

# A Gendered Critique of Women in Peace and Conflict Situations in Africa

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## Abstract

Many African nations have faced conflicts that have caused many deaths, loss of property and the displacement of the populations. Women always represent the majority of the refugees and internally displaced people after the occurrence of a conflict in Africa. In order to build peace in Africa, women must have an active role prior to and after conflicts just like men. In many peace-building processes, women have taken a back seat even though they are the most affected by conflicts. There are many challenges that prevent African women from participating in peace building processes including domestic roles of women, lack of resources, stereotypes against women, low levels of education, lack of empowerment among other challenges. Women in countries such as Liberia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and many other African countries managed to organize themselves into groups in order to agitate for the peace of their countries. Many reforms in African countries are attributed to women; women's groups ensured that there were constitutional changes that could recognize the rights of women. Women have been very successful in ensuring there is peace because they often taken moderate positions and ensure that the welfare of every citizen is protected. African women such as Liberian President have been recognized for their efforts in peace building. However, despite the efforts of many women in mediation, some women took up arms and joined men to go and fight against enemies. Some of the women willingly joined armed groups, but others were compelled to join these groups or face death. The paper looks at different conflicts that have occurred in Africa and the role of women in peace in such conflicts. In a detailed manner, the paper discusses challenges women face in the process of agitating for peace and proposes how these challenges can be overcome.

**Keywords:** Women, Peace and Conflict, Africa

## Introduction

In recent years, Africa nations have encountered different conflicts leading to a lot of suffering and stagnation in development. These conflicts are far from being over since some parts of Africa have become home to some of the deadliest criminal groups. Africa, in the year 2006 alone, experienced about 17 conflicts that resulted in many losses. Among the countries that are in the Horn of Africa, only Djibouti and Tanzania can be categorized as fairly stable countries (Agbalajobi, 2009). Kenya was the epitome of peace in the horn of Africa until the 2007 post-election violence that led to the demise of about 1500 people.

Conflicts in Sudan have existed since mid last century leading to the demise of about two million people. The more than ten years old civil war in Somalia has claimed thousands of souls and many others displaced. Almost one million people are now refugees in the neighboring countries, while million others fled from their homes. Rwanda's conflict between two ethnic groups led to genocide never witnessed in the history of the country (Hunt & Posa, 2001). Over 500000 civilians, mainly from one community in Rwanda, died because of the genocide. The internal conflict that happened in Burundi led to the deaths of thousands of lives and the displacement of over 500000 people.

The consequences of these conflicts have led to immeasurable toll on people's lives, leaving many dead and others displaced either internally or externally. In these devastating situations, women and children are exposed to violence that gravely undermines their rights to get opportunities just like men. Studies indicate that women are the most affected by conflicts and also affected in a different way from that of men. It is now becoming evident that women have exceptional opportunities for resolving conflicts and maintaining peace because of special roles they play in society (Agbalajobi, 2009).

Between 2003 and 2004, African leaders adopted the "Women's Protocol" and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (AU, 2013). The leaders also supported the Security Council's Resolution 1325 of 2000 on Women, Peace and Security (AU, 2013). The documents advocate the participation of women in preventing conflicts and maintaining peace so that there can be reversal of marginalization and observing human rights. The "Women's Protocol" has been very supportive to women; the protocol has helped many African countries to realize gender parity.

These commitments are supported by some guidelines of the AU. Some of these principles include the promotion of gender equality (AU has mandated a 50% representation of women in its bodies). Supporting Security Council Resolution 1325, AU's Gender Policy (2009) demands effective involvement of women in peace practices, conflict mitigation, supporting post-conflict development efforts and involving women in the maintenance of peace and security (AU, 2013).

### **Conflicts in the Africa**

The modern Africa faces the reality of how different countries are grappling with the certainty of conflicts. The fledgling institutions in these countries lack the capacity to face the huge expectation released by occasional conflicts. Africa has suffered from internal conflicts than any other continent in the world. Between the period of 1960 and 2000, Africa experienced about 35 conflicts; seven million people died and over nine million people were displaced. In the year 1996 alone, 14 African countries faced various conflicts that contributed to more than half of war-related fatalities on the globe. The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) crisis involved different States and millions of people who live in the Great Lakes region (Hunt & Posa, 2001).

