlying causes and social conditions that create and foster violent expressions of conflict, and to promote nonviolent mechanisms that reduce adversarial interaction and minimize violence. Pursuit of this change fosters structures that meet basic human needs (substantive justice) and maximize people's participation in decisions that affect them (procedural justice).

The cultural dimension refers to the ways that conflict changes the patterns of group life as well as the ways that culture affects the development of processes to handle and respond to conflict. At a descriptive level, transformation seeks to understand how conflict affects and changes cultural patterns of a group, and how those accumulated and shared patterns affect the way people in a given context understand and respond to conflict. Prescriptively, transformation seeks to uncover the cultural patterns that contribute to violence in a given context, and to identify and build on existing cultural resources and mechanisms for handling conflict (John Paul Lederach, 2003)".

Basically, whether our ideas and views are formed by the formal and informal structures, whether formed by laws around us or burned into the very fabric of our identity, attitudes and behaviors are learned and imbibed; therefore, addressing such dimensions requires in some cases, extensive unlearning. In understanding the specific gender issues faced by women in Kaduna, it is important to recognize that the issue of violence equally affects their lives and whether this violence is explicit or latent. Violence can emerge in a number of structures and systems that affect the everyday lives of communities.

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In the cosmopolitan, diverse and political powerhouse of Kaduna State, violence has been an unfortunate feature historically traced to Local Government Areas (LGAs) outside the capital city but gradually spread to all 23 LGAs in the state. It is no surprise, as we noted earlier, that localization of policies and plans is not felt which leads to the situation of “things on paper” that never get implemented. As noted earlier, despite the national and international instruments, like the Nigerian National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 that amplify the importance of inclusion of women in the process of peace building, peace keeping, conflict resolution and conflict management, these policies remain largely on paper. They have not been implemented at the local government and community levels. This means that both the written and unwritten policies of the communities are not in tandem with the national policy on gender. The conflict “context” is significantly influenced by the structural dimension.

In the domain of Nigerian traditional leaders which are sometimes referred to as the fourth tier of Government due to their close proximity to (and influence among) the people, no significant representation of women exists. In fact, of the eight first class traditional rulers who are highly regard and who represent the broad spectrum of Nigeria, none are women. In a 2019 study on Female Genital Mutilation in Northeastern Nigeria, the author notes,

“Within this patriarchal society, cultural norms also relegate women to certain gender roles and do not recognise the value or potential capacity and agency of women to influence, lead communities and facilitate peace processes. Many cultural practices outrightly prohibit women from any kind of leadership or autonomy, with some practices being outrightly violent against girls and women. Examples of these include, “female genital mutilation (FGM), son/gender preference, breast Ironing, bride kidnapping, forced & early marriages, forced pregnancy, widowhood rites and female infanticide (Amodu et al., 2019)”.

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“Four social norms were identified as drivers of the harmful traditional practices FGM and early marriage:

- A respectable woman marries early
- A respectable woman is submissive to male authority
- A suitable woman is not promiscuous
- A woman is worth more as a wife than as a daughter (Saskia et al., 2018)”.

Sanusi stresses that “In Nigeria, the monarchy system is patriarchal in nature where only men can become kings and rulers of the society while the women are given supportive and less prominent positions. Though this is the case across all tribes in the country, there are a few exemptions to this rule. Most times, “female kings” are referred to as regents, but they act the same role as a male king would do. They attend the council of kings meeting at the local level, state level, and federal level. Despite being females, this set of monarchs are expected to dress as men and not women because the position they occupy is meant to be masculine. Females are preferred as regents because it is believed that they will want to be relieved of the position as soon as possible so they can settle and go ahead with their marital obligations. Regents cannot get pregnant while on the throne neither can they marry if unmarried before ascending the throne. But in the case of the male regent, it is believed that he might not want to vacate the throne when the time is up for him to do so (Sanusi, 2020)”. Overall, it is important to keep in mind that we speak of seven female traditional rulers out of 500 (1.4%) traditional rulers in the country as of the end of 2020.

