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## AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (1) February, 2013: 1-20

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

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### Gender and Conflict Resolution in Africa

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#### Abstract

*Women's vulnerabilities in times of conflict have long dominated the policy agenda. While conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women are particularly affected by its effects. However, their determined efforts to bring an end to fighting are usually behind the scenes as they are not recognized as stakeholders in the peace process. This paper examines women's role in conflict resolution with particular focus on Africa. It argues that women should not be viewed as victims of violence only but as positive contributors to conflict resolution. It therefore concludes that women need to be mainstreamed in the conflict resolution process.*

**Key Words:** gender, conflict, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, gender empowerment

#### Introduction

Over the past few decades Africa has suffered more from armed conflict than any other continent. Between 1960 and 1998, there were 32 wars in Africa,

seven million lives were lost and over nine million people became refugees, returnees or displaced. In 1996 alone, 14 out of the 53 countries of Africa were afflicted by armed conflicts, accounting for more than half of all war-related deaths world-wide. The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo alone has involved a dozen or so States and over 50 million people of the Great Lakes region. This is not a record of which the continent can be proud. The consequences of these conflicts have seriously undermined Africa's efforts to ensure long-term stability, prosperity, human rights and gender equality for its peoples. As a direct result, the quest for socio-economic development and strengthening of African economies has been undermined. For example, the 17-year old civil war in Sudan, has resulted in more than two million dead and at least five million displaced. It has brought starvation and extreme poverty to the Sudanese people. Ethiopia and Eritrea diverted an estimated 80 per cent of their national budgets to augment their defence in a war claiming at least 400,000 lives. They now face famine and destroyed livelihoods for millions of their citizens, in particular the most vulnerable and affected - women and children. Conflicts have changed in nature. Interstate conflicts have given way to internal civil wars whose main victims are civilian populations. One cannot forget the tragic Rwandan genocide in 1994 in a hurry. This conflict will forever remain one of the darkest pages in African history. The new types of conflicts no longer aim at defeating the opponent's armies but at inflicting pain and humiliation on civilians by destroying their identity and sense of community. They erode institutions that provide a basis for the sustainability of African societies and undermine societal values replacing them with institutionalized violence. Women become specific targets. Rape, forced pregnancies, sexual slavery and assault have also become deliberate instruments of war. These realities make the issues of gender equality and human rights particularly salient features of conflict management. It is therefore vital that attempts at managing violent ethnic conflicts or preventing them, must bring women into the process at an early stage as contributors and active participants in all stages of conflict management. The reality is women are part of the process and this is increasingly being recognised beyond the confines of the continent. Starting from grassroots activities including humanitarian assistance, demobilization and disarmament, child and health care, hostage exchange, and using traditional African conflict management approaches, and the peace tent, women's organizations in Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and the Sudan have grown in

strength and legitimacy. They have extended their roles to a wider political agenda. Indeed, these grassroots activities often serve as catalysts that motivate others to mobilize and enter the struggle for peace (Kin 2001).

The role of women in conflict resolution has gained prominence in the last few years as a result of concerted efforts by NGOs and international agencies to address the issues of gender and conflict resolution, the greatest impetus being the Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council on Women, Peace and Security and the Beijing declaration on affirmative action among others. In spite of this however, women in Africa like their counterparts in different parts of the world are yet to be in the mainstream in the political, social, economic as well as peace and conflict related issues (Oluyemi-Kusa 2009) and Anthony (2005). The traditional view of women as home makers often makes them to be sidelined or neglected in issues of conflict resolution. Yet conflict resolution does not only concern men who participate directly in armed conflicts but also women as evidence from many peace building efforts in and outside Africa has shown. The Strategic Conflict Association of Nigeria SCA reveals that women have been very active in traditional methods of conflict resolution from the earliest times (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2003). In pre-colonial Yoruba land for instance, Iyalode (Female Political Leader), the Erelu (the female spiritual leader), the Iyaloja (Mother of the Market), Obirin Ile, (Compound wives) etc settled disputes amicably with the men (Tumbo-Masabo 1994) while the same goes for women in Ibo land and Hausa land. A strong case is therefore made for gender equity and mainstreaming especially in conflict resolution. Men and women need to work together to resolve conflicts which have become a feature of our political landscape. The paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the introduction followed by the clarification of the concept of gender after which violence against women is discussed. Subsequent sections talk about women as peacemakers, policy initiatives for gender mainstreaming and the need to mainstream gender in conflict resolution. The study ends with a conclusion and recommendation.