These conflicts in Africa have severely affected the continent's efforts to ensure stability, social-economic development, individual rights, and strengthening of economies. For instance, the about 20-year old civil war in Sudan led to the demise of many people and the dislocation of about five million people. The civil war caused great poverty and starvation to Sudan and its people (Hunt & Posa, 2001). Countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea diverted most of their national budgets to enhance their military in their war that claimed close to half a million lives. The two countries later faced famine and affected livelihoods for many people, mostly women and children.

Conflicts in Africa have been changing in nature in the last few years despite efforts to stop them. Interstate conflicts have resulted in internal civil wars that cause loss of lives and property of civilians (Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). The 1994 Rwandan genocide will for a long time remain to be one of the deadliest massacres in the Africans books. The modern day conflicts do not aim at conquering the opponents but at inflicting pain and killing civilians. The attacks destroy civilians' identity and sense of community, erode institutions that are involved in the provision of sustainability of societies and weaken values of a society by replacing them with violence. Women are the main targets; rape, assault, and sexual slavery are now deliberate instruments when different parties are fighting (Mazurana & Carlson, 2004). These acts of violence destroy the bonds that exist in communities. These acts of violence make gender equality and human rights issues features of conflict resolution. It is critical that attempts towards conflict resolutions in Africa involve women at all stages.

Different conflicts have wrecked the continent of Africa in the last few decades. Few steps have been taken towards a peaceful existence despite many peace processes that are taking place (Vincent, 2001). A cold war featuring Ethiopia and Eritrea extended its tentacles into Somalia. Eritrea supported Al-Shabaab as it fought Somalia government, an Addis Ababa-supported government (Marchal, 2013). Al-Shabaab has on many occasions attacked Kenya, most recently being 2013 where it killed about 70 people in Nairobi. Both Sudan and South Sudan have supported revolts in each other's territory in many occasions. Sudanese Janjaweed has attacked the eastern part of Chad and the Central African Republic, killing innocent civilians. Kony's Lord's Resistance Army has attacked the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), CAR, and South Sudan while Congo's civil war led to cross-border fights from Rwanda and Uganda (Lemarchand, 2007). In many conflicts that occur in Africa, illegal groups or governments empower armed groups to gain control of unstable nations. Shockingly, mediators have mainly focused on the most powerful military players.

### **Women as combatants in wars**

Contrary to some beliefs, women comprise a significant percentage of militias in Africa's in-fights. As militias, women fight alongside men and they are responsible for many deaths and damages in different wars. Women fight for various reasons that include registering their opposition towards dictatorial governments and showing solidarity with their affiliations. The affiliations can be political, religious or economical depending on the state of people. In many circumstances, however, women are forcefully recruited into rebellious groups. Kidnapped women are compelled to take up arms when faced with a scenario of killing or be killed. In the civil wars of Burundi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and other few countries, women were compelled to engage in wars (Jackson, 2014).

During the war in Congo, thousands of child soldiers were given guns and commanded to fight their enemies. Of the about 30000 child soldiers, between 30%-40% were girl children. Besides fighting together with male

counterparts, these young girls were involved in sex slavery. The UN argues that in the Sierra Leone conflict; about 12% of the fighters were women while the rest were men (Jackson, 2014). Due to societal opinions of gender roles, the participation of women in this civil war was ignored. Africa is a patriarchal society; therefore, the efforts of women in wars can be forgotten unlike those of men.

### **Women as victims in conflicts**

The instruments of civil wars and conflicts cannot make a difference between civilians and combatants. Although it was the case in the past, modern day weapons are predominantly fatal for civilians. Just like men, women are victims of murder, persecution, forced disappearance, and assault during civil wars. Women are more likely to be the casualties of gender violence compared to their male counterparts who can protect themselves. Gender-based crimes include rape, forced prostitution and marriage, and many other inhuman acts. During the Mozambique civil war, the feet, hands, and arms of some women were cut off to restrict them from performing domestic work for their enemies. Today, the amputees cannot effectively support their families by doing work (Jackson, 2014). Their physical challenges cannot allow them to carry out their household duties that will help them.