Bloody clashes in the state had polarized the people along ethno-religious lines. The state capital Kaduna evolved over the years into physical divides with majority of Christians living in the southern part of the town, and Muslims in the northern part. This not only exacerbated the already existing ethno-religious-political conflict within the state but did more damage to the possibility of women mobilizing together across divides for better representation and influence over decision making, peace processes

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and conflict transformation. A notable example is the crisis of 2002 that still haunts the state and inter-communal relations. This is not to say that every other example prior or after this is minimal, on the contrary, every single outbreak of violent conflict in Kaduna built upon previous ones and continues to get more devastating.

In February and May 2000, in some of the most serious inter-communal violence that Nigeria has seen in recent years, at least 2,000 people, and possibly many more, were killed in fighting between Christians and Muslims in Kaduna. Some commentators have described the 2000 Kaduna riots as the single worst outbreak of violence in Nigeria since the 1967-70 civil war.

The 2000 violence in Kaduna took place in two main waves—sometimes referred to as “Sharia 1” and “Sharia 2” — a first wave from February 21 to 25, with further killings in March, followed by a second wave from May 22 to 23. In reaction to the prospect of the introduction of Sharia into Kaduna State, the Kaduna branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) organized a public protest on February 21.

Then the situation degenerated: Muslim youth clashed with the Christian protestors and fighting between Christians and Muslims spiraled out of control, with massive violence and destruction on both sides. An accurate, total death toll has never been ascertained, and as is typical in these situations, government and police officials were keen to play down the figures. A judicial commission of inquiry set up by the Kaduna state government reported that at least 1,295 people had been killed, while an unspecified additional number were buried unidentified, and others were declared missing. However, this number refers only to those killed in February and does not include the several hundred people reported killed in May.

All the people Human Rights Watch (HRW) interviewed in connection with the 2002 riots believed that the number of people killed in the 2000 riots far

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exceeded the figure of 2,000 and was likely to be closer to 5,000. A Nigerian journalist who covered the November 2002 Kaduna riots described them as ‘child’s play compared to what happened in 2000.’

The 2000 violence in Kaduna had repercussions elsewhere in the country, particularly in the southeast, as predominantly Christian ethnic groups, such as the Igbo, took revenge for the killings of Christians in Kaduna and turned against Muslim populations in their areas. The 2000 violence has left long-lasting scars on the people and the state of Kaduna; the memories were still fresh when violence struck again two years later, and many communities feel that their grievances have still not been addressed. In particular, many of those interviewed by HRW in December 2002 were still bitter about the fact that there had been no justice following the massive violence in 2000; they therefore expressed little hope that the organizers or perpetrators of the 2002 violence would be prosecuted.

None of the people interviewed by HRW were able to cite any cases of leading actors in the 2000 violence who had been brought to trial. It is widely believed that at that time, government authorities decided to avoid what they perceived as a risk of further escalating the violence by charging and trying the individuals responsible.

Many Muslims and Christians alike also attributed the lack of prosecutions for the 2000 violence to significant political pressure from leaders of both communities and feared that a similar absence of action would characterize the government’s response to the 2002 violence.

As described in this report, their predictions have turned out to be true. Apart from the trauma that individuals and families have suffered, and the ever-deepening divisions in the society, the physical effects of the violence of 2000 are still visible in the widespread destruction of houses and other buildings.

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When Human Rights Watch visited the state capital in December 2002, local residents pointed out destruction that had been caused in 2000, separately from the more recent destruction caused in 2002.

In some cases, the same neighborhoods or buildings had been hit twice, first in 2000, then again in 2002, and many had not been rebuilt or repaired since 2000. The 2000 violence also caused large-scale population displacement, leading to a sharp segregation of communities in some areas.

By 2002, residents were describing particular areas of Kaduna town as “100 percent Christian” or “100 percent Muslim.” This was largely as a result of the 2000 events, and to a lesser extent the clashes of previous years. Christians and Muslims increasingly moved to areas which were dominated by people of their own faith in the hope of finding safety there; many of them did not return to their original areas of residence.

Following the 2002 violence, this physical segregation of parts of the city appears to have increased — an indication of deepening polarization in what was once a genuinely mixed population. Many of the people interviewed by HRW in December 2002 explained that they had moved homes not because they did not want to live with members of other faiths, but that it was a “survival tactic”: they expected to be safer surrounded by their own community in the event of any future resurgence of violence (Human Rights Watch, 2003).”