### **The Concept of Gender**

The term gender has its root in the Latin noun, *genus*, which means 'kind' or 'group'. The term is widely used to denote the different and unequal perceptions, views, roles and relevance, rewards etc which society assigns to men and women through its culture (Anifowose and Enemuo 1999).

According to Wikigender, 'gender is a range of characteristics of femininity and masculinity. Depending on the context, the term may refer to such concepts as sex (as in the general state of being male or female), social roles (as in gender roles) or gender identity. The American Psychological Association (2011) views it as: 'the attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behaviour that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviours that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity.' A United Nations Development Programme report (1986) defines gender as follows:

The term gender denotes the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, then biologically determined. Gender includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology.

Gender has also been conceptually described in the *OXFAM Gender Training Manual* as follows:

People are born female and male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught that the appropriate behaviour and attributes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity and determines gender roles.

According to Best (2009) 'Gender is about society and culturally defined sex roles, attributes and values which communities and societies ascribe as appropriate for one sex, and not the other.' Miller (2001) sees it as 'sexual division of power.' He goes further to differentiate between sex and gender, viewing sex as biologically determined and gender socially constructed. He agreed with the definitions of Dex (1985) and Reddock (1994) that; 'Gender defined as the sexual division of power departs from the community accepted definition of gender as the sexual division of labour, women's work being restricted to the private sphere of the household while men's work extended to the public sphere.

Though there is multiple understanding of gender, this study elaborates on how the topic of women and men in conflict situation is approached. It focuses is on the role of women in conflict situations. Gender roles are neither natural nor immutable but are constructed and invented by society. While the United Nations and many in the international community recognize equal rights and status for women as a legitimate goal to pursue globally, the speed and manner in which this goal can be attained will vary according to the cultural setting. Just as each country has its own unique culture and traditions, each society views the role of women differently. This will vary by country/region and can be influenced by such factors as education, religious and cultural norms, the legal status of women, and the degree of exposure to Western ideas and culture. Although during conflicts, women's vulnerable position as victims are often emphasized, the multifaceted role of women is increasingly being recognized; women can be bread winners, combatants, peace activists etc at the same time. The notion of masculinity and femininity are interpretations of what it means to be a man or a woman. While masculinity is often linked to aspects of aggression, militarization, dominance, hierarchy and competition etc femininity is usually associated with motherhood, care, non-violence and potential capacities for peace. The interpretations of masculinity and femininity shaped by the gender culture in which women and men live by the nature of the conflict, in the end determine male and female actions, behaviour, perceptions, rationality positions and roles.

### **Women as Victims of Violence**

Women are usually victims of violence during conflicts. The fact that gender-based violence increases in conflict-affected communities is well established, though the specific roots of the problem remain unclear. The increased occurrence of gender-based violence may be attributed to general climates of violence in conflict environments; the lack of social order, police enforcement, and unemployment can also contribute to this problem. According to Abama and Kwaja (2009), Violence against women is increasingly documented in crises associated with armed conflict, with rape and other forms of sexual violence used to humiliate and intimidate civilians and as tactics in campaigns of ethnic cleansing (Amnesty International, 2004). It may also be used to undermine women's ability to sustain their communities during times of conflict. Where community support structures have been eroded by displacement, violence occurs within the community as

well. Normal cultural controls over behaviour tend to be weakened during times of conflict and violence becomes more prevalent. For example, women in Sierra Leone and Liberia described the situation in their countries – where rebel fighters used rape, torture, and amputations as strategic tactics – as “cultures of violence.” The far-reaching consequences of rape linger not only with the victims, but also with their families and society long after the conflict ends. Consequently, both the rape survivor and relatives feel shamed and humiliated. During the Rwanda genocide of Hutus against Tutsis, an estimated 50% of women were raped. Babies born as a result of the rapes were unwanted reminders of a period of horror.