The UN Security Council has recognized rape as a weapon of war in many conflicts around the world. The recognition was agreed unanimously by UNSC (Jackson, 2014). In the resolution, the body recognized that the affected women did not deserve what happened to them and that the victims should not be blamed for the atrocity done against them. The UNSC acknowledged that rape is used as a weapon of war in many conflicts since it can help destroy communities. In addition, the Rome Statute acknowledges rape as a form of genocide and this makes it a very grave crime. It is regarded as genocide if the intention of the act is to wipe out certain communities.

Individuals responsible for getting food, water, and other basic needs suffer great hardship when war disrupts normal life because crops, sources of water, and markets are affected. War causes malnutrition and illnesses to affect many families. War can displace women and children from their homes; many of them will find themselves in refugee camps (Jackson, 2014). Women refugees are susceptible to material hardship and the likelihood of exploitation. Refugees' lives, in many cases, become humanitarian crises, and many of them will never go back to their countries. Hostilities among communities during civil wars badly affect women, although they rarely participate in these hostilities.

### **Causes of conflicts in Africa**

Africa is an immensely varied continent with different histories, geographical settings, economic development, public policies and patterns of interactions. Conflict occurs because of a clash of interests when parties or countries are relating to each other and pursuing different goals. Although the word '*war*' can be used as another name for *conflict*, it confines the denotation of war to brutal conflicts. Just like war, '*conflict*' is another way of settling disputes between wrangling groups in the society (Oyeniyi, 2011). Africa boasts of being diverse: diverse in ethnic groups, religion, and socio-cultural matters.

The Horn of Africa negatively boasts of all the bad things existing in the world's agenda. These challenges include tribal animosity, religious intolerance, civil war, refugees, famine, and the disintegration of states. South Africa's racial biases still occur from time to time, though the country has made a very big stride its eradication. The north part of Africa still faces the challenge of Islamic extremism. The causes of conflicts and civil wars in Africa are many and they keep occurring including causes of potential tensions that can be summarized in the following ways as Oyeniyi (2011) proposed

*Inter-state borders:* Inter-state borders conflicts contribute to a majority of disputes in many African states. Almost all African borders were marked in colonial times. These borders were the result of talks and treaties between and amongst colonial authorities decided in foreign countries with the assistance of poor maps and failure to involve Africans. At independence, many governments did not make any adjustments, as African countries did not obtain independence in the same year.

The existing state structures in Africa do not gratify the aspirations for cultural identity, sovereignty, economic democracy, and freedom of various nationalities living in certain countries. The ease with which dissenters of a government are harbored in neighboring countries and militias trained there causes inter-state conflicts.

*Poor economic performance:* The main reason for conflicts in Africa is the disastrous economic situation of many African nations. Together with the problem of debt, low flow of capital into many countries, and foreign

aid assistance can lead to conflict. In early 1990s, a former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali argued that the main causes of conflict include economic misery, social injustice, and political repression. Amidst poverty in Africa, the elite group that has power enriches itself. The political class attracts envy/rivalry from other elite groups. Some groups galvanize armed groups to attack certain people they consider enemies of their people.

*Ethnicity:* Ethnicity has continued to be a primary cause of disagreements in Africa. The creation of independent states was characterized by immediate calls for unity by the new leaders who were fully aware of the challenge in overcoming ethnic and regional loyalties. The European notion of a country was brought to Africa without considering its characteristics.

There are quite a number of pro-self-rule movements attempting to break away such as Katanga (Zaire), Biafra (Nigeria), and others in countries such as Somalia. Ethnic differences and rivalry are the main cause of military coup. Personal rivalry between Idi Amin and the incumbent led to a coup in Uganda. Idi Amin recruited soldiers loyal to him in Sudan; a tribe of his, which had been split during colonial times. Sudanese troops participated in that coup to allow Amin to take over power. Using foreign soldiers tends to intensify the abuse of human rights impose on civilians as the troops have little empathy with the people they are taken to control.

*Political:* Political causes of conflicts assume ideological/political movements, territorial controls, and religious intolerance against other states. Political factors align to regional rivalries, terrorism, compulsion or disrespecting the economies of other countries.

*Domestic politics:* Domestic politics can easily lead to conflicts, and they include agitations for power, hostility, over-population, economic and religious differences, tyranny, and tribal violence connected to economic, religious, cultural, social or ethnic matters.

*Persecution:* Persecution signifies abuses of human rights, displacing people, poverty, or instability because of ineffective government, rampant corruption by the government, and other forms of injustices.