It is noteworthy here that the diversity in Kaduna is not only faith related but ethnicity related with up to 63 ethnic groups across 23 LGAs. Furthermore,

“for nearly 40 years, Kaduna State has been embroiled in multiple ethno-religious crisis that has pitted the southern part of the state against the northern part. In those 40 years, it’s been from one attack to another with alarming

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casualties and destruction of properties worth millions of naira. The same scenario played out in 2018 where over 70 people were killed in the bloody ethno-religious clash, which started in Kasuwan Magani community, a few kilometers from Kaduna metropolis.

This was the second time the Kasuwan Magani community had suffered from bloodshed. In February 2018, Muslim and Christian youth in the area clashed over allegations that Muslim youth were having love affairs with Christian girls and converting them to Islam and marrying them. In the February incident, about 20 people were said to have been killed with hundreds of shops and houses burnt during the incident.

The Kaduna Peace Commission's Strategic Plan for 2018 – 2022 states that historically, several conflicts have been fueled by mobilizations of ethnic and religious groups. In fact, the state recorded at least 35 crises between 1980 and 2017 are reinforced by perceived economic disparities between communities.

These include concerns among groups over perceived inequitable access to social mobility and economic opportunities, as well as provision of social amenities and infrastructure, like schools, health centres, water and electricity supply, location of industries and scholarship awards. According to the commission, inequality is another major driver of conflict in Kaduna state which has a huge youth population with over 54 percent of its 6.1 million people aged between 15 - 64 years. The youth are central actors in conflict either as causes, victims or actual perpetrators of conflict (Shiklam, 2018)".

To put this into further perspective, much more than the official figure of 20,000 people have died in various incidents of violent conflict over the last three decades in Kaduna with every year numbers climbing due to the increase of violent extremism, extra-judicial killings, gender-based violence, banditry, abductions and increased crime rates.

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Living in such overwhelming conditions and dynamics presents very tangible and difficult circumstances for women of the different identity groups to unlearn what they have learned from history, lived experiences, and observation. From Lederach's conflict transformation lens once again, it is easy to see how much of a struggle women, like Aisha, would face in all dimensions of conflict; ranging from personal perceptions of herself, how she relates with others she sees as different, the structural and cultural factors that limit her belief in herself and any opportunities she may have benefitted from and also served her community. I believe we can relate with the difficulty she and many like her faced to step into a change process.

### **The Risk of Change**

One key factor I believe affects our willingness to unlearn and change is the theory of "loss aversion." In the field of behavioral decision-making, "loss aversion" is a behavioral phenomenon in which individuals show a higher sensitivity to potential losses than to gains (Klaus et al., 2020). When changing a position is perceived as a loss rather than a potential gain or an opportunity for transformation, such strong personal motivations are enough to limit the desire and possibility to try something differently. Since our worldviews are so central to our identities and the decisions we make, we truly may be under the assumption in certain areas that taking a different path is not worth as much as staying the same course, which in all honesty can be true sometimes.

Why is this the case? Essentially, because it takes less effort to change. It leaves us in our comfort zone to remain the same, to not try something new. Even if the state of remaining the same is tedious, we may feel compelled to do so because we are influenced by, or do not want to be seen as disloyal to, members of our identity group. This is despite the fact that remaining the same sometimes leaves us in a state of uncertainty, disorganization, vulnerability and even indecision sometimes. If I am affected by loss aversion or any other factor, how likely is it for me to change? Not very

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likely, unless I am part of something drastic or transformational. Only if I see or experience something different from the usual narrative in a safe and reflective space will I possibly be able to embrace change, but this always comes with tremendous effort, self-awareness and self-control and going through the change cycle.

This insight illustrates how change can be related to our attitudes (how we see ourselves or feel about something/someone) and behaviours (how we act and live out our attitudes including how we act towards others. Here it is useful to consider how Saul McCleod constructs attitudes and behaviors.

