

A Feminist Perspective and the Challenge of Post Conflict Development in Africa

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Abstract

In the last two decades, Africa has witnessed series of wars and ethno-religious conflicts with devastating impact on women. Various atrocities against women have been recorded during these conflicts and these developments have created a dangerous dimension against non-combatant women in the continent. In an attempt to resolve the conflict and armed conflict on women in the areas of sexual and gender-based violence, series of peace missions and peace building mechanism were put in place. Despite the various peace negotiations, evidence has shown that women are largely absent from formal peace negotiations and their voices are not heard both at local and continental levels especially within the modern-day challenges and post conflict development. In fact, the transformation agenda of post-conflict peace negotiations routinely failed to consider the gendered causes and consequences of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempts to reassess the ambivalent role of women in conflict management in Africa. More importantly, the paper argues that there is need to increase women's participation in peace talks, planning of demilitarisation, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and determining governance and security structures, especially in conflict prone areas. Ultimately, the paper seeks to also identify challenges hindering the role and the participation of women in post conflict development in Africa.

Keywords: Feminist; Post conflict; Gender; Violence; Womanism; Conflict escalation.

1. Introduction

In 1994 over 3,000 women converged in Dakar to attend the African Women's Preparatory Conference. Basically, they came to articulate an African position for the Beijing Fourth Women's World Conference. The resulting African Platform for Action identified several priorities, one of the major issues deliberated upon at that conference include, increasing the involvement of women in the peace process among others. The Beijing conference that followed in 1995 also stressed the need to involve African women in some conflict resolution practices and the empowerment of women as one of the central development goals of the 21st century (Manuh, 2009). The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in October 2000 addresses the impact of armed conflict on women as well as their, undervalued, contribution to conflict prevention and peace building (UNSC Resolution 1325, 2000). The need to involve women in the peacebuilding field is an emerging one as we as active participation of women which has become popular in recent times with the passage of the UNSC resolution 1325, which specifically calls on all states to make deliberate efforts for increase participation of women in peace processes.

The contribution of African women to households, food production systems and national economies are increasingly acknowledged in Africa and by the international community. This in no small way has accelerated African women's efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard. At both the grassroots and the national levels, more women associations have been formed during the 1990s, taking advantage of the new political openings to assert their leadership roles (Hudson, 2006). In related development, in the bid to revitalize the role and the involvement of women in conflict management, many international agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has sprang up and similarly, the Commonwealth Secretariat support gender involvement in conflict management. Some of the agencies have provided technical assistance and favored gender groups to be involved in conflict resolutions. They are also pressing for an expansion of women's economic and social opportunities, and the advancement of women's rights (Manuh, 2009). It should be reiterated that, women are regarded as peace-builders, taking into consideration their positive child-care role and through social capital transmission of values. Apart from the important roles in child-care, women also provided for their families' needs and participated in conflict mediation and conflict resolution within the family and often times some of the elderly women at the community level. Traditionally, women's roles in peace-building may not have been loud, but they were recognized and ever

so often in conflict situations, women were asked to talk to their sons especially when all other approaches seemed to have failed. Often the women's quiet diplomacy bore fruits and the community recognised this contribution. But in the modern times, women have to learn to speak up as they are often the forgotten voices and again, the traditional culture of quiet diplomacy, many African women are still afraid to raise their voices for fear of victimization or isolation (Ngongo-Mbede, 2003; Forcey, 1991; Vincent, 2003).

Contemporary history has shown that during civil violence and conflict, women in Africa endure the escalation of traditional structural inequalities, such as employment discrimination and disparate pay in addition to the violence perpetrated against them. Women frequently are subjected to a gendered double-victimization: they are victims of direct violence but are more likely to experience the discrimination associated with social inequalities (Jackson, 2011). In many cases, the nature of political, economic, and socio-cultural breakdown makes it extremely difficult to re-create a sense of identity and belonging after conflict has ended. Women, mothers and children are among the most vulnerable population in conflicts and they are particularly affected by the traumas of war in post war societies. Women who were raped also confront marginalization, this is as a result of the social stigma that is still widely attached to rape, many have been shunned by their own husbands, families and communities or obliged to remain silent to avoid being ostracized (Pankhurst, 2003; Nirit Ben-Ari and Ernest Harsch, 2005).