*Military:* A country can decide to attack another country or support rebels fighting that country. Inter-state takeover and hostility can lead to many conflicts between and amongst different countries.

### **Role and impact of women in peace and conflict in selected countries**

The involvement of women is needed if the process of making peace in any nation is to succeed. If half the population of any country is discriminated, the peace process can face very many challenges. Female peace builders can bring a different perspective in resolving any conflict that exists in a country. The role of women in peace and conflict has been recognized in many resolutions by well-meaning organizations. The Nobel Peace Prize honored to Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2011 was the recognition of the role of women in ensuring that order exists (Jones, 2013). Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman are also some of the women who have been acknowledged for supporting peace in their respective countries and the world. Although women have played a pivotal role in peace processes around the globe, they have continued to be sidelined in various peace processes (Jones, 2013).

Women can help in order maintenance since the effects of conflicts in different countries on both genders differs significantly. Men comprise the majority of detainees caused by civil wars and conflicts in Africa. Men are also likely to get wounds or murdered because they are the ones who can easily join militia groups. The effects of conflicts on women and children are enormous. Women are easy targets of militia attacks and are prone to marginalization, poverty, and other challenges connected to conflicts (Porter, 2003). Women are susceptible to sexual exploitation and physical insecurity, matters that lead to stigmatization in the society. Women can be vulnerable if they are considered as just bearers of cultural identity and children attendants. In situations where women are also militias, they carry another burden assigned to them by family roles. Family roles dictate that women primary roles are to take care of families during times of conflicts, and not peace building.

Women are now playing a big role in peace and conflict resolutions in many parts of the world including Africa. The reality is now dawning, not only in Africa, but also in other continents that women play an important role in maintaining peace. Right from the ground, activities such as humanitarian assistance, disarmament, children care, and exchange of hostage are very instrumental in the process of maintaining peace and resolving conflicts (Porter, 2003). Women have managed to extend their roles to be a political agenda, and their grassroots efforts have served as vehicles that motivate people to get involved in the struggle for peace.

Women have shared concerns that they may want to address for the last time. They include getting access to schools, hospitals, health care, clean water, and nutrition. These concerns may become hard to get if there is no peace. Because of the above reasons, women must be involved in confidence-building plans and enhancing reconciliation during and after the occurrence of conflicts (Adebajo, 2002). Women's organizations can mobilize their members across party lines and help to build consensus when making peace agreements. Women networks are some of the strongest proponents of open and accountable governance in Africa. Additionally, women create national groups that help in peace building for future peace and gender equality issues.

Describing women as just victims of war should not be entertained. Different groups of women have done a commendable job in their countries under various circumstances. The efforts of women to ensure that their families survive have affected the number of women who can participate in peace processes. Since there are few women who are courageous enough to participate in peace-making initiatives, they should be protected by getting funding, training and inclusion in offices of power (Adebajo, 2002). When women's movements are properly supported, their peace efforts can affect a large portion of the population. Their efforts can help reduce violence and build democratic institutions in the post-conflict period. These groups must be recognized at the onset of peacemaking initiatives and helped to communicate their points to communities around them.

In order to make the society support and understand women's issues, women must participate in the making and implementation of initiatives such as truth and justice commissions, and ensure there is adequate representation in both courts and parliament. In Rwanda, almost 50% of the seats in the lower house comprises of women while another 35% of women make up the Upper House of parliament (Daley, 2006). A continuous effort by women in the Liberian peace process was instrumental in the appointment of some women as commissioners of the country's Truth Commission. Gender-sensitive initiatives were also implemented, 35% of testimonies given to the Commission came from women.

#### The case of Liberian women

During the Liberian civil war, women's groups worked so hard to bring fighting groups to negotiate in order to allow the country to enjoy peace. Women's effort allowed Liberia to return to normalcy, and it has even elected a female president. It was noted that women voted in large numbers in the election of 2005 and they contribute a large number of elected leaders (Adebajo, 2002). Women's efforts show how well-organized grassroots groups can launch inclusive peace building exercise. The civil societies of this country face the challenge of shifting from grassroots groups to nationally recognized groups.

