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## Women Empowerment and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Women for Women NGO in Rwanda

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### Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact of women's empowerment programs on post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda, with a specific focus on the initiatives undertaken by the Women for Women NGO. Leveraging a multiple linear regression model, the research, which engaged 398 participants, offers valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between women's empowerment and the post-conflict rebuilding process. One of the central findings of this study is the significant positive impact of women's educational attainment, which was observed to influence the reconstruction process impressively, with over 295.5% of participants displaying a beneficial effect. On the other hand, it underscores the detrimental influence of prolonged conflict durations, emphasizing the urgency of swift reconstruction efforts in conflict-affected regions. Moreover, the research reveals that income-generating activities for women play a pivotal role, contributing a substantial 56.9% of the overall reconstruction endeavors. These activities not only enhance the economic well-being of women but also drive progress within societies emerging from conflict, thereby underlining their transformative potential. Access to healthcare services is identified as a crucial factor, contributing to 52.7% of the overall societal rebuilding process. This emphasizes the imperative of investing in healthcare infrastructure and accessibility in conflict-affected regions, not only for the improved well-being of the population but also for driving substantial advancements in post-conflict societies. The study also underscores the immense significance of gender-based violence interventions integrated into women's empowerment programs. These interventions make a substantial positive contribution of 38.6% to the overall efforts in post-conflict reconstruction. By reducing violence and creating a safer environment, they empower women and contribute significantly to the broader process of societal rebuilding. The significance of this study lies in providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted aspects of women's empowerment programs in post-conflict reconstruction, thus offering valuable guidance for policymakers and NGOs. It is intended to facilitate the promotion of sustainable peace and development in post-conflict regions, ensuring that the transformation experienced by beneficiaries of these programs becomes a beacon of hope for others in similar circumstances. In light of the research findings, this study strongly recommends prioritizing investments in women's

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education, enhancing income-generating activities, improving healthcare services, and integrating gender-based violence interventions into women's empowerment initiatives as crucial steps in promoting robust and stable post-conflict societies.

**Keywords:** *Women's Empowerment Programs, Post-Conflict Reconstruction, Women for Women, Rwanda*

## 1. Introduction

In the aftermath of conflict, achieving sustainable peace involves not only rebuilding physical infrastructure but also addressing the intricate social fabric that has been disrupted. This research seeks to address the complex interplay between women's empowerment and post-conflict reconstruction, with a specific focus on the activities of the Women for Women NGO (WfW) in Rwanda. The problem at hand centers on the need for a more contextualized analysis of the strategies employed by NGOs like WfW to empower women within the unique Rwandan context, which remains an understudied area.

While the existing literature offers valuable insights of women's roles in post-conflict societies, there is a gap in understanding how localized efforts, like those of WfW, align with and respond to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Rwandan women during reconstruction. This research aims to bridge this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of WfW's interventions, drawing from authoritative sources (Bakken and Buhaug, 2021; Reyes and Fattori, 2019; Scanlon, 2019; Christien et al., 2020; Percival et al. 2014). It seeks to provide insights into how localized efforts can contribute to women's empowerment and enhance post-conflict reconstruction, ultimately fostering sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions, thus addressing the research gap and contributing to the broader discourse on this vital issue.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

### 1.2.1 General Objectives

This research aims to assess the impact of Women's empowerment programs on in post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda.

### 1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- (i) Assess the influence of women's educational attainment, within empowerment programs, on post-conflict societies' reconstruction.
- (ii) Examine the contribution of income-generating activities for women, as part of empowerment programs, to post-conflict reconstruction, emphasizing economic empowerment.
- (iii) Investigate how improved access to healthcare services through women's empowerment programs impacts post-conflict societies' reconstruction.
- (iv) Evaluate the role of gender-based violence interventions within women's empowerment programs in contributing to post-conflict reconstruction.

## 1.3 Research Questions

- (i) What is the influence of women's educational attainment, as a component of empowerment programs, on post-conflict societies' reconstruction?
- (ii) To what extent do income-generating activities for women, as part of empowerment programs, contribute to post-conflict reconstruction efforts?
- (iii) How does improved access to healthcare services through women's empowerment programs impact the post-conflict reconstruction of societies?

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- (iv) To what extent do gender-based violence interventions within women's empowerment programs contribute to the post-conflict reconstruction of societies?