In order to address the invisibility of women and girls both as victims and actors within the context of armed conflict it is essential to devise strategies for gender sensitive peace building and post conflict reconstruction as well as considering the role of women in early warning. This means women having an equitable presence at peace negotiations as well as in legislature and in the planning and operation of humanitarian interventions and peacekeeping missions. Women and children, being among the most vulnerable populations during times of violent conflict, continue to suffer from the consequences of war even after the fighting has stopped and peace agreements have been signed. Due to their importance in rebuilding war-torn societies, women and children must be given special attention in efforts to address the impact of conflicts and to create the foundations for stable and prosperous post-war communities (Posa, and Cristina, 2001; King, 2001).

It is against this backdrop, that this paper endeavor to re-examine the comparative advantage of women's involvement in peace building and reconstruction in Africa, taking into consideration various calamities suffered by women during and after conflict. This study's purpose was to add to the knowledge base and the need to involve women in conflict management. There is no doubt that, war and conflict have increased violence against women and worsened the social and economic conditions under which they live. During the long war in different parts of Africa, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Congo Democratic Republic, Sudan, Chad and Mozambique, women and girls faced extreme violence, including exposure to rape, gender-based

violence, trafficking, displacement, health and the severe dismemberment. Women of all ages are victims of violence in conflict. Drawing on case studies around Africa, this paper will attempt to provide a global comparative perspective on the challenges women face during conflict and in post-conflict peacebuilding environments, and to offer lessons for a more just and effective inclusion of the needs and interests of women and children in rebuilding economic, political and cultural structures of society.

2. Re-Conceptualizing Women Involvement in Peace Resolution

The discourse on the role of women in peacebuilding is largely situated in the liberal and standpoint feminist paradigms (Vincent 2003; Vayrynen, 2004). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 (like the Millennium Development Goals) is enshrined within a neo-liberal, managerialist or problem-solving approach, which is essentially state-centric and follows a relatively narrow approach to security (Boulding, 1984). Consequently, from a critical point of view, the gender roles which this neo-liberal paradigm ascribes to are rather one-dimensional and unproblematized (Burton, 1986). In other words, women are added to the peacebuilding discourse and the many ambivalent gender voices and power relations are left unexamined. Although, nearly six years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”, October 2000), some progress towards its implementation has been achieved, but then, a lot of work still needs to be done. Under a people-centred approach to security, peacebuilding must be assessed in terms of freedom from fear, freedom from want and freedom of choice. Both the liberal feminist approaches (pursues equality) and standpoint feminism (which tends towards gender stereotyping) offer unsatisfactory explanations of women’s role in peacebuilding (Pearson, and Pearson, 1998). Alternative approaches can risk cultural relativism, an over reliance on difference which weakens women’s ability to speak for each other. Finding a balance between these two extremes may offer an approach that is culturally relevant but not deterministic. African feminists use the concept of ‘womanism’, which emphasizes cultural context, the centrality of the family and importance of cooperation with men (Hudson, 2006). Groups such as Emang Basadi in Botswana, the Forum for Women and Democracy in Uganda, the National Women's Lobby Group in Zambia and the Women's National Coalition in South Africa have all forced changes in political participation and the rights of women in their countries. The Women's National Coalition drew up a "Women's Charter" on gender equality, which has been enshrined in the new South African constitution. The Women's Caucus in Uganda developed gender dialogues as a lobbying tool and has worked with other groups to form an Equal Opportunity Commission and to push for implementation of affirmative action programs. These groups have held consultations with other women's groups from around Africa to share experiences, both of the obstacles that women face in