The Women concerned with the maintenance of peace rallied other women to come together in the early days of the conflict. These groups staged public awareness in early 1990's to support peace in that country. By 1993, these groups started to participate in peace talks. The calmness after the first peace-agreement and the election of 1999 did not last for long. The civil war started again in 2000, and women's groups intensified their efforts to rally women to demand peace. A defining moment for women in Liberia occurred in the country's peace process when the former President, Charles Taylor, requested them to locate the rebel leaders and call them to the negotiating table (Adebajo, 2002).

The women organized for a trip to Sierra Leone where they met some of the opposing camp's leaders who had sought asylum there. The women helped to arrange negotiations between the then Liberian president and the opposing camp's leaders. The Liberian women earned a reputation of being objective in the peace process (Jones, 2013). Later, because of the cruelty of the war, women's groups led a mass action to face and engage the rebels directly. The women travelled everywhere in their country; their negotiation with the rebel leaders was critical in allowing for the disarmament process.

#### The case of South African women

'Women for Peace' was formed in 1976 in connection to the Soweto uprisings to condemn apartheid and enhance inter-racial understanding at all levels. Just after the apartheid period, women joined hands to lobby for a constitution that support women. These women advocated the implementation of various socio-economic reconciliation programs. Before the 1994 South Africa elections, women formed National Women's Coalition that encompassed many lines that were instrumental in maintaining the peace accord (Gobodo-Madikizela et. al, 2011). The women also participated in the review of the South Africa's Constitution that included the Bill of Rights. National Women's Coalition assisted in the agreement of setting the one-third quota for women in parliament. Opportunities for women helped Patience Pashe, a South African woman, to be the head of the Alexandra Peace Accord Committee (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011).

#### The case of Eritrean and Ethiopian women

When Eritrea and Ethiopia were fighting over boundary, Eritrean women mobilized each other and organized mass demonstrations to call for an end to war with their neighborhood. In Sierra Leone, a network of women's groups informed the public about the Lomé Peace Accord. They also called for greater involvement in the role of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration. Mali women helped to take the peace process to the local level. They were involved in building consensus across every society and encouraging conflicting parties to be involved in dialogues in order to implement the National Pact of 1992 (Agbalajobi, 2009).

#### The case of Somali women

Somalia women played a big role to ensure the civil war in their country come to an end. The women were involved in bringing Somalia warlords to place where they could talk. The Somalia Peace and Reconciliation Conference (SPRC) held in 2000 in Djibouti involved women in the negotiations (Daley, 2006). Earlier in this century, the women from Burundi coming from opposing sides of the conflict called for gender parity in the peace process. The late Nelson Mandela, who played a very important role, facilitated the peace process. Many proposals from Somali women were included in the final agreement of the peace-building process.

#### The case of Congolese women

Congo has continuously been faced with civil wars. The Congolese women registered in large numbers as voters and participated in elections for them to have a voice in the governance of their country. Although many Congolese women have registered as voters, they are still under-represented in the National offices. These women still face sexual attacks such as rape, and they are being committed with impunity (Whitman, 2007). For them to fight for their human rights and ensure there is peace in their country, Congolese women organize themselves into groups. These groups are used as avenues to sensitize women on the need for peace and how to influence the society to ensure that there is a peaceful co-existence. In modern days, some Congolese women have found their way into powerful political seats.

#### The case of Rwandese women

Various community groups such as the Widows Association emerged just after Rwanda's genocide to deal with the psychosocial and living needs of members. In the last few years, different women's groups came together (about 35 women's groups) to support reconciliation and peace. In 1997, Rwandese women group received an award from UNESCO in recognition of its effort to support reconciliation and peace (Bop, 2002). These groups focused on advocacy and lobbying that allowed women to get a chance to participate in political and economic arenas. The women successfully fought for property rights of women, and spoke against violence against women. Women's groups managed to influence warring parties to work together and build their country.

#### The case of Sudanese women

Women from South Sudan who were displaced from their countries began assembling in different groups in Nairobi, Kenya. The earlier group consisted of 600 and together with their children from various tribes and linguistic groups (Pankhurst, 2003). The majority of women were single heads of their families and mainly illiterate with just a few who had gone to school and received education.

The part of the women of Sudan to peace building varies depending on their region. Sudanese women participate in maintaining peace through civil society since they were excluded from the main peace negotiations. Women activists are concerned with the return of refugees and other fugitives and to increase the capacity of women to participate in democratic processes. Looking at both the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) and the Darfur Peace Agreement (2006), they fail to provide an assurance that women will play a critical role in implementing those agreements (Wolf, 2014). In Sudan, there is no enough representation of women in the corridor of power and other positions. At the ground, women work tirelessly to ensure the community lives harmoniously, and the rights of women are protected at all cost.