## **2.1 Empirical Review**

### **2.1.1 The influence of women's educational attainment and post-conflict societies' reconstruction**

Pospieszna (2015) suggests a mechanism of women's political empowerment that comprises legal, mental, and material empowerment, with material empowerment, in the form of democracy assistance, positively affecting women's political empowerment through mental and legal empowerments. The case study and interviews conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina support this model, showing how international donors provide funds to domestic organizations to empower women politically by educating them about their rights and facilitating networking. The quantitative analysis, while not showing a direct impact of aid on political empowerment, highlights the significant role of legal empowerment in enabling women's political empowerment. The study also identifies limitations in impact evaluation methods employed in democracy assistance and suggests the need for specific project analysis to better understand the effectiveness of aid in empowering women in post-conflict countries (Pospieszna, 2015).

Partnership Paradox: The Post-Conflict Reconstruction of Liberia's Education System" offers a profound examination of Liberia's educational recovery following two decades of civil strife and devastation. Talbot and Taylor (2015) depict the grim conditions in Liberia, marked by infrastructure destruction, high illiteracy rates, and unemployment. The book underscores the challenges faced by the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in meeting stringent global aid requirements. To address this, the Open Society Foundations and UNICEF, in collaboration with the Government of the Netherlands, pledged up to \$20 million to the Liberian Ministry of Education for the sector's revitalization. The work delves into the paradoxical nature of the partnerships essential for supporting post-conflict educational recovery, providing firsthand accounts and insights that are invaluable for the education and international development community (Talbot & Taylor, 2015).

### **2.1.2 Income-generating activities for women and post-conflict reconstruction**

Christakis (2013) conducted a study to investigate the roles and impacts of women in post-conflict Liberia and post-disaster Haiti in the contexts of development and post-conflict reconstruction. The research revealed that the nature of crises, whether protracted conflict or sudden disaster, significantly influenced the opportunities available to women and their subsequent agency. However, this study primarily highlighted the variations in women's roles based on the temporal aspect of crises without delving into the specific mechanisms at play. The identified research gap here is the need for a more comprehensive and comparative analysis of the drivers and barriers that shape women's agency in post-crisis scenarios. This research aims to address this gap by providing a more detailed exploration of the factors impacting women's contributions to civil society rebuilding in diverse post-crisis settings, thus offering valuable insights for more effective gender-inclusive policies and interventions.

Gender financial inclusion initiatives, often centered on microfinance, are increasingly seen as drivers of post-conflict women's empowerment. However, Duarte Reyes et al. (2019) exposed a critical research gap, highlighting that these initiatives, though equipping women with economic management tools, frequently overlook the deeper structural factors perpetuating poverty and discrimination against women during the transition from conflict to peace. To authentically empower women in post-conflict phases, a holistic approach is

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needed, engaging not only women but all household and community members, including men and children. This inclusive approach should recognize the socio-cultural intricacies shaping women's lives and acknowledge their agency within this context (Duarte Reyes et al., 2019).

### **2.1.3 Improved access to healthcare services impacts in post-conflict societies' reconstruction**

Percival et al. (2014) conducted a study aimed at exploring the integration of gender equity into health system reform in post-conflict countries. They used the World Health Organization's framework to assess the extent to which gender considerations are accounted for in health system reconstruction. The study found a significant gap in the literature on gender equity in post-conflict settings, despite international efforts and recognition of its importance. The researchers adopted an iterative approach, reviewing health system reforms in low and middle-income settings to identify key components for building gender-equitable health systems. The study underscores the need for donors and policymakers to prioritize gender equity in health system reform efforts for broader societal and economic well-being, this parallels the potential gap in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts led by organizations like Women for Women in Rwanda, where empowerment programs for women play a central role.

Rutherford and Saleh's (2019) examined the intricate challenges of post-conflict health system development. The authors emphasize the pervasive negative impact of war and conflict on health systems, including the disruption of services, resource depletion, and governance breakdown. In response to the existing literature's limited focus on specific facets of health systems at isolated time points, the article conducts a comprehensive 12-year evaluation of health system development in post-conflict environments, drawing on case studies from Afghanistan, Cambodia, and Mozambique. By applying a revised framework, the authors assess health policies, inputs, and their outcomes. This holistic approach contributes to a more nuanced understanding of post-conflict health system evolution, offering insights valuable for healthcare management, policymaking, and the healthcare professionals engaged in the complex process of post-conflict health system reconstruction.