politics and of successful strategies that might be replicated (Manuh, 2009). More recently, and no doubt in response to such critiques, prominent male scholars in the field have begun to treat feminist perspectives in general and the relationship of gender and conflict in particular more seriously. For example, Louis Kriesberg pointed out the contribution of feminist perspectives to the contested debate on the causes of war and the prospects for peace and conflict resolution. As part of his overview of theoretical frameworks, Kriesberg called attention to the fact that "feminists argue that a major source of war is the socialization of men to be aggressive and concerned about appearing strong in the sense of being ready to fight and kill; consequently, an androgynous socialization would help generate peace" (Kriesberg, 1991). Another significant reference to the role of women's perspectives in conflict resolution was made by John Burton (1990), although he did not mention feminist scholarship, he called attention to the significant role women may play in conflict resolution. Women as well as other people who have had the experience of being members of disenfranchised, underprivileged and minority groups, have according to Burton, a special role to play in the area of conflict resolution and peace building. He insists, however, that "it is not that females are more peace-oriented or less forceful than males," but rather that "because of their social experiences" women are better positioned to trust conflict resolution initiatives and engage in activities that will further the prospects for peace (Burton, 1990).

3. Women and Conflict Escalation in Africa

Conflict escalation has had its effects on women generally, both as non-combatants and combatants. Initially, the perception that prevailed was that the vulnerability of women during armed conflicts was primarily related to their childbearing role. There was little recognition of other factors that contribute to the vulnerability, particularly the endemic discrimination against women during conflict escalation. However, analyst reports that the vulnerability of women in Africa during armed conflict and conflict escalation is the direct consequence of their status in society and sex (Mathey, 2003; Schirch, and Sewak, 2006). In unstable and chaotic conflict and 'post-conflict' situations women and girls are often the victims of sexual violence including systematic rape as well as forced recruitment into armed movements and sexual slavery. As Amnesty International noted, "When political tensions degenerate into outright conflict, all forms of violence increase, including rape and other forms of sexual violence against women" (Amnesty International, 2005). The Amnesty International's report, which covers one hundred and thirty-one (131) countries across the world, highlights some examples of the impact of armed conflict on women in Africa. The gravest examples include systematic gang rape of women and young girls by the Janjawid militia in Darfur, Sudan and rape committed by armed groups as well as United Nations forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Amnesty International, 2005). In the course of the armed conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo

(DRC), tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped and sexually assaulted by combatant forces. Women and girls have been attacked in their homes, in the fields, or as they go about their other daily activities. Many have been raped more than once or have survived gang rapes. Girl child soldiers have also been the victims of rape and sexual violence (Mathey, et.al, 2003; Erturk, 2007).

Peace keepers in troubled areas often rape women with impunity, even civilians and military personnel, who are entrusted with the task of protecting women, subject women to mistreatment. For example, the peacekeeping troops who were posted to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to protect civilians were implicated with sexual exploitation of Congolese women and girls (Gardam and Jarvis, 2001). In 2004, in response to media reports, an investigation conducted by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services in Bunia (Ituri District) confirmed that sexual contact between Congolese women and peacekeepers occurred frequently, usually in exchange for food or small sums of money, often involving girls under the age of eighteen (18), some as young as thirteen (13) years old. This clearly contradicts United Nations standards, which prohibits any solicitation of prostitution, regardless of the age or consent of the person solicited (United Nations, 2005). In 2006, the United Nations recorded over one hundred and seventy-six (176) allegations in which MONUC personnel were accused of having engaged in sexual exploitation or abuse. The United Nations Secretary-General in August, 2008, stated that he was 'deeply troubled' by the outcome of a probe that revealed *prima facie* evidence that a number of Indian peacekeepers, previously assigned to one of the units with United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) (was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) on 1 July 2010) may have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse (Erturk, 2007).