Women living in conflict situations or in camps for refugees or displaced persons are already very vulnerable to extreme poverty, hunger and illness. Their situation is frequently made even worse by the high rates of physical and sexual assault against them, including by intimate partners, which have been documented in such circumstances. In some cases, women and girls are forced to submit to sexual abuse in order to obtain food and other basic necessities as fuel and water. Violence against women is a major threat to social and economic development. This was recognized in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000, in which the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved “to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”(United Nations, 2005). In most contemporary conflicts civilian casualties are about 80 percent most of them being women and children. Because women are unarmed and unprotected unlike their male counterparts, they are vulnerable to all kinds of violations. Besides, since they play a greater role in responsibility to children and the elderly relations, they are less mobile to flee from figuring and indiscriminate violence. Forced displacements may also expose them to violations while a lack of gender sensitivity in refugee camps resulting in inappropriate sanitary facilities, and contribute to their exposure to risk and violence. The effect of violence on women range from psychological problems, and traumas to social exclusion and been ostracism of the particular women and children born out of such sexual violence. In post-conflict phase sexual violence often continues from the public to the private space of homes. The male combatants, who return home, pour their traumas and frustrations on their wives and families. In Nigeria for instance, up to a third of women in Nigeria report that they have been subjected to some form of violence, including battering and verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, marital rape,

sexual exploitation, or harassment within the home. Unmarried women in the Christian Southern states of Nigeria are the most frequent victims of violence. In parts of Nigeria, the figures are as high as 70% (see Obi and Ozumba, 2007).

Women are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for more reasons than just violence. Large flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are associated with most conflicts. Forced displacements may also expose them to violations while a lack of gender sensitivity in refugee camps resulting in inappropriate sanitary facilities, and contribute to their exposure to risk and violence. Reports from human rights advocacy groups document many examples of the exploitation and abuse of women and children affected by conflict. Women in refugee and IDP camps face sexual exploitation and a lack of physical security. This is especially true in households without male protectors, and women in refugee or IDP camps are often heads-of-households. War-induced migration and mobility put unaccompanied women and children at greater risk of violence during flight. They frequently lack documentation to prove their entitlement to food, health services, and shelter, and consequently may be obligated to exchange sex for survival. Lack of equal access to food in emergency situations is one of the primary reasons that war-affected women and girls adopt high risk behaviour such as exchanging sex for food. In countries like Liberia, Burundi, Ivory Coast, East Timor, Congo, and Bosnia, UN Peacekeepers have been accused of exchanging sex for food with girls as young as eight. A report conducted by Save the Children in Liberia found that parents of these abused girls refused to complain because offering sex seemed to be their only option for acquiring food. In Northern Uganda, girl “night commuters” are known to exchange sex for money in order to pay for their school fees.

Even after hostilities cease, a variety of conflict-related health issues persist, such as post-traumatic stress, malnutrition, war-related injuries, and the scars of sexual abuse. The lack of reproductive health services in particular has harmful long-term ramifications for women and their children. Maternal and child mortality rates soar when services are absent. The risk for contracting communicable diseases also rises during conflict, as heightened population mobility, increased presence of soldiers, relaxed social behaviour controls, and widespread poverty are common in conflict situations, leading to high-risk behaviour and increased exposure to HIV and other diseases. Another lasting consequence of conflict for women is the impact on children. In cases

where rape has been a weapon, unwanted pregnancies often lead to the abandonment of the resulting children.

Whenever social protection systems for communities break down, gender-based violence intensifies, leading to further deterioration of women's status.

### **Women as Peace Makers**

Though victims of sexual abuse and violence, women can play crucial roles to bring peace to their communities. Nevertheless, they are usually left out of formal peacemaking activities unless they exhibit remarkable determination to seat themselves at the peace table. The idea of women as peacemakers has a long history. In ancient Athens, in the play *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, a young woman named Lysistrata organized the Athenian and Spartan women to withhold sex from the men until the latter stopped the war. Within a short while, the men came to their senses and made peace (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2012). In 1852, *Sisterly Voices* was published as newsletter for women's peace societies. In 1892, Bertha Von Suttner persuaded Alfred Nobel to create the Nobel Peace Prize. During World War1, in 1915, Jane Addams and other feminists convened an international women's peace conference at the Hague and founded the Women's Peace Party (now called the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom).