Three women are part of the on-going negotiating team in Addis Ababa between the government of South Sudan and Sudanese rebels. These groups are playing a critical role in a field dominated by men; the three women are members of the national parliament. War in South Sudan re-started in December 2013 between the government and rebels led by a former Vice-President Riak Machar (Wolf, 2014). The peace initiative has been on in Ethiopia since January 2014 and both delegations have 10 members.

#### The case of Ugandan women

Uganda has made great strides to ensure that women participate in decision-making and peace-building

processes. Women's movements in Uganda are well-organized and well-funded by donors and other well-wishers unlike women's groups in other Africa countries. These organizations rely on networking to advance their vision of ensuring that Uganda is a peaceful country (Daley, 2006). With a lot of consultation, dedication to learning different things, budgetary muscle, and strong leadership, women's groups in Uganda have become pillars of peace in their country. Women efforts have ensured that the country enjoys stability and peace for almost two decades now.

#### The case of Sierra Leone women

Sierra Leone, a West African country, is still recuperating from an atrocious war that ravaged the country for about 11 years (Adebajo, 2002). Women felt the wrath of the civil war and are still trying to get access to politics, education, and social-cultural resources. Despite some reforms, since the end of civil war, Sierra Leonean women continue to remain unrepresented in the national politics. Despite their little representation in the national politics, women's groups are playing a critical role in promoting peace and the need to increase women's representation in national offices.

Sierra Leone's women group, 'Women's Situation Room for peaceful elections' managed to mobilize women to participate in peace processes. The group employed the experiences of women in mitigating conflicts and any threat that could emerge before and after general elections. The group's mandate was to create an opportunity for consultations with responsible parties and motivate women to participate in elections, negotiation, coordination, and political analysis. Although there were so many bottlenecks against the efforts of women, the group made a huge impact (Adebajo, 2002).

#### Challenges Africa women encounter

Women's experiences show that despite their successes, they still continue to feel marginalized and disregarded. Women hunt for peace for their countries that is grounded in freedom and social justice. These women, at the same time, are trying to fight for gender rights against many structural factors that favor social and gender inequalities and hamper leadership of women.

There are many challenges that women face as they attempt to get a place on the negotiating table. Many African women are not well-represented at important levels of decision-making in their countries. Among about 150 leaders who attended the United States 2000 Millennium Summit in New York, only four leaders were women; none of the four leaders in the meeting came from Africa. The four countries represented by women were New Zealand, Finland, Bangladesh and Latvia (Tripp et. al, 2009). Measures involving quotas and a certain percentage of women in positions can help women gain advantage and change the agendas of parliament. Just having more women in national positions may not be satisfactory. The participation of women in various arms of government is critical, and this needs to be an aspect of public life.

The other main challenge that faces African women is gender violence. Gender-based violence is prevalent not just in Africa, but also many other areas of the world. Violence that faces women during conflicts is still a common feature. Civilian victims who are mainly women and children contribute to a larger percentage of war-related deaths (Lemarchand, 2007). Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) has included rape as a crime against humanity, such cases are still high. Authorities must add effort to defend the rights of their people in all circumstances. The world must not rest until there are enough laws to deal with sexual violence crimes.

As witnessed in the Burundi peace process, peace accords resolutions failed to involve women as players in the peace process. The Burundi peace agreement language was not strong enough as it denied women the opportunity to contribute in the process of making peace (Lemarchand, 2007). Many societies refer to women, elderly and crippled persons as vulnerable groups. Women are considered as hopeless victims, victims who cannot take control of their lives.

The following are additional challenges that women face in their quest of participating in the peace and conflicts-resolution processes (Mpangala, 2004):

**Lack of enough skills in lobbying techniques:** For many years, women have always faced seclusion from politics and other decision-making opportunities. It, therefore, implies that women lack a chance to play a part in politics. Without a political stage, women will not get a chance to participate in the process of making peace.

**Lack of political muscle:** Many women lack ideological frameworks that could give them a strong say in matters concerning their issues. Conflict resolutions are a political activity that requires a proper strategy to be successful.