It is troubling to note that while a number of these allegations of sexual harassment and gang raped may eventually prove to be unsubstantiated. Reports received from Congolese non-governmental organizations, United Nations staff members and individual victims indicate that cases of sexual abuse of girls and solicitation for prostitution continue to occur and that, regrettably, some troop contingents fail to address these allegations with due diligence (Campbell, 2007). Also, shortcomings in the legal and procedural framework allowed perpetrators to escape criminal accountability, even where allegations could be substantiated and the perpetrators is removed from the Mission. In cases involving civilian peacekeepers, impunity may ensue if the perpetrator's country of nationality does not exercise extraterritorial jurisdiction over crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse (Leatherman, 2007). These jurisdictional problems do not apply to military personnel, because military penal codes generally provide for their extraterritorial application.

However, cumbersome procedures often prevent the successful prosecution of soldiers. On the other hand, the United Nations lacked a mechanism to provide victims of sexual abuse with adequate compensation. There are no measures put in place by the United Nations to ensure that fathers of babies born from relationships between MONUC personnel and Congolese women pay child support. The sexual atrocities committed in South Kivu are indeed reminiscent of those perpetrated by Interahamwe militia during the Rwandan genocide. The atrocities are structured around rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage. They aim at the complete physical and psychological destruction of women with implications for the entire society. Women are brutally gang raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, men are forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters. In some cases, women and girls were shot or stabbed in their genital organs after they were raped. Women who survived months of enslavement reported that their tormentors had forced them to eat excrement or the flesh of murdered relatives (Erturk, 2007).

Furthermore, women and children, particularly female children, are most susceptible to assault by armed elements. The presence of small arms was frightening and disturbed the peace and order of the civil society. Everyone was subjected to all kinds of humiliation and abuse. The most vulnerable groups were the women and the children (Omosho, 2008). During conflict, we do experience mass movement of the civilian populations as people are forced to flee their homes and most often, these developments have a disproportionate impact on women. For instance, women are less able to flee when the civilian population comes under attack and so are at greater risk of abuse by combatants (Schmidt, 1997; Steinberg, 2003). In post conflict regions such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, gender-based violence precedes wartimes and does not end when peace is declared (Becker, 2003; Lihamba, 2003; Mazurana and McKay, 2006; Erturk 2007). Based on this, African women can be said to be faced by the following during conflict escalation: First is the health hazard faced by women after conflict, (many of the household equipment and other environmental goods were destroyed by bombs and landmines during conflict); continuous water shortages forced many of the house wives and female children to walk for miles to collect the firewood and water needed to sustain their families. These women were more likely to suffer negative health effects from the leftovers of dangerous chemical that were sprayed across the land during the conflict (Jackson, 2011). Second, there is also an economic impact of post conflict escalation on women, which affects their role as coping and surviving actors. In Sierra Leone for example, women are regularly disadvantaged in both the educational and economic opportunities available, they have traditionally inhabited informal sectors of the employment industry. Before the civil war, many Sierra Leonean women earned their income by selling food and crafts at local marketplaces. As conflict

escalated, this occupation became increasingly dangerous as violence erupted throughout the country. Additionally, as materials became progressively more difficult to come by and potential customers increasingly less inclined to spend money during an unstable wartime economy, the already minimal profits for the women disappeared (Jackson, 2011). Third, after conflict, many women from war-torn countries frequently assume the head of household position when their husbands or fathers are killed, displaced, or otherwise absent during the conflict – a stress-inducing role that is typically outside the realm of their normal experiences. Women, and in some instances girls, serve as the head of household in approximately seventy percent of all households. As heads of household, women are responsible for earning an income and, without experience working in formal employment. They also struggle to provide the basic necessities for their children and dependent family members. The market women who no longer earned the same level of income as they did pre-conflict were forced to assume the new and difficult role of head of household, and the girls who were orphaned or left without guardians to care for them took up creative and often desperate measures in order to ensure their families' survival. After a conflict, some women also find themselves with few options aside from working for warlords and criminal militias or entering into exploitative informal economies (Mazurana, 2006). Unfortunately, some of the women turn to prostitution in order to provide for their families, a trade that requires neither education nor training but may produce a somewhat reliable income. In Sierra Leone, for instance, displaced women and young girls under the age of fifteen were seen engaged in prostitution and were sometimes so desperate, they did not even exchange sex for money, but rather for food and shelter (Coker and Richter, 1998; Amnesty International, 2000). These young girls in particular struggle with the new roles they were forced to take on during conflict escalation.