When we say that attitudes are evaluations, we mean that they involve a preference for or against the attitude object, as commonly expressed in term such as *prefer*, *like*, *dislike*, *hate*, and *love*. When we express our attitudes—for instance, when we say, “I like swimming,” “I hate snakes,” or “I love my parents” —we are expressing the relationship (either positive or negative) between the self and an attitude object. Statements such as these make it clear that attitudes are an important part of the self-concept (Stangor, Rajiv Jhangiani and Tarry, 2014).

“Behaviorism, also known as behavioral psychology, is a theory of learning which states all behaviors are learned through interaction with the environment through a process called conditioning. Thus, behavior is simply a response to environmental stimuli. Behaviorism is only concerned with observable stimulus-response behaviors, as they can be studied in a systematic and observable manner. (Mcleod, 2022)”.

Since, as earlier stated, we may be biologically programmed to resist change, getting to a certain position or worldview means we have been conditioned to believe that is the absolute truth and best way to view that matter. Learning through behaviourism concretizes our worldviews (right or wrong or subjective) since we have been made to accept (conditioned) a certain way as the right way to react.

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We are born into this world with a “clean slate” in terms our attitudes and behaviors, however the moment we “arrive” we are laid bare and open to the shaping of our very way of thinking in terms of attitudes and behaviors from things we are taught or experience. This is a good place to expand on the term social conditioning.

“Supposing parents have a very radical thought and are over opinionated regarding other religions, communities or castes, it is one dangerous form of social conditioning induced in children who, when grown up, may get very intolerant towards other communities and may get easily offensive on criticism about their religion and beliefs. They may just stop listening to what others are trying to convey. This is an extremist ideology which spreads in the mind like a cancer.

As children, we were influenced by two sets of people- family (parents) and teachers. Though we spent most of the time in school, we were more subjective to our parents. Do you remember the time when your parents taught you to behave while you are at a relative’s place? Or the time when you were reprimanded for cribbing in the shop for a toy? Though they look like regular etiquettes being preached to us, these are typical examples of social conditioning. This is to teach us to display an acceptable behaviour in front of others.

A second example of social conditioning in the society is ‘*gender-bias*’. Boys are the ones who develop prejudices against movement of women and their choices when they see how their sisters are treated at home. For children, whatever their parents do is right so, if they are restricting the girl child of the house, the son of the family will procedurally grow up to treat his daughter in the same way.

It is vitally important to note that social conditioning is also a deterrent to personality development. If somebody is an introvert or an extrovert, it is all the

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consequence of it. It is so undeniable to say that whatever we are today it is a collective outcome of how we were brought up and the circumstances of our childhood. (Kasireddi, 2013)”.

It is important to know both the benefits and consequences of social conditioning, as it is a way of transmitting either kind (positive or negative) of values and worldviews. How then do we deal with the very essence of how we structure our lives, belief systems and our identities being challenged? How can we break away from harmful learned behaviors which direct us towards violence in the presence of conflict?

In our case study, as with many examples of structural and cultural conflict, those who venture “out of the norm” are considered traitors or, at the very best, misguided by the “other” in this case religion and/or ethnicity as the dividing factor. In the midst of personal and collective loss and trauma which may be chosen (for younger ones) or experienced (for older ones who have been directly), it is completely understandable why the divides among women of different religious and ethnic identities are vast, distrust is prevalent, minimal communication exists and the desire to engage socially is almost non-existent. The combination of previously mentioned theories including social conditioning, the biological resistance to change, loss aversion and behaviourism further complicated by the dimensions of the conflict make it clear that attempting to change the attitudes and behaviours of these women is an extremely tall order. So, then what happens when change happens in such a complicated scenario?

### **Learning to Unlearn and the Change Cycle**

From 2013 to 2017, four cycles of Empowerment For Peace Programmes (EPPs) were implemented by Generations For Peace with 60 women aged 25 years and above, originating from eight ethnic groups and two major religions in 20 selected communities in the Northern and Southern parts of Kaduna state. The EPPs addressed the lack of women’s empowerment and inclusion in decision-making at the community level which had a direct effect on community level peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

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Programme activities included a series of increasing complex assessments, mapping and understanding of their communities and the identified conflict issue, as well as sessions to develop their income generation skills which would support greater economic empowerment and influence in their communities. Most importantly, the programme very importantly provided the opportunity for women to engage from the different sides of the violent conflict divides of religion and ethnicity, giving room for new narratives, experiences to be told and formed.

