

## The place of gender in peacebuilding: An analysis of Women role in post-peace processes

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**Abstract:** *This paper analyses the role of women in post-peace process. It is based on examination of secondary documents and reports to make clear the kinds of theoretical perspectives that frame the work on violence against women and their exclusion in the post-peace participation. It reviewed the ways in which UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which focuses on women as victims of sexual violence, continue to reinforce exclusion of women in peacebuilding processes from the local to international levels. The paper held that focusing on women as victims of violence and inferior, limits chances for sustainable peace and development in any society. Such an approach fails to address the ways in which institutional and structural challenges that curtails women substantive participation can be overcome to allow their full engagement in post-peace participation hence failure to realize peaceful society and hence, development. This paper thus recommends for full inclusion and integration of women before and after peace processes to ensure that their nurturing skills and knowledge are critically utilized to allow for sustainable peace which is a key ingredient for the achievement of sustainable development.*

**Key words:** Sustainable peace, Gender, post-peace, violence, Development

### I. Introduction

*“There is no sustainable peace strategy that is more powerful and beneficial to a whole society other than the one that involves both men and women as active players and not as an “add-on tool and stir” Annan.’* Issues pertaining to inclusion and exclusion of women in post-peace process continue to illicit much attention across the globe. Data regarding how men and women are situated differently within global processes reveals the extent of gendered power inequalities embedded in most traditional societies. Gender - *socially constructed*, defines the roles performed by men and women as defined by the society. Through these roles, emphasizes is placed on masculinity while devaluing femininity resulting into inequalities between men and women. Through a gendered lens, inequalities are institutionalized and underpin structural inequalities that impact on world politics (Cusack and Pusey 2012: 55).

### II. Purpose of the study

The effect of Gender-based violence (GBV) during conflict remains an area of much focus to both local and international community. Although both men and women are affected during GBV, the impact is greater for women. Women by nature, have good nurturing skills which facilitates conflict resolution from their homes, communities, local, and international levels. These experiences and insights pressurize the advocates of women human rights, international, and local bodies to make gender an integral part of development and in dimensions of peace - from armed conflict to peacebuilding initiatives. Even with this realization, it is not clear the role that women play after peace (post-peace) has been realized in the society. Where women are incorporated as active participants and not as victims in building peace before and after from local to international levels, their involvement has been substantial leading to sustainable peace. However, previous studies reveal that the level of women participation remain minimal during peace process, and it is not clear the role that they play after peace has been

realized in the society. It is against this backdrop that the paper sets out to analyze the role of women in post-peace processes and its outcome on sustainable peace and development. The paper discusses women in post-peace processes and the challenges that women face as they strive to find their way into public sphere. The paper concludes by recommending on the way forward. The outcome of this study would contribute to generation of new knowledge in the field of peace and conflict studies with a focus on strengthening the level of women in both peace and after-peace process.

### III. Research questions

This paper was guided by the following research questions in its quest to understand the place of women in the post-peace process

1. What is the role of women in peacebuilding process and where do women disappear to after peace has been achieved in the society?
2. What challenges face women in their efforts to actively participate after peace has been achieved?
3. What is the impact of excluding women after peace has been realized?

### IV. Methodology of the study

This is a qualitative study based on the analysis of available literature on the role of women in peacebuilding and post-peace process. Document review was chosen because it allows for triangulation and combination of methods drawing from different accredited data sources were focused on to increase the credibility of the findings (Bretschneider et. al., 2017). It also gives meaning and voice in the study topic.

#### Critical text analysis

Critical text analysis is an application of rational and logical thinking when trying to deconstruct the text read and written. The aim is to find out inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxical statements and dilemmas in the text. Importantly, this helps the researcher to remain objective especially where more than one source has been utilized thereby complementing insights (Polit and Beck, 2010; Mikkelsen, 2005; Creswell, 2013).

#### Reliability and validity

The information utilized in this study was secured from highly accredited sites which greatly enhanced reliability and validity of the study.

#### Evaluation of the sources

This study was based on a set of approaches which aimed at evaluating the authenticity of the sources and sites. It is crucial to remain objective while using such sources and sites for any academic work.

### V. Findings and discussion

#### Where are women in peacebuilding process?

Peacebuilding is like a journey that begins with a single step. It is a transitional process that requires transformation power to be transformed. The transformational power begins with an individual, group, or community. The role of women in this journey cannot be negated. Throughout history, women have been on the fore front to help ignite this transformational power (Björkdahl, 2012) in themselves, family members, and community in general. This journey is never time-specific since; it is unpredictable. Anderlini (2007), notes that women skills and trust have been instrumental in eradicating fear through building broken relationships and ensuring peace at domestic, national, and international level.