After war, gender divisions are exacerbated and new ones created. Contemporary history has shown that during times of civil violence and conflict, women in Africa endure the escalation of traditional structural inequalities, such as employment discrimination and disparate pay in addition to the violence perpetrated against them (Calmy-Rey, 2004). Women frequently are subjected to a gendered double-victimization: they are equally, if not more likely, to be the victims of direct violence but are disproportionately more likely to experience the discrimination associated with social inequalities (Jackson, 2011). In many cases, the nature of political, economic and socio-cultural breakdown, particularly of diverse communities make it extremely difficult to re-create a sense of identity and belonging after conflict has ended and women, mothers and children being among the more vulnerable populations in conflicts are particularly affected by the traumas of war in post war societies (Schmidt, 1997; Barth, 2003; Vlachoud and Biason, 2005).

4. Feminism: A Key Consideration in Peace Building and Reconstruction in Africa

There is now a global awareness of the importance of women involvement in peace building. There are various reasons for considering women as key actors in peace building. Gender issues have moved onto the peacekeeping agenda, the United Nations has deployed gender specialists, first in the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor (UNTAET) and in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 1999, and then in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) in 2000 (Vayrynen, 2004). Jean- Marie Guéhenno, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), in her assessment of gender involvement in the mainstreaming in peace operations, she argues that "Far more remains to be done, both in the field and at Headquarters" (Gardam and Jarvis, 2001). The necessity of women's equal participation in peace processes is asserted again and again, directly and indirectly, in the United Nations Charter, the Beijing Platform for Action, by the Economic and Social Council (*ECOSOC*) of the United Nations, the Security Council, the General Assembly, The Hague Agenda for Peace and the Namibia Plan of Action, among others. Yet women's participation in peace processes and in peace operations in particular, has been anything but equal or fair. In the thirty two (32) years between 1957 and 1989, only 0.1 per cent of the field-based military personnel in the United Nations peacekeeping missions were female, despite the fact that in 1996 the Secretary-General recommended that, by the year 2000 women should constitute 50 per cent of staff in the United Nations system, including field missions, women made up only four per cent (4%) of police and three per cent (3%) of military in the United Nations operations in 2000. At United Nations Headquarters between 1994 and 2000, women represented only eighteen per cent (18%) of those employed at the director level and none at the senior director level (Erturk, 2007).

Abinitio, women are known to be involved in conflict management in Africa one way or the other. For the purpose of this paper, we shall conceive the role of women in peace building and reconstruction in Africa from two different perspectives; the traditional African perspectives and the contemporary African perspective. The comparative advantage of women in peace building and reconstruction is widely recognised in both the traditional and the contemporary African settings. In the traditional African settings, African women were seen as mothers, wives and aunts and they play various roles in peace building as educators, through social capital transmission, through conflict mediation in conflict resolution through rituals and practices, through consolidating peace pacts and as peace envoys (Nwoye, 2005). As educators, it is believed that peace is not borne but made and that the culture of peace in traditional African societies was implanted in a child through responsible upbringing and socialization undertaken and supervised by mothers. In Tanzania as observed by Lihamba, (2003) women have always played a critical part in maintaining equilibrium in their society by bringing up their children as responsible members of the community women