### **2.1.4 gender-based violence interventions post-conflict reconstruction**

True's (2013) policy brief emphasizes the critical potential of post-conflict peacebuilding for advancing women's rights and gender equality. However, it underscores the pressing need for a more effective implementation of the gender perspective within these processes. A major challenge lies in harmonizing the intertwined political and economic security aspects of peacebuilding, where gender-mainstreaming efforts often fall short due to the enduring structural gender inequalities perpetuated by the post-conflict political economy. These inequalities hinder long-term recovery and peace.

Isaac Kfir's paper "Security, Gender and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: The Need for a 'Woman Question' When Engaging in Reconstruction" underscores a crucial paradigm shift required in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Kfir contends that gender-related issues, often addressed from legal or development perspectives, demand a reevaluation. He argues for the significance of viewing gender not solely as a development or legal concern but as an existential factor affecting the security of states transitioning out of conflict. This perspective highlights the imperative of addressing deeply rooted gender bias and inequalities that persist within post-conflict societies (Kfir 2012).

Justino et al. (2012) underscores the lack of empirical evidence concerning the impact of violent conflict on women's roles and activities during such periods. This knowledge gap

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extends to understanding the consequences of women's involvement in post-conflict economic recovery and peace. Existing academic literature and policies often lack comprehensive insights, and the absence of evaluation procedures limits their impact assessment in terms of gender roles and equality. Consequently, there's an undue focus on male-centric interventions, such as reintegrating male combatants. This report calls for systematic, rigorous empirical studies to guide gender-responsive policies addressing evolving women's roles during conflict and their contributions to post-conflict recovery and peace-building.

## **2.2 Research Gap**

The empirical review provides valuable insights into the critical role of organizations like the Women for Women NGO in post-conflict reconstruction, highlighting their substantial impact on women's empowerment in these contexts and underscoring the pressing need for gender-sensitive interventions (Women's Economic Empowerment Would Yield Huge Dividends for Peacebuilding Efforts, Speakers Tell Security Council, Urging Greater Action to End Gender Barriers, UN Press, 2022). However, there are significant research gaps identified across several dimensions. Firstly, there is a need for comprehensive research that evaluates the effectiveness of aid in empowering women in post-conflict settings, considering the intricate interplay between legal, mental, and material empowerment and the limitations in assessing direct impacts of aid (Pospieszna, 2015).

Secondly, further research should explore the drivers and barriers shaping women's agency in post-crisis scenarios, beyond highlighting temporal variations in their roles, thereby providing a more detailed and comparative analysis (Christakis, 2013). Additionally, the practical implications and effectiveness of gender-based violence interventions in post-conflict reconstruction require in-depth investigation, particularly in light of the enduring structural gender inequalities perpetuated by the post-conflict political economy (True, 2013; Kfir, 2012).