Women actively participate in activities that aims at promoting peace as individuals and as groups. They sacrifice their lives for peace through challenging militarism and urging for reconciliation over retribution (Björkdahl, 2012). They contribute to peacebuilding as activists, community leaders, and as survivors of war. Their efforts extend in transforming peace processes in every nation organizing cross political, religious, and ethnic affiliations. Through their efforts, perpetrators come forward testifying the deeds in public and asking for forgiveness – the case of Rwanda during the genocide (Anderlini, 2007; Issifu, 2015) but, their efforts remain absent from peace tables. Where they participate, the level of participation and representation remain questionable. Failure to recognize women and girls' experiences and roles during and after conflicts undermines efforts to realize real peace in any society (Moore and Talarico, 2015). Participation in peacebuilding efforts is respect for human rights since; we live in a society where human rights violations are rampant and results in structural violence (Anderlini, 2007).

Most women are economically dependent and have limited control which limits their participation level. They are subjected to gender-based persecution, discrimination, and oppression including sexual violence and

slavery (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). Although women are greatly affected by wars and armed conflicts, they remain absent in the peacebuilding process and other top decision-making levels. They do much work but their work is never recognized at the top level (Mazurana, Raven-Roberts and Parpart, 2005).

At grassroots level, their work remains remarkable. Often, women develop informal/formal groups and processes. This contributes to peacebuilding and the construction of democratic societies. Examples of such informal groups are: The Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) established by women from three countries namely, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea whose work was crucial in ending impunity in the country and building peace at the grassroots level. Ruma women group in Kenya – Kisumu, who have set up a home for orphan children and further educate them, AVEGA (Association of Rwandan women widows) in Rwanda which provides psychological and social support and health services to its members in addition to providing shelter and re-integration of ex-combatants (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002; Issifu, 2015). In Liberia, women organized themselves under the umbrella “*Mass Action for Peace*” which contributed immensely to ending ceasefire. South African women also played a remarkable role under “*Harambee women Forum*” to develop devastated communities and ensure peaceful co-existence. Kenyan women were also on the fore front in building peace during the 1991 violent conflict which left over 1200 people dead. Under the auspice “*Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC)*”, women were instrumental in realizing peace in the nation (Issifu, 2015). In addition, women in Solomon Island advocated for local peacebuilding in the communities through women peace groups (Westendorf, 2013). All these examples demonstrate the crucial role that women play in realizing peaceful co-existence in the society.

#### ***Women in post-peace process: What next after peace?***

The question of women in post-peace remains unclear with many scholars seeking attention and clarity especially at the international level (Anderlini, 2007). Efforts to empower women have been ongoing but the policies and programs remain unclear. Little has been done to challenge and break the structures that cause and fuel conflicts (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). The adoption of the UNSCR 1325 gave hope for women being the only international treaty that protects women and ensure their inclusion in peacebuilding processes. It gave women power for political participation and to air out their voices and issues regarding security matters. The resolution has in addition facilitated management of gender-based violence especially in conflict situations (Anderlini, 2007).

Although great improvements and hope about women in conflict, however, the hope seems to be diminishing since; UNSCR 1325 lacks a clear implementation plan and strategy (Westendorf 2013; Issifu, 2015; Moore and Talarico, 2015). As an international body, UNSCR 1325 is yet to be adopted by all its member states. This raises issues of how serious member countries are in implementing their suggestions and in integration of women into peace processes. Countries that have adopted the UNSCR 1325 with a clear national action plan in place have seen greater improvements on the status of women. Such countries adopt a gender lens which tends to rectify women exclusions and clearly defines how strategic decisions are made (Westendorf, 2013). On the contrary, documented literature further notes laxity in comprehensively adopting and implementing the UNSCR 1325 by some nations. Gender in such situation is used as a problem-solving tool to fulfill the requirements of the international community. The field of peacebuilding therefore remains a competition where politicians are constantly contesting for power relations resulting in asymmetrical power relations that is the basis for inequalities.

#### ***Women participation in post-peace process and emerging challenges***

Efforts to actively involve women after peace processes have been outlawed by superficial laws and policies. Where such policies and laws exist, they do not give clear outline/structure of how the incorporation will be achieved. International efforts to mainstream gender in peacebuilding processes has been futile as it faces numerous challenges. Most peacebuilding approaches have and continue to marginalize gender issues which are assumed to be affirmative and therefore receive less attention.

From a social dominance view, group-based inequalities and women oppression are linked to gendered power relations. The way men and women relate to issues of power in the society is asymmetrical. Men power is defined in the public sphere while women power is vested in the private sphere. Power and authority is exercised in the public realm, and since peacebuilding is viewed as a public sphere activity, it limits women influence on construction of peace even though their presence has favorable outcome for peace (Pratto, Sidanius and Levin, 2006; Björkdahl, 2012). The economic dependence and vulnerability of women further exposes them to inequalities. The structure of Society continuously perpetuates and reinforces this economic dependence limiting women power over men.