In recent decades, in many countries of the world including Africa, women's participation in the peace process has brought the needed peace. In South Africa, among others - women's peace organizations and coalitions have played a crucial role in helping to bring about peace. In the years leading to the 1994 elections, women in South Africa formed a strong National Women's Coalition that cut across racial, political and social lines and was instrumental in sustaining the peace accord and in the drafting a democratic Constitution and the Bill of Rights. This coalition also assisted in setting the 30 per cent quota for women in all parties in parliament. Patience Pashe headed the Alexandra Peace Accord Committee and worked closely with the United Nations Observer Mission to South Africa. In Eritrea women mobilized other women to hold mass demonstrations, including in Asmara, to bring about an end to the war with Ethiopia. In Sierra Leone, the Women's Forum, a network of women's organizations and groups, raised public awareness of the Lomé Peace Accord and demanded greater involvement in the work of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. In replicating the national peace process at the local level,



women in Mali played a key role in building bridges across society and in encouraging militants from both sides to engage in a constructive dialogue on implementation of the National Pact of 1992. The pro-femines/Twese Hamwe Collective in Rwanda, an association of 35 organizations made significant contributions to spearhead dialogue between Tutsis and Hutus. It also promoted communications among government agencies, women's organizations and donor groups.

Following the long struggle by Somali women for peace and democratization including their ability to bring warlords to the peace table, the Somalia Peace and Reconciliation Conference in Arta, Djibouti, in 2000 involved women in the peace negotiations, though not as equal partners. In July 2000 Burundian women from all sides of the conflict demanded gender parity in the Arusha peace process facilitated by the former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. Several of the women's demands were incorporated in the final document. These are only a very few of the strategies women have used effectively. Much more documentation and dissemination is needed.

In Liberia, the Women's Peace Initiative made major strides towards a peaceful resolution of the 14-year conflict by pushing for disarmament of the fighting factions before the signing of a peace accord. Although their role was more substantial during the second Liberian civil war, women's movements participated in the resolution of the first civil war. Throughout the two conflicts, their action consisted in many demonstrations against the different fighting groups. The strength of Liberian women's movement lays in their peacefulness and the refusal to use violence, contrary to all of the other actors of the civil conflict. One of the most active women's movement in Liberia, AFELL (Association of Female Liberian Lawyers) was founded during the first Liberian war by Association of war, but it remained active during the two conflicts and since then. AFELL is a group of female lawyers based in the capital city Monrovia, representing women in the entire country. In particular, they focus on cases of rape, as it is a common practice among soldiers during war time. With the Centre for Abused Girls and Women, they documented the experiences of Liberian women during the war years. Their role was thus important to help women to break the taboo existing around this question, and then to represent them in court against their rapist. In 2000, AFELL was granted the right to prosecute rape cases, whereas before this date, only state lawyers were allowed to prosecute criminal cases. It was later able to influence the legislation in drafting a new legislative bill increasing

the penalty linked to rape. However, AFELL does not limit its fight to rape and war crimes, as it is also fighting on the field of inheritance rights and customary law.

Another women's group that has been active in peace building is the Women In Peace Building Network (WIPNET), a women association present in several countries of West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria), created from the broader West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP). WANEP was created in 1998, facing the need for civil action to counter the civil conflicts raging in West Africa. WIPNET was then created to ensure that women would not be submitted again to a patriarchal society following the end of the war. WIPNET's women started acting from the beginning of the First Liberian Civil War, organizing marches for peace and security from 1991 and attending the peace conference from 1993. The peak of their action happened during the second Liberian civil war, when WIPNET's women met Charles Taylor and after long talks, convinced him to meet with the rebel forces. Strong of the numerous contacts they had in the neighbouring countries, they were able to organize a trip to Sierra Leone, meet the rebel leaders and convince them to participate in the meeting with Taylor. Thus, it was the women's actions that allowed the Accra summit – the peace summit – to happen. However, they were not invited to the peace talk and therefore they organized more demonstrations, but this time in Accra, [Ghana](#), and joined by Ghanaian, Sierra Leonean and Nigerian women. When the 2003 peace agreement was signed, the actions of WIPNET went from resolving the conflict to building peace. An interesting example of the strength of these women can be found during this period: whereas the women were excluded from the disarmament process, they went themselves to the fighters camps to convince them to abandon their weapons. WIPNET's women different actions were featured in a 2008 documentary *Pray the devil back to hell*. This film focuses on the actions that took place during the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign. In particular, it follows the leaderships of Leymah Gbowee and Asatu Ben Kenneth. These two women were respectively members of Christian and Muslim associations and they decided to join their efforts towards peace. They organized sit-in, mass demonstrations and even a sex strike to protest against the war and make men react.