The EPPs recognized that change does not happen overnight and involves a process of well-designed and facilitated physical or abstract safe spaces and/or activities over a sustained period of time to kickstart and allow the change process to happen. Initially, it may (or will) seem impossible and, when the process starts, individuals may not even realize it is happening since it works on both a conscious and subconscious level, usually starting with the latter. During the process of designing and implementing conflict transformation programmes, the importance of personal motivations, willingness and participation cannot be overlooked. Getting to a place of unlearning takes time, effort and support. It is, however, extremely heartwarming to see the transformation happen and the fulfillment that comes from realizing that the efforts that have been made have borne fruit.

Yet, in my view one of the most difficult steps in change is once you realize change is needed, “How do I change? This is what I know, this is how I have lived, this is my comfort zone, where do I start?” A period of self-realization is the place to start and then other processes that enable you to “allow” yourself to unlearn must take place prior to the change itself. Aisha and other participants must have wrestled with this realization intensely. I would describe it as the proverbial fish out of water and now the fish trying to figure out how to survive, how to breathe, how to adjust, how to live now. As we learn new things and unlearn some of the old, it is necessary to be able to put them into practice or else we will forget and this is where we may face direct confrontation from members of our identity groups. I imagine that Aisha would be confronted by her community of “Why are you suddenly talking differently about these

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people?” I know I would ask her that if I noticed her way of speaking about and interacting with the “other” had changed.

As a consequence of the resistance and, in some cases, outright ostracism to the change in behaviour and attitude of women like Aisha, it is vital to have the opportunity to constantly reinforce the change and continue the engagement long enough for the change to “stick” and remain. Another metaphor I would use to describe it is “locking it in.” You cannot unlearn and leave the “space” empty – this might lead to a crisis of identity amongst other things, so it is important to acknowledge the process and affirm that the process is not easy. The action of unlearning is about change yes, yet it takes effort not only to unlearn but learn to unlearn. Aisha and the other women went through that cycle and, I daresay, they did so many times. Being exposed to those and things you had stereotypes and perceptions of and realizing that your views may have been wrong or at least not holistic, gave her the chance to stop, pause and say, well maybe there is a need to change how I see these people. In doing so, the desire to change and support change sprung up – knowing full well that this would not be easy. I imagine that doubts came up several times especially if incidents in her community or other communities seemed to solidify the previous viewpoints.

As an individual like any other person: Aisha or any of the women in the EPPs, I have had to learn to unlearn in some aspects of my life and I would list the below factors as necessary for this to happen:

- Self-awareness and the ability to reflect critically about oneself.
  - The willingness to believe that what you know is the absolute truth may not be the only truth.
  - The ability to open up one’s mind to new possibilities and narratives.
  - The ability to listen actively.
  - The willingness to allow yourself to be vulnerable.
  - The willingness to change.
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These I would say are some of the key building blocks to learning to unlearn. While there are many famous change cycle models, each one being valuable and providing a unique lens to the change process. One that I like to refer to regularly is the ADKAR Change Management Model. This model has five elements represented by the acronym ADKAR namely:

- Awareness (of the need to change)
- Desire (to participate in and support the change)
- Knowledge (on how to change)
- Ability (to implement required skills and behaviors)
- Reinforcement (to sustain the change) (Sharma, 2022).



**Visual Two: The ADKAR Change Management Cycle (Sharma, 2022)**

I see the stages above as natural derivatives following the process of being ready to unlearn. Once we become ready and aware we need to change, then we need to find the motivation to do so. This motivation could be intrinsic or extrinsic but driven by a strong desire to make the necessary change. How do I change? I need to know, I need to know the new facts, feel the new environment, listen to people, and open up my mind to new things. Then I have the knowledge to practice what I have learned, means to develop my skills and habitualize it otherwise known as the competency needed. For change to be sustainable, it has to be continually reinforced. That could range from

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continually developing new knowledge and putting it into practice to repeating or experiencing some of the same conditions that made the change possible in the first place. This is why long-term intervention is needed for social change. One off activities and sessions do not bring about significant change. This is especially the case if activities are not repeated within safe spaces where we can reinforce and sustain the change.