taught their daughters and sons proper behavior and the ethos of society and impressed on them the importance of such values as honesty, uprightness and the necessity to compromise. As such, women have always been active promoters of harmony in the community, which can be referred to as a culture of peace (Lihamba, 2003: 115). A similar trend of emphasis on the role of ‘mother as peace builder’ is also noted in the study among the people of Somali where women were shown to prepare and train the young boys who are one day going to be adult men of the society. Women in traditional Africa have also played important roles as peace envoys. For example, older women who could no longer conceive were in charge of studying situations, they assessed the prospect of peace, facilitated contact and communication between the two warring parties. The Somalis are careful as to whom they would choose as peace envoy. Those selected are required to possess a wide spectrum of qualities and competencies such as a sense of responsibility, patience, good personality, oratory abilities, decency, they are well versed in customary law and are required to know exactly what the problem is and what is at stake. According to Mohammed Abdi Mohammed (2003), married women, capitalizing on their neutrality and privileges bestowed on them by Somali culture, shuttled between the warring clans theirs and that of their husbands carrying messages of peace and reconciliation, they also mobilized and encouraged the forces of peace from both sides (Mohamed, 2003).

The same appreciation of ‘the mother as school’ is found in the report from the Cameroonian study which underscored the idea that among the traditional communities in Cameroon, the mothers taught their children, particularly the girls, how to share and show solidarity. They showed them how to protect the weaker children and the handicapped (Erturk, 2007). Also, African women have contributed in peace building by playing a dominant role in the transmission, propagation and consolidation of the critical values that generate peace and harmony in traditional African societies. A study by Mathey et al (2003) revealed that a fundamental fact of traditional Central African societies was the sacred character of the respect given to the elderly in general and to elderly women in particular, according to respondents from that study states that:

The elderly women are respected by all and played a key role in crisis management and conflict resolution. Thus, when a conflict degenerated into armed violence, an appeal would usually be made to a third party of mature years to calm the tension and reconcile the combatants. Such an appeal for mediation was usually made to a woman who enjoyed the consideration and respect of all who knew her (Mathey et al., 2003).

The same study revealed that if war broke out among the Zande in Congo, the oldest women of the clan would go to meet opposing clan, and to interpose themselves between the fighters in order to make them see reasons. When words proved fruitless, the women would threaten to expose their nakedness or to go down on their knees, if there was no laying down of arms after this, the old women would then crawl towards the foolhardy combatants and say to them:

We are your mothers,

We do not want war,

We do not want bloodshed

Do not fight with your brothers

They have sent us to sue for peace (Nwoye, 2006)

The same conflict mediation charisma is reported of women among the traditional Burundi people. In such a society where conflict usually arose between individuals, within a family, between different families or between the inhabitants of different territories, they have well-organized regulator machinery in which women generally played a major part. Under this system, a woman was recognized as having an advisory role, behind the scenes, mainly where her husband was concerned and as playing an active part in strengthening solidarity and social harmony generally (Nwoye, 2006). These observations have been able to demonstrate that women in traditional Africa have been able to play more direct roles in peace building and reconstruction in Africa and this direct role is lacking in contemporary Africa. In the contemporary order, African countries can no longer afford to exclude women in important peace processes. Women have played strategic roles in peace building but most records have shown their indirect contribution such as their impacts in education, politics and most of their records have shown women successful efforts within international organizations and this is unlike the traditional African setting where traditional African women have been directly involved in peace building. Only few evidence have shown women's direct involvement in peace building processes in contemporary Africa instead, in contemporary Africa, women have been involved in peace building either as individuals influencing policies (like the Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf or the Forum of African Women Educationalist (FAWE). The Forum of African Women Educationalist (FAWE) which has National Chapter in thirty-one (31) Sub-Saharan African countries. FAWE is an indigenous African Non-Governmental Organization that seeks to increase the intellectual capital needed for the development and survival of Africa by promoting the education of women and girls at all levels. The organisation was (in May-September 1995) able to run an emergency camp school programme for more than three thousand (3000) displaced children of whom over two thousand (2000) were girls. Also, in 1996, they

were able to launch a Displaced School Children Endowment Fund, sourced for scholarship for displaced children and on returning home in the second half of 1998, they were encouraged to share their experiences through case study on women traditional mediation and conflict resolution practices in Sierra Leone (Gachukia, 2009). In related development, the National Women's Movement (NWM) saved the peace and national unity in Mali. The NWM was created during the Touareg conflict which started in Northern Mali in June 1990 by rebel groups. They took part in the Mali national conference in 1991, they organized a study on the northern conflict, they made contacts with the army, the rebel movements and the population at large, and they also made contacts with rebels who had dispersed to other countries such as Algeria, sending them moving messages to try to make them see reason. They served as a base, their positive values of pacific co-existence, these values which link the different communities, to develop messages of public awareness aimed at the different players, to reduce the violence and to bring about more tolerance and solidarity (Governance en Afrique, conference: L'Afrique pends son deston en main National.)