The power of women's networks was evident in the Mano River Women's Peace Network - a formidable linkage of women in three countries with the

common purpose of bringing peace to the West African region. MARWOPNET was established by the West African Women's Association (WAWA) in Abuja in 2000 to lead the process of reconciliation in the Memo River Region (Sierra Leone, Guinea and Liberia) by promoting dialogue and confidence building, coordinating women's peace activities and bringing pressure to bear on states in the union to pursue peace and sustainable processes of conflict resolutions (Hutchful and Aning 2001). The network grew out of the intense desires of a few strong women to put an end to the fighting and suffering caused by conflict. MARWOPNET put forth an initiative to mediate the conflict and disagreement between Guinea and Liberia and dispatched a delegation to appeal to the feuding heads of states in the region. MARWOPNET has issued statements urging ECOWAS and the UN to intervene in the Liberian crisis. MARWOPNET's efforts were commended by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1408 on the situation in Liberia. In 2000, women spoke out against war as the Women in Peace-building Network staged. MARWOPNET has successfully engaged the leaders of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone in achieving a breakthrough in the region between the member states of the organization. Liberia's neighbouring countries played an important role during the conflict: for instance, many fighters took refuge in Guinea and Sierra Leone during the first conflict. The importance of the region was even stronger during the second conflict, when Liberia was engaged in a regional conflict with Guinea and Sierra Leone that supported the rebels of LURD. Facing this regional conflict and the impact on women, Mano River's women got together to solve the conflict in these three countries. Eventually, they succeeded in this task by having the three respective leaders of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea to meet in Rabat in 2002. On this subject an anecdote is reported by *African Renewal* when the MARWOPNET delegation went to Guinea to convince President Conté to come and sit at a table next to Charles Taylor, the President answered to their offer: "What man do you think would say that to me? Only a woman could do such a thing and get by with it." He finally accepted to participate to the summit admitting: "Many people have tried to convince me to meet with President Taylor. Your commitment and your appeal have convinced me." For its achievements, MARWOPNET received the United Nations Prize in the Field of Human Rights in 2003.

In Sierra Leone, grassroots women's organizations organized public demonstrations and made radio broadcasts to express their desire for an end to fighting. International NGOs have supported the women's groups by

providing meeting places, training, and funding. Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP) a group with the Sierra Leone Women's Forum organized peace marches and raised the level of awareness of women. In Uganda, Betty Bigombe has played a pivotal role in moving forward the peace process between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. Negotiating directly with rebel and government leaders, Bigombe has worked tirelessly, mediating between the two entities, and has made a significant contribution to bringing the country closer to peace.

Despite this notable progress for women over the past decade, their role in peace negotiations women tend to be ignored and they fade into oblivion and do not receive their deserved recognition. In most cases, women's efforts towards peace go unrecognized and are under-reported, as data collected on peace processes is often not disaggregated by gender.

### **Policy Initiatives for Mainstreaming Gender in Conflict Resolution**

Gender mainstreaming is an organisational strategy to bring a gender perspective to all aspects of an institution's policy and activities, through building gender capacity and accountability. According to the Beijing Platform for Action, governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes (Reeves and Baden 2000). Mainstreaming gender implies that both women and men be involved. Since women are often excluded, from mainstream of the peace process, the female gender is to be mainstreamed. Women's involvement and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into conflict prevention processes are essential components towards durable peace, security and reconciliation. This includes the incorporation of gender-sensitive indicators into early warning systems and the strengthening of prevention strategies relating to violence against women.

The issue of gender and conflicts was brought to international attention by the Beijing conference, 'the fourth world Conference on Women : Action for Equality Development and Peace, which took place in Beijing China in 1995, at the international level, the United Nations (UN) has played a leading role in promoting the subject of gender equality in conflict situations by organizing the UN World Women Conferences, first of which took place in Mexico in 1975 followed by that of Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985 and Beijing in 1995. At the end of the Beijing Conference the participants formulated an agenda identifying twelve critical areas of concern for follow-