Sometimes change requires that we drop certain elements of our identity and there is always the risk of peer pressure or loss aversion to return to the former way of thinking, that is why interventions must be thorough enough for us to be strong enough not only to change ourselves but even those around us. If I am to introduce a new way of thinking, I do not only need to convince myself, but if I still live and relate within the identity group that largely holds the former worldview, I should be able to affect them positively as well. The changes and unlearning I have accomplished should even speak for itself and provide new opportunities for members of my identity group and environment to see and experience new ways of thinking. Whether we speak of conflict transformation, organizational or personal change, learning to unlearn means we are in a continuous process of change that can benefit not only us but those around us. It can contribute to new structural and cultural views and practices and ensure that the balance brought about through diversity and participation makes everyone feel included and valued.

The monitoring and evaluation data of the EPPs showed a significant improvement of 30% in terms of the number of women who say they felt more equipped for decision making as well as a 33% improvement in number of women who felt more confident to participate in decision making. In addition, there was also a 40% improvement in terms of the number of women who felt that community heads allow women to take part in decision-making. Data also showed a 60% improvement in the number of women outside the programme who said women are now included in decision making in the community. The participating women delightfully found common concerns and interests, and even went ahead to create initiatives on the local level like peace

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initiatives, financial co-operatives and were recognized and engaged in decision making by community leaders - gaining seats at the decision-making tables where they should have been all along. I continue to hear stories of how these women from the EPPs have formed lasting friendships that further reinforces the change and makes it sustainable. What an honour to be able to be a part of such life-changing processes and adding a little drop into the mighty ocean of an envisioned peaceful society.

Impressive results, yet a lot to done still in other communities.

### **When Change Happens**

No better illustration of change can be found than from the narrative of someone who has experienced the process. Aisha was a participant in Generations For Peace Empowerment For Peace Programme in Kaduna, Nigeria. Aisha did not necessarily go through the ADKAR steps in the order they are mentioned, in fact she needed an extrinsic motivation (in her case her husband) to sign her up. She did not know what she was going to go through. As she engaged and opened up more, she did realize there was a need to change because what she was experiencing was not consistent with what she had been conditioned to believe and the rest followed. Aisha's testimonial illustrates the transformation that is possible even in the most challenging of circumstances.

“I am Aisha a Hausa Muslim and as an average Hausa lady, I got married at a young age, need I mention, I was born and brought up in Tudun-Wada community and got married in the same community. It's almost like I have been living in a different world entirely, it's like I have been blindfolded and everything I know about people from other ethnic groups is what I was told while growing up or what is shown in the media, for example whenever there is an outbreak of crisis (like the Zangon-Kataf crisis of 1992 and Miss-World crisis of 2000) we are meant to believe that the Christians are hostile and they hate our religion

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and we Muslims and will do anything to hurt us, and so I grew up to know that where there are Christians, I should keep my distance.

The mere mention of communities like Narayi, Sabo and the likes gives me a shiver as these are Christian dominated areas in the southern part of Kaduna and for people like me; a Hausa Muslim who have never been outside my community, it means a death zone. I have never attended any activity or participated in any event from any non-governmental organization (NGO) before, but my husband, nominated me to participate in the EPP and I can say that, that was when I was born, that was when my life started and that is where my story began.

Initially, during sessions, I never made any comments or contributions and whenever the sessions physically rotated to communities in the South, I would go with so much doubt and fear of a violent attack or such. But this changed gradually, I saw another side of people from the other religion and other ethnic groups in ways I never knew before, I now know they are good and kind people among them too. I could also confidently contribute meaningfully during sessions, in fact some contributions I made, I would never have thought I could make such contributions before!

I never knew the office of the District Head or Village Head of my community, how much more visiting the office, or even contributing in any form of decision in the community, but as a result of my participation in the EPP, I was selected as one of the participants in a dialogue event by Pastors and Imams in my community. What earned me this position is my participation in the EPP and I am motivated to do more through the Community Initiative we are planning in order to bring other women like me out of their shells.”