Since the start of the 1990s, many more women's associations have been formed or revitalized, and the quality of their work has improved significantly. For instance, the Women National Movement for Peace keeping and National Unity in Mali, Pro-Fermme/Jwesa Hamive in Rwanda, Sudanese Woman's voice for Peace, Women United for Peace Democracy-Liberia, The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom-Sierra Leone, etc (Gachukia, 2009). Some of them are operating at both grassroots and national levels, these groups have taken advantage of new political openings in many countries to raise issues in new ways and to form alliances with other civil society groups to advance women's rights. While many of the associations receive external funding, a number seek to stress internal responsibility, African agenda-setting, and the development of organizational potential. African women and gender studies programmes also have been set up in many universities, both to teach and to engage in fundamental and applied research to improve the conditions of women in Africa. In contrast to the 'development discourse' of the 1970s and 1980s, issues affecting women now are discussed most often within the framework of rights. Women have entered into debates and action on gender concerns that formerly were perceived as divisive and unpopular, such as violence against women, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and the use of condom by men, in addition to economic, political, legal and cultural issues (Manuh, 2009).

In 2003, women in Liberia began a Mass Action for Peace campaign, drawing in women from all faiths and levels of society. While the parties to the conflict were negotiating a peace agreement in Ghana from June 2003, the women took the Mass Action to Accra, bodily confining the delegates in the hall and blocking the entrance when leaders of one of the armed opposition groups threatened to walk out. As a result of their

campaign, women gained entry to key meetings. A delegation of Liberian women from the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) took part in the talks and was one of the groups representing civil society that signed the peace agreement in August 2003 as witnesses (UNIFEM Report, 2003; Steinberg, 2003; Hudson, 2006). In fact, some the women non-governmental organization offers literacy and vocational training combined with treatment for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), organizing socio-economic and political programs in post conflict situations were such programs would help improve the economic conditions of communities and provide a long term financial commitment and resource materials during post conflict. These developments provide opportunity for women not only to help change the economic conditions, but emerging politics; helping out in trauma counseling, the psycho-social rehabilitation of post conflict reconstruction and supporting non-war activities. They used existing networks of church groups, women's associations and other civil society organizations to do this work; providing women humanitarian assistance and tribunal and legal advice, disengaging women from conflict; re-integrating female ex-combatants and creating sustainable women.

Steinberg also argues that, bringing women to the peace table improves the quality of agreements reached and increases the chance of success in implementing, just as involving women in post-conflict governance reduces the likelihood of returning to war. Reconstruction works best when it involves women as planners, implementers and beneficiaries. The singular most productive investment in revitalizing agriculture, restoring health systems, reducing infant mortality and improving other social indicators after conflict is in women's and girls' education. Furthermore, insisting on full accountability for actions against women during conflict is essential for the re-establishment of rule of law (Steinberg, 2003). Some women non-governmental organization are organizing and educating themselves on the issue of peace and conflict resolution. They are demanding resources and legal recognition to rebuild their lives, as well as participation in peace-building, conflict-resolution and early warning mechanisms, citing both their traditional peace-making roles and their right to equal involvement. Rebecca Akwaci, an organizer of the Sudan Women's Voice for Peace, says "women can be peacemakers in our community not by standing with a gun, but by teaching peace," She further reiterates that, women "can be on the borders, encouraging peace, talking about reconciliation instead of revenge" (Gachukia, 2009). The Federation of African Women's Networks, this comprises of women from Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Mozambique, Angola, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia, Congo, Mali and South Africa. As part of their efforts to re-establish their role in the peacebuilding process, they stress the missing social dimension in mechanisms for conflict-resolution, which currently emphasize more technical aspects over consultation with the people and communal action. It is such growing organizations of women that are making a push for systemic changes in women's lives.