up. One of these twelve areas of concern for was called Women and armed conflict. Since 1995, the UN, Development organizations and member governments have closely monitored the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In a bid to assess the overall progress in the five years following the Beijing Conference, the UN General Assembly, in resolution 52/100, decided to convene a special session five sessions. At this session entitled Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century, the General Assembly adopted a political Declaration and Platform for Action. The outcome document among other things is that, there is a wider recognition of the fact that the destructive impact of armed conflict is different for women and men and hence the need to integrate a gender perspective in the planning, design and implementation of development aid and humanitarian assistance (Bouta and Frerks 2002). In the same year precisely 31 October 2000, the UN Security Council adopted another resolution (no. 1325) on women, peace and security, reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building. The council emphasized the importance of tier equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. This resolution is generally regarded as one of the most influential recent documents in setting the policy framework for women and armed conflict. The adoption of 1325 marked the first time the Security Council acknowledged the disproportionate effect of armed conflict on women and the lack of women's contributions to conflict prevention. It is a watershed political framework that makes women – and a gender perspective – relevant to negotiating peace agreements, planning refugee camps and peacekeeping operations and reconstructing war-torn societies. On May 31, 2000, the UN Transitional Assistance Group brought out the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibian plan of Action on 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations'. This and a publication from the lessons learned unit at the UN Department for peacekeeping operations, form the most important publications at present for in peace operations, especially in the field. In addition to these, the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs Published a series of Briefing notes on Gender and Disarmament in 2001 elaborating on gender in among others, programmes for determining small arms collection and demobilization and reintegration. Furthermore, the issue of gender and violent conflicts has been longstanding

topics of interest to the organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The OECD established in the 1980s an Expert of Group on Women in Development which was renamed the DAC Working Group on gender Equality in 1998. Its two publications, the DAC Guidelines for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development cooperation and the DAC Resource Book on concepts and approaches linked to Gender Equality. These build on the Beijing Declaration and the platform for action and describe how DAC members' intervention can promote gender equality in situations of conflict. The Task Force on conflict published for the first set of DAC Guidelines on conflict, peace and Development cooperation in 1997 which was later updated and expanded into the publication security issues and Development cooperation: A Conceptual Framework for Enhancing Policy Coherence. This publication discusses the interrelationship between gender and conflict by addressing the need for female military police. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000 recognizes the importance of women in the peace process. Similarly, Articles 40(A) and 44(C) of the ECOWAS Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention Management, Resolution, Peace Keeping and Security also emphasizes the importance of women in conflict resolution. The Windhoek Declaration and Namibian Plan of Action on Mainstreaming Gender in Peace Support Operations underline the Importance of women in Conflict prevention and resolution.

Despite elaborate international and national policy frameworks, women around the world face enormous challenges to their participation in peace-building processes and in translating legal instruments into real rights and concrete change. Furthermore, women's ability to effectively influence peace-building processes is often compromised by the threat or the actual experience of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), which commonly escalates during and after armed conflicts, as well as by continuing obstacles to women's full political participation in many countries. Too often women are neither adequately represented at decision-making levels nor involved in peace negotiations and agreements and women's grassroots organizations and peace initiatives are marginalized or ignored. Further, gender issues are often ignored in post-conflict reconstruction.

### **Reasons for Gender Mainstreaming**

The question is why is women's involvement in the peace process desired? From a gender equity point of view, the answer is that women have equal rights and chances as men on political participation.

In addition, women must be involved in conflict prevention, resolution and management efforts at all levels because they constitute the majority considering their population. When they are not active participants, the views, needs and interests of half of the population are not represented, and therefore interventions will not be as appropriate or enduring.

Furthermore, women can make a positive difference in conflict management, conflict resolution, peace negotiations and peace building. Several studies have shown that women often introduce other experiences with conflict, set other priorities for peace building and rehabilitation, are the sole voice speaking out for women's rights and concerns, manage to form coalitions bridging deep political, ethnic and religious divides and on the basis of their shared interest are regarded as less threatening to the established order thus having more freedom of action, and bring a better understanding of social justice and existing gender inequality to peace negotiations. Women's participation in the actual peace process (talks) can also foster a wider popular mandate for peace, making it more sustainable. Cases of women's involvement in peace talks cited in this study are good examples.

In addition, women often suffer different forms of violence such as rape during conflicts and as such, conflict situations force them to organize themselves in order to safeguard their lives. Even after conflicts, domestic violence against them increases as a result of trauma, stress and social disorder that emerged during and after conflict. Because the consequences of war weigh so heavily on the lives of women, they naturally show great interest in peace processes. In some cases, peace itself may come much later if women are not involved in the process.