The society is governed by patriarchy which poses a greater challenge for women. Patriarchy is a major structural force that influences how men and women relate in all spheres of life, resulting in inequalities between men and women. The social construct excludes and negates women the autonomy to enjoy their human rights. The exclusion further denies women an opportunity to actively participate in public life. The outcome is a gendered

construction of public and private spheres. The private domain is set aside for women while the public-where power and authority are exercised are dominated by men (Björkdahl, 2012; Westendorf, 2013; Tracy, 2007).

The weak political will reinforced from the international level raises more questions (Westendorf, 2013). Lack of enforcement and monitoring mechanism gives nations a leeway not to fully implement UN resolution 1325. The concept of gender is assumed by many nations to center around women issues and warrants less attention and curiosity. Such issues have less/no economic benefit and attract little or no political support. This view has greatly impacted on women participation in post -peace processes making gender ‘an add on and stir’ strategy and a problem –solving tool.

Gender mainstreaming is everyone business, taking responsibility for the same has been a challenge (Anderlini, 2007; Westendorf, 2013). This view makes it impossible for gender to be considered seriously since; it is business as usual. There is need to move out of the usual business for social change to be realized and to increase women participation in peacebuilding processes. Failure to take responsibility reinforces the use of gender as a problem-solving tool.

It is important to note that ‘lone men’ strategy cannot achieve sustainable peace in any society. Inclusion and substantive participation of women is very important if peace is to be attained. This does not mean that women should be incorporated in the already established plans/programs/policies/ and decision-making processes, rather, it calls for integration of women right from identification, development, implementation and initiation of the developed policies and programs to realize this goal (Gallagher M. in Desta, 1997).

Failure to support women after peace processes is another key challenge. In some cases, there are efforts to retain a few women who participated in peace processes, but they receive less support from their male counterparts. Sometimes they may not also assume leadership roles within political life because of fear of being victimized. For example, in Kenya, the two women who participated in the mediation process were retained may be because they were in the parliament before. However, they are not supported by their male counterparts. One of the women declared her interest to vie for a presidential seat and called for support from her male counterparts. Though some (a small number) supported her, majority did not.

#### **Way forward**

Women advancement in peacebuilding is a tough battle. Through unceasing feminist efforts and curiosity, this battle may be won. There is need for mobilized efforts, capacity building, and political will from local to international level. Gender mainstreaming and analysis are the path towards winning this battle. To mainstream gender, there is need to move from the known to the unknown to unravel the ‘hidden’ in the society. A clear understanding of gender as a concept is very crucial. This will help the society to understand the need for setting up gender focal points, ministries, and departments of gender within various structures and organizations of society. It will also facilitate an understanding of why the 2/3 representation at the senatorial and nation assemblies are crucial. Supporting women as groups and not as individuals is necessary. This will empower women and trickle this to other women in society. Power, patriarchy, and culture which are the basis of inequalities need to be understood and mechanisms devised to tackle them. Men need to understand what patriarchy and culture are doing to them and their women partners in the society. This insight unravels the ‘hidden’ in society and make it visible. It is time to overlook the ‘blame the victim’ mentality. Blaming the victim worsens the situation and limits solution, thus making one to be a contributor to the problem and not to the solution. There is need to realize and recognize the contribution of women in reconstruction and development of any society and see the best ways to reward them. Importantly, having resolutions and policies on paper creates a gap between theory and practice. There is need to focus on the implementation aspect. Women should be the driving force in the implementation. Also, implementation should focus on addressing the needs and experiences of women at all levels. Adopting a national action plan will aid in laying down clear policies and procedural mechanism on how to implement such policies.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Women participation and representation has a long way to go. It is a stairway to realizing a stable and peaceful society. Peace, development and humanitarian efforts will fail unless a focus is put on the needs and resourcefulness of women (Egeland, 2013). This calls for transformation which not only consists of access and distribution of resources but also, political institutions, situations, and relationships. Principles such as democratic participation, human rights and gender perspectives need to be embraced to allow sustainable peace based on social justice and equality for all.

Substantive representation and active participation of women is vital in changing the existing patterns of masculinity in society. Increased income for women and their ability to participate in public political processes and civil society is key. Importantly, increasing the number of women leaders and their representation at various levels is

necessary. The secret to achieving this goal rests on adopting gender mainstreaming as a strategy to reinforce efforts that will challenge masculine cultures in society and in institutions worldwide. In addition, it will help to support and empower women as groups of individuals rather than as organizations through education. This will help women to fully participate in decision making bodies and train other women in return, allowing their needs, concerns and interests be addressed.

Moreover, the principle of good governance needs to be embraced. This will ensure respect for human dignity, rights, and the rule of law to strengthen democratization and promote transparency, and accountability by public administration. In addition, recognizing the role of women in peace building and reconstruction processes and not to look at women as home makers is necessary to challenge the deeply rooted masculine norm of culture in society.

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