Governments, bilateral and multilateral agencies and other NGOs must cooperate with them for meaningful change to occur, in the lives of women themselves and in society as a whole (Manuh, 2009). Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA) also seeks to elevate the status of women by building on what they already possess through equipping them with leadership and other skills which enhance their intuitive skills in conflict prevention and emphasize their role as mentors to the younger women. IFAPA lays emphasis on the kind of education (spiritual, religious and moral) that retains core African values, promotes religious diversity and teaches peace and respect for human rights, with priority given to girls and grass-root women. IFAPA also lays emphasis on documentation that highlights women's contribution to peace-building and interfaith collaboration for peace in an empowering manner and not manipulatively (<http://ifapa-africa.org>, 2011).

In 2000, following campaigning from the women's rights movement, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1325. This Resolution on Women, Peace and Security is a historic step that acknowledges the essential role of women in peace building. It calls for the full inclusion of women in decision-making at all levels, in the prevention, management and conflict resolution. It refers to women's involvement in United Nations field-based operations and especially among military observers, civilian police and human rights and humanitarian personnel. It calls for the particular needs of women and girls to be considered in the design of refugee camps, in repatriation and resettlement, in mine clearance, in post-conflict reconstruction and in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. However, much needs to be done if the principles of Resolution 1325 are to become a reality. For example, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), a United Nations agency, mandated to provide financial and technical assistance to promote women's human rights, political participation and economic security, remains the smallest United Nations fund. In the four years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, less than 20 per cent of United Nations Security Council resolutions included any reference to women or gender.

5. Conclusion

The viability of women's institutions and mechanisms for decision-making in the community, market places and trades must be recognized, and they should be utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making power in the society. Taking into consideration the calamity suffered by women during and after conflict, women should be seen as an important factor in the negotiation and developmental stages of the peace process, helping to ensure the recognition, consideration, and incorporation of the specifically unique needs of women during and after conflict. "If you want to develop Africa," affirms Soukeyna Ba of Senegal, "you must develop the leadership of African women." It is critically important for policy-makers to listen to

and work with women to improve their positions and thereby accelerate Africa's development. A comprehensive approach must be taken by governments in conjunction with developmental agencies and women non-governmental organizations, to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women (Manuh, 2009). Also, women should be part of peace building because women are more peaceful than men who they view as warlike in gender.

Women are also important in peace building because their population are half of every community and the tasks of peace building are so great, women and men must be partners in the process of peace building; but then, women are also seen as the central caretakers of families in many cultures, everyone suffers when women are oppressed, victimized, and excluded from peace building. Their centrality to communal life makes their inclusion in peace building essential; women have the capacity for both violence and peace, women must be encouraged to use their gifts in building peace. Also, women are excluded from public decision-making, leadership and educational opportunities in many communities around the world, it is important to create special programs to empower women to use their gifts in the tasks of building peace. Women and men have different experiences of violence and peace, women must be allowed and encouraged to bring their unique insights and gifts to the process of peace building. Sexism, racism, classism, ethnic and religious discrimination originate from the same set of beliefs that some people are inherently “better” than others, women’s empowerment should be seen as inherent to the process of building peace. Violence against women is connected to other forms of violence, women need to be involved in peace building efforts that particularly focus on this form of violence (Schirch and Sewak, 2010).

It is imperative to educate and sensitize more stakeholders in the society for the need to involve women in conflict management and overall development of women and the society. According to the former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Anan in his statement on International Women’s Day Celebration, said that, the United Nations has “resolved to work for gender equality and the empowerment of women as vital tools to combat poverty and disease, and to achieve development that is truly sustainable; equally, we are determined to build on the contribution of women in managing conflict and building peace” (Annan, 2002).

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