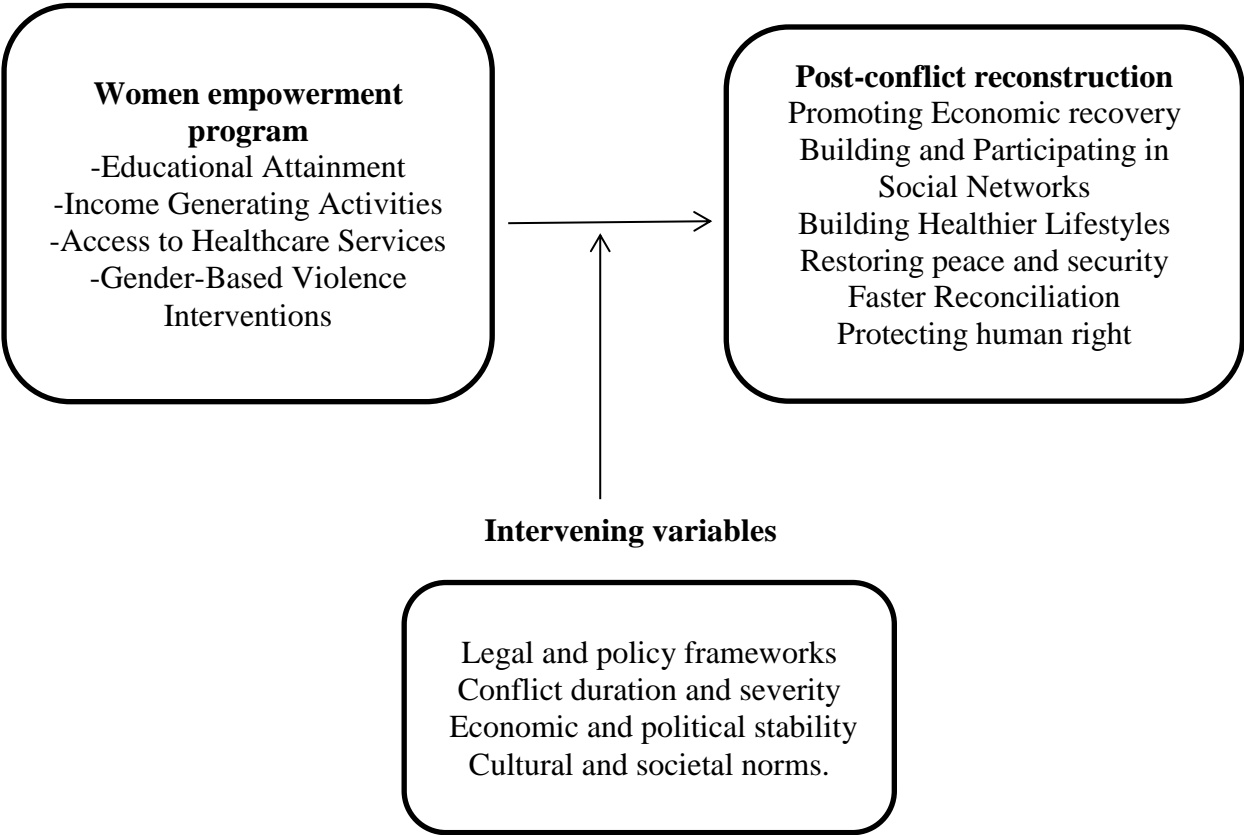
Lastly, the absence of empirical evidence regarding the impact of violent conflict on women's roles and their contributions to post-conflict recovery and peace necessitates systematic, rigorous studies to guide gender-responsive policies (Justino et al., 2012). These research gaps underscore the need for more comprehensive, context-specific, and impactful studies to advance the understanding and effectiveness of women's empowerment in post-conflict scenarios.

## **2.3 Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework serve as the foundation for our data collection and analysis, allowing us to assess the extent to which Women for Women NGO contributes to women's empowerment and post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda.

**Independent variables**

**Dependent variables**



**Figure 2. 1: Conceptual framework**

The conceptual framework illustrates a set of interrelated factors that shape the dynamics of post-conflict reconstruction, particularly in the context of women's empowerment programs. Women's educational attainment, income-generating activities, access to healthcare services, social support networks, and gender-based violence interventions collectively influence various dimensions of the reconstruction process. This comprehensive approach recognizes the pivotal role of women in rebuilding communities after conflict. As women gain economic independence, improved access to healthcare, and social support, they become more active participants in rebuilding healthier and secure post-conflict environments. By considering these dependent and independent variables, we can conduct a comprehensive analysis to measure the impact of the Women for Women NGO's empowerment programs on women's socio-economic well-being and participation in post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda, addressing the specific research objectives outlined in the study.

**3. Materials and Methods**

The research design is a comprehensive and systematic framework focusing on women's empowerment and post-conflict reconstruction, centered around the Women for Women NGO in Rwanda. It employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses for a thorough exploration of key variables impacting women's empowerment. The target population encompasses approximately 78,000 women who directly benefited from the NGO's post-conflict initiatives, with a sample size of 398 beneficiaries selected through purposeful and random sampling techniques. The data collection instruments consist of a well-structured questionnaire and consent form,

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emphasizing the use of Likert scales for data collection. Ethical considerations were meticulously observed, including obtaining ethical approval, ensuring informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, minimizing risks, and securely storing data.

The study conducted descriptive, correlation, and multiple linear regression analyses using SPSS version 23. Descriptive analysis involved summarizing demographic characteristics and key variables, while correlation analysis assessed relationships between empowerment indicators, socio-economic factors, and participation in post-conflict activities. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to identify significant predictors of women's empowerment outcomes, evaluating the impact of the Women for Women NGO's programs. Findings were presented through tables, charts, and narratives, aligning with research objectives to showcase the NGO's influence on women's socio-economic well-being in post-conflict Rwanda.

Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, risk minimization, and secure data storage. By upholding these principles, the research aimed to protect the welfare and rights of the participants while maintaining the highest standards of ethical conduct in data collection, analysis, and reporting. The rigorous methodology and ethical practices guarantee the credibility and reliability of the research outcomes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of women's empowerment and post-conflict reconstruction in Rwanda, particularly within the Women for Women NGO's initiatives.