**Lack of resources:** Many women lack enough resources that will allow them support their course. In some

situations, they cannot access the media to boost their peace efforts because they lack resources to support their activities. In many cases, women are not involved in fund-raising activities unlike their male counterparts who are actively involved. Many women work voluntarily on the ground and use their own resources to support peace-building processes.

**Lack of visibility:** Peace building activities connected to women are restricted to the sideline of official in peace talks. Additionally, when women get involved in peace building, they do not get an opportunity to contribute in a formal way. Representation of women does not mean active participation when making decisions in peace agreements. Additionally, once peace-building process has ended, many women revert to their normal activities, thus losing their public presence. The losses make it hard for them to return to the former state when resolution begins.

### **Overcoming challenges for women in the peace building process**

There is a greater need to rise above the challenges that prevent women from taking part in the process of maintaining peace before and after the conflict. Women should use the lacuna existing after the conflict because of a weakened patriarchal order and come up with active women's groups. These groups need to be formed early in time before it is too late when traditions come back and dominate over women. Women's movements must be sustained through the conflicts and post-conflicts. These movements need to help mend fences between different groups, thus boosting the struggle for the rights of women without necessarily waiting for the end of the conflicts. For African women to be successful in the process of maintaining peace they must be well organized, and fight for institutional and political representation. They must also create cohesion through different networks (Pankhurst, 2003).

The international community needs to assist women to actively and effectively participate in processes that will lead to stability in Africa. The international community must help promote gender equity and change laws that promote gender inequality. Some of these laws continue to discriminate women, and constitutional and judicial reforms can play a big part in supporting women's initiatives (Pankhurst, 2003). Women must be given access to economic resources and allowed to participate actively in elections. Although women's groups have made various contributions in their countries, gender parity mechanisms created are still very weak.

Peace initiatives in Africa must support women's organizations and ensure that resources are available for women so that they can do something in peace-building processes (Pankhurst, 2003). There is a need to have discussions with women's groups and identify ways in which they can help to maintain peace in their communities. African governments must ensure that women obtain necessary information that will empower women and ensure that they can participate in the processes of peace building.

The UN and various countries must offer enough protection to refugees and internally displaced women by ensuring that their needs are catered for. These women need health care, rehabilitation, education among other issues (Pankhurst, 2003). Governments must ensure that they bring impunity to an end, and prosecute those involved in crimes against humanity. They must also ensure that women's rights are protected by being enshrined in the constitution. Constitutional amendments can help women realize their rights of participating in building their countries.

Women must be trained as advocates of policies to help them draft important policies. Women organizations need to be trained to shift from grassroots activities to developmental work. Women must gain skills that will allow them to work efficiently in different backgrounds. However, capacity training may not be enough for these women. Improvements of basic education, knowledge, and skills of life will help to progress the ability of women to influence policies. Some people believe that when you empower a woman, you have empowered the whole community.

Women need economic empowerment. There is a need to include policies that will give accessibility of markets to both men and women (Daley, 2006). Countries' economic policies must put more investment towards female farmers by providing opportunities to participate in development. The modern society must acknowledge women's leadership and entrepreneurship, not seeing them as just domestic workers. Proper economic policies such as creation of women's funds can go a long way to help women start businesses that will help them.

Coalition building efforts at all levels must be enhanced and merged (Daley, 2006). A main priority is the development of women's alliances at the national level with active involvement of grass-root based women's organizations. The facilitation of women to participate in international negotiations, peace-building efforts and

development ethics is a significant capacity building practice. Networking and alliances with internationally-recognized women's rights organizations is critical in promoting international learning and advocacy for supporting the rights of women to peace and development.

### Conclusion

In order to maintain peace, stakeholders must involve women in every level of the process of building peace. Despite this fact, many formal peace-building processes are under the control of men, and women are made to be victims of conflicts. Different attempts have been proposed to make sure that a gender viewpoint plays a critical role in maintaining peace. For instance, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 advises member countries to allow participation of women in making decisions at various levels of governance. In addition, Africa Union (AU) has also been in the forefront to advocate for the rights of women. The organization has appointed several women to lead some of its arms. Many years after UN's resolution 1325, prejudice against women is still prevalent. However, there are positive signs that women across Africa are getting opportunities to effectively participate in peace building processes.

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