Added to the above is the fact that women are naturally peace lovers. A Bridgit Brockton Study by Ferris (1995) revealed that there is an innate ability in women that makes them prefer non-violent actions in their social relations. Babbitt and Pearson-D'Estree (1996) observed that conflict resolution workshops with just women came out with more constructive discussions than group with mixed sex. That is why according to Oluyemi-Kusa (2003), 'men tend to go into negotiations expecting one side to win and

another to lose (whereas) women look for points of commonality and are less afraid to compromise. This admirable trait of talk-to-finish rather than fight-to-finish distinguishes the female gender...in many times when there is a deadlock and men walk away, the women are left at the table.....women often bring a moderate tone, a less aggressive attitude and easier communication and cooperation between warring factions.’

Furthermore, the economic impact of intrastate conflict on women is severe. In addition to poverty and hardship caused by war, women lack access to the means of production in particular, land as the case of women in Rwanda has shown. Some women do not have access to their deceased husband’s property. These problems are solved where the women are involved in the decision making process.

### **Conclusion**

Women constitute more than half of the world’s population. While conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women constitute the major victims. Sexual assault and exploitation are frequently employed as tools of war; victimization leads to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma, and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children. As culturally-designated caregivers, women must struggle to support their families and keep their households together while the traditional bread-winners are caught up in the fighting and are unable to provide for their families. The new role as primary provider exposes many women to further abuse. The Fourth World conference in Women in Beijing in 1995 brought the issue of women and armed conflict to international attention. This was followed by the acceptance of Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. Other departments such as the organization for Economic cooperation and Development (OECD), the organization for security and cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the European Commission, the European Parliament and the conflict of Europe have also developed statements and policies on the topic however, women to continue be marginalized in the area of conflict resolution. The study advocates that women should be mainstreamed in the conflict resolution process. In view of this, the following recommendations are made:

Women must be sensitised about the significant roles that they can play in building a peaceful culture and communities. Our society must be encouraged to develop an integrated approach towards conflict resolution



which involves men, women, and young persons in order to promote a culture of peace, resolve conflicts and increase women's representation at all levels of peace building processes.

For women to effectively play decisive roles in negotiating the peace process, they must be empowered politically and economically, and must be adequately represented at all levels of decision-making. Without a voice in decision-making, women have no access to resources. Without access to resources and to the institutions which shape social norms and attitudes, women will continue to be marginalized. Experience in countries around the world has shown that when women have a voice in the decision-making process, they can often assist in mitigating conflict even before it starts. Program options in this area can be cross-cutting and easily fit into larger objectives, including targeting information campaigns on voter education for women, promoting community-based and/or grassroots organizations that include roles for women, working with state lawmakers to draft laws that guarantee women's participation in parliaments or other decision-making bodies, etc. These and other activities can be incorporated into overall programs, empowering women. Perhaps, the most insidious barrier to women's equal participation in decision-making and leadership, however, is persistent stereotypical attitudes towards the respective gender roles of women and men. To break the cycle of violence and discrimination against women it is vital to change these attitudes both within formal government and within society and both on the part of men and among women themselves. To sustain these efforts and to change attitudes, women need support networks and the support of the international community.

There is need to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements and to address the special needs of women and girls during repatriation, resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post conflict reconstruction. Women must not be treated merely as victims of conflict, but as resourceful actors in all areas of peace building, negotiations, and conflict management.

African governments should strengthen the roles of women in conflict prevention and resolution by:

- collecting best practices of how women's role in the field have been addressed for and should be addressed

- increasing the number of women and gender-sensitize men in the field of conflict-related interventions,
- enhancing the commitment among all staff that deals with the issue of women in armed conflict.
- ensuring that women play a key role in the design and implementation of post-conflict resolution and peace building activities,
- supporting and strengthening women's organisations in their peace building efforts by providing adequate and sustained financial and technical support.
- Strengthening the protection and representation of refugee and displaced women by paying special attention to their health, rehabilitation and training needs.
- ending impunity and ensuring redress of crimes committed against women in violent conflict and enforce and bring to justice culprits involved in rape as a war crime.
- establishing mechanisms for enforcing and monitoring international instruments for the protection of women's rights in post-conflict situations.

There is no doubt that women occupy a most strategic and pivotal position in the African society. Much as ours is a highly male dominated society, there is no gainsaying the fact that our women have a voice that is capable of providing guidance, peace, progress and reason to the rest of the society.

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