#### 4.1 Presentation of findings

This section of a research is where researchers communicate and explain the results of their data analysis, providing a clear and organized account of the study's conclusions, insights, and implications based on the collected data and analysis.

##### 4.1.1 The influence of women's educational attainment on post-conflict societies' reconstruction

**Table 1** women's educational attainment and post-conflict societies' reconstruction

Model		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	0.477	0.036		13.089	0.000
	Women education attainment	2.959	0.278	4.387	10.653	0.000
	Legal polic framework	0.479	0.058	0.641	8.244	0.000
	Conflict duration	-3.003	0.369	-4.549	-8.134	0.000
	Cultural societal political	0.289	0.054	0.538	5.370	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: post_conflict_reconstruction						

**a. Dependent Variable: post\_conflict\_reconstruction**

Source: author's computation, 2023

Table 1 of the presented regression analysis with "post\_conflict\_reconstruction" as the dependent variable, several independent variables were examined. The unstandardized coefficients (B) represent the estimated relationships between each independent variable and the outcome. Notably, "women\_education\_attainment" exhibits a positive unstandardized coefficient (B = 2.959) and a corresponding positive standardized coefficient (Beta = 4.387), indicating that as women's education attainment increases, post-conflict reconstruction also increases significantly (Sig. = 0.000).

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Conversely, "conflict\_duration" shows a negative unstandardized coefficient ( $B = -3.003$ ) and a negative standardized coefficient ( $Beta = -4.549$ ), suggesting that longer conflict duration is associated with lower levels of post-conflict reconstruction, and this relationship is statistically significant ( $Sig. = 0.000$ ). Additionally, "legal\_policy\_framework" and "cultural\_societal\_political" also have positive unstandardized coefficients ( $B = 0.479$  and  $0.289$ , respectively), with corresponding positive standardized coefficients and high significance values, indicating their positive impact on post-conflict reconstruction. Overall, these results highlight the significance and direction of these independent variables in influencing post-conflict reconstruction, providing valuable insights for policy and decision-making in post-conflict settings.

#### 4.1.2 The contribution of income-generating activities for women in post-conflict reconstruction

**Table 2: Income-generating activities for women and post-conflict reconstruction**

Model		Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	0.052	0.056		0.921	0.357
	income_generating_activities	0.569	0.044	0.533	13.054	0.000
	legal_policy_framework	-0.154	0.040	-0.206	-3.880	0.000
	conflict_duration	0.923	0.052	1.398	17.585	0.000
	cultural_societal_political	-0.419	0.026	-0.781	-15.921	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: post conflict reconstruction						

Source: author's computation, 2023

Table 2 shows regression analysis with "post\_conflict\_reconstruction" as the dependent variable, several key insights emerge from the coefficients of the independent variables. The constant, representing the model intercept, is 0.052, and its relationship with the dependent variable is not statistically significant ( $Sig. = 0.357$ ). "income\_generating\_activities" exhibits a positive unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.569$ ) and a positive standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 0.533$ ), signifying that an increase in income-generating activities significantly contributes to higher levels of post-conflict reconstruction ( $Sig. = 0.000$ ).

Conversely, "legal\_policy\_framework" has a negative unstandardized coefficient ( $B = -0.154$ ) and a corresponding negative standardized coefficient ( $Beta = -0.206$ ), suggesting that a stronger legal policy framework is associated with lower levels of post-conflict reconstruction ( $Sig. = 0.000$ ). "conflict\_duration" displays a positive unstandardized coefficient ( $B = 0.923$ ) and a positive standardized coefficient ( $Beta = 1.398$ ), indicating that longer conflict duration is significantly linked to higher levels of post-conflict reconstruction ( $Sig. = 0.000$ ). Finally, "cultural\_societal\_political" has a negative unstandardized coefficient ( $B = -0.419$ ) and a negative standardized coefficient ( $Beta = -0.781$ ), indicating that stronger cultural, societal, and political factors are associated with lower levels of post-conflict reconstruction ( $Sig. = 0.000$ ). These findings collectively underscore the importance and direction of these independent variables in influencing post-conflict reconstruction, providing valuable insights for policy and decision-making in post-conflict contexts.