Aisha learned to unlearn within a safe space that allowed for reflection and exchange across differences. She and her fellow participants traveled through the process and

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loops of the change cycle, experienced and were influenced by the theories we have discussed earlier. From being personally, relationally, structurally and culturally affected by the conflict, having to weigh the potential that change could bring despite the conditioning she had been exposed which she clearly shares in her own words, to gaining and acting on unlearning to learn new things, I can only salute Aisha and all the other women in the EPPs for their indomitable courage.

### **Conclusion**

Why would one even attempt a programme like the Empowerment For Peace Programme in a context of such engrained beliefs and practices as detailed in Kaduna, Nigeria? Because it is important to try and improve the status of women. Going in with expectations in such a situation can be risky business. But then again... change is risky. Being able to approach challenging circumstances knowing full well what the landscape looks like is the kind of courage needed for change, to learn and to unlearn. With women in the communities that were engaged in the EPPs becoming more recognised, more influential, feeling more confident and able to contribute their part to the development and culture of peace in their communities, the potential to learn new things on an individual and collective level and unlearn that such things are impossible is enormous and provides a unique opportunity to replicate context specific and responsive interventions for lasting change.

It is often joked about that the Nigerian conversation can never end, because it is so complicated and intersects across so many factors that it would take a miracle for lasting change to occur. Perhaps so, but with sensitivity, respect for local knowledge and expertise, patience, time, surrendering to process, not being afraid to fail, and most importantly, supporting individuals like Aisha to come to their own place of self-realisation, we can see change. In order to learn anew, we must be open to unlearn the comfortable and familiar. Aisha and all her fellow participants are examples for us all to learn from, for communities to honestly look inwards and take the leap of faith to

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start to unlearn and think differently, and for us as nation to start from somewhere in bringing about a more peaceful society.

In concluding this article, I would like to highlight tips to remember as we go through the personal or otherwise dimensions of unlearning, re-learning and change.

1. It is natural to follow learned behaviors and the conditioning we have been exposed to in our environment, regardless of whether these are considered positive or negative.
  2. The things we learn are meant to benefit us and give us the skills needed to meet life's requirements and challenges. This is not always the case especially when we develop stereotypes based on our or others experience, or we opt for the path of chosen trauma.
  3. I need to be self-aware to lead me in the direction of the change as well as teachable to learn.
  4. The more we learn, the more influenced we are by what we learn, they form the basis for our worldviews, attitudes and behaviors.
  5. It is possible to unlearn what we have learned, but it is very important to acknowledge that it is a process that takes time and is not an easy one.
  6. Learning to unlearn precedes change and can also be seen as an additional element of the change management cycle.
  7. Learning to unlearn can have numerous benefits, once we get to the point where we are ready to let go and let in new things, processes, experiences and narratives.
  8. Conflict transformation provides us with the possibility of unlearning in safe spaces and for that unlearning to lead to concrete change.
  9. Conflict transformation contributes to community wide and larger change that is of benefit to us and our societies.
  10. Unlearning and change is and should be a continuous process to encourage sustainability. It takes much more than one event to unlearn and change, so
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interventions must be long term, participatory and conditions to reinforce that change provided.

It has been a fulfilling journey working and reflecting on this piece and now, I invite you the reader and I the writer, to garner the courage, take the step and learn to unlearn continuously.



**Photo One: An Empowerment For Peace Programme Participant**  
©Generations For Peace 2013

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**Photo Two: Muslim and Christian Participants at an Empowerment For Peace Programme Session. ©Generations For Peace 2016**



**Photo Three: Empowerment For Peace Programme Participants with Community Heads. ©Generations For Peace 2017**

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**Photo Four: Empowerment For Peace Programme Participants Taking a Stretch during a Session. ©Generations For Peace 2017**



**Photo Five: Empowerment For Peace Programme Participants with Community Heads. ©Generations For Peace 2017**

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**Photo Six: Empowerment For Peace Programme Participants Sharing a Laugh during a Session. ©Generations For Peace 2017**



**Photo Seven: Empowerment For Peace Programme Participants Group Photo. ©Generations For Peace 2017**

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