#### 4.1.3. Access to Healthcare Services through Impacts Post-Conflict Societies' Reconstruction

**Table 3: Access to Healthcare Services Impacts Post-Conflict Societies' Reconstruction**

Model	Coefficients			t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.457	0.028		16.546	0.000
Access to health services	0.527	0.027	0.907	19.603	0.000
Legal policy framework	1.431	0.079	1.915	18.226	0.000
Conflict duration	-1.884	0.148	-2.854	-12.716	0.000
Cultural societal political	0.658	0.049	1.227	13.457	0.000

##### a. Dependent Variable: post conflict reconstruction

Source: author's computation, 2023

Table 3 of the regression analysis shows that the constant term is 0.457, representing the expected value of the dependent variable when all independent variables are zero. Notably, "access\_to\_health\_services" has a positive coefficient of 0.527, signifying that a one-unit increase in this variable is associated with a 0.527 increase in "post\_conflict\_reconstruction," and this relationship is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, "legal\_policy\_framework" has a positive coefficient of 1.431, indicating that a one-unit increase in this variable leads to a 1.431 increase in "post\_conflict\_reconstruction," and this relationship is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). Conversely, "conflict\_duration" has a negative coefficient of -1.884, demonstrating that a one-unit increase in conflict duration results in a -1.884 decrease in "post\_conflict\_reconstruction," and this relationship is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that longer conflicts are associated with lower post-conflict reconstruction. Additionally, "cultural\_societal\_political" has a positive coefficient of 0.658, indicating that a one-unit increase in this variable is linked to a 0.658 increase in "post\_conflict\_reconstruction," and this relationship is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). These coefficients and their associated statistics provide insights into how changes in these independent variables affect post-conflict reconstruction.

#### 4.1.4. Contribution of Gender-based violence interventions to post-conflict reconstruction

**Table 4: Gender-based violence interventions and post-conflict reconstruction**

Model	Coefficients			t	Sig.
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.509	0.026		19.397	0.000
Gender based violence interventions	0.386	0.019	0.636	20.189	0.000
Legal policy framework	0.857	0.052	1.147	16.549	0.000
Conflict duration	-0.798	0.094	-1.209	-8.466	0.000
Cultural societal political	0.279	0.031	0.519	8.956	0.000

##### a. Dependent Variable: post\_conflict\_reconstruction

Table 4 represent regression analysis coefficient with "post\_conflict\_reconstruction" as the dependent variable, the coefficients and associated statistics reveal the relationships between this dependent variable and several independent variables. The constant term is 0.509, representing the expected value of post-conflict reconstruction when all independent variables are zero. Notably, "gender\_based\_violence\_interventions" has a positive coefficient of 0.386, indicating that an increase in such interventions is associated with higher post-conflict reconstruction, a relationship that is highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

"Legal\_policy\_framework" also has a positive coefficient of 0.857, indicating a positive impact on post-conflict reconstruction, and this relationship is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, "conflict\_duration" has a negative coefficient of -0.798, implying that longer conflict durations are associated with lower post-conflict reconstruction, and this relationship is statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). "Cultural\_societal\_political" has a positive coefficient of 0.279, suggesting that an increase in this variable is associated with higher post-conflict reconstruction, also highly statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ).

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study has successfully answered the research questions and met the specific research objectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of women's empowerment in post-conflict reconstruction. We found that women's educational attainment, a key component of empowerment programs, has a positive influence on post-conflict societies' reconstruction. Income-generating activities for women significantly contribute to economic empowerment and post-conflict reconstruction.

Improved access to healthcare services through women's empowerment programs has a positive impact on overall societal well-being during reconstruction. Gender-based violence interventions within women's empowerment programs are essential in creating a safer and more equitable environment. We've also highlighted the need for careful design when implementing legal policy frameworks, considering their potential impact on reconstruction efforts.

Furthermore, the study underscores the detrimental effects of longer conflict durations on post-conflict reconstruction, emphasizing the urgency of conflict resolution and prevention. In conclusion, our research offers comprehensive insights and addresses the research questions, successfully meeting the research objectives and advancing knowledge in the field of post-conflict reconstruction and women's empowerment.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, we recommend policymakers prioritize investments in women's education as a key strategy for post-conflict reconstruction. Education programs should be designed to empower women and align with broader reconstruction goals. Simultaneously, supporting income-generating activities through training and financial incentives can stimulate economic growth and entrepreneurship. Improved access to healthcare services, gender-based violence interventions, and thoughtful legal policy frameworks are also crucial. Prioritizing conflict resolution and prevention is essential to minimize conflict duration and enhance post-conflict reconstruction outcomes.

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