

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

THE ROLE OF UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS
IN PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF DEMOCRATIC
REPUBLIC OF CONGO

OWUOR VERONICA ALUOCH


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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented to any other university for award of a degree.

Signature 

Date: 1 December 2021

Veronica Aluoch Owuor

Candidate

Reg No: R47/38638/2020

Supervisor

This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as University of Nairobi supervisor.

Signature



Date 1 December 2021

Ms. Winnie Rugutt

Supervisor

Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies

University of Nairobi

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the women serving in the military forces and those who have struggled to ensure that there is a great improvement in the integration of women in peace support programs.

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I would like to express my special thanks to my supervisor Ms. Winnie Rugutt of University of Nairobi, Institute of Diplomacy and International Studies (IDIS) for tirelessly dedicating her time to advise and guide me throughout my research on “The Role of United Nations Peacekeeping Female Engagement Teams in Peace Support Operations in Africa: A case study of Democratic Republic of Congo”. Special thanks also go to Defence Staff College (DSC) for providing me with logistical support during my research.

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ABSTRACT

For many years, women have faced disparities when it comes to military activities. While many countries now allow women to join the military, they still face discrimination when it comes to selection to serve in peacekeeping missions. Despite the challenges, a number of female teams have emerged that play a key role in peace support operations. This study sought to examine the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa: A case study of Democratic Republic of Congo. The main objective of the study was to examine the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa, a case of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The three specific objectives used to guide the study were: to Analyze the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations, examine the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa and assess the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The study used descriptive research design to collect both primary and secondary data. The study was hinged on the standpoint theory of feminism and international relations. This theory assumes that gender plays a key role in in structuring how people perceive global matters, in this case, the participation of women in peace support operations in Africa. The study found that there are efforts to have women take part adequately in peace support operations through the four main pillars: participation, protection, post-conflict reconstruction and prevention. The study also found that in as much as FETs have served in a number of countries in Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Mali and Somalia, they are still characterized by limited and stereotyped roles where women are assigned “softer” roles as compared to men. Lastly, the study found that the role of the FETs in the DRC was effective because female peacekeepers play a key role in ensuring that they act as role models in the host nation environment, inspiring girls and women in societies where males have been shown to dominate to participate in social justice duties and push for their own rights. The study recommends that the UN should develop proper guidelines on the operations of the female engagement teams; there is need to change the narrative and perception about the abilities of female soldiers in Africa; and African countries should come up with gender-balanced policies that promote the growth and development of female soldiers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background of the Study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	5
1.3 Research Questions.....	6
1.4 Objectives of the Study.....	6
1.4.1 General Objective.....	6
1.4.2 Specific Objectives.....	6
1.5 Literature Review.....	7
1.5.1 Theoretical Literature.....	7
1.5.2 Empirical Literature.....	12
1.6 Justification of the Study.....	21
1.6.1 Academic Justification.....	21
1.6.2 Policy Justification.....	21
1.7 Theoretical Framework.....	22
1.8 Hypotheses of the Study.....	24
1.9 Methodology.....	24
1.10 Scope and Limitations.....	25
1.11 Chapter Outline.....	26
CHAPTER TWO	27
FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS (FET) AND PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS	27
2.0 Introduction.....	27
2.1 Gender Perspectives in Peace Operations.....	27
2.2 FET and Peacekeeping Operations.....	29
2.3 Challenges Facing FET in Peace Operations.....	33

2.4 Chapter Summary.....	36
CHAPTER THREE	37
FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS IN AFRICAN PEACE SUPPORT PROGRAMS	37
3.0 Introduction.....	37
3.1 Composition of FETs in Africa.....	37
3.2 Limited and Stereotyped Role.....	38
3.3 Embedded in Cultural Norms.....	42
3.4 Lower Numbers.....	43
3.5 Chapter Summary.....	44
CHAPTER FOUR.....	45
FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS AND THE PURSUIT FOR PEACE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO	45
4.0 Introduction.....	45
4.1 The Current State of DRC.....	45
4.2 Effectiveness of the Role of FET in the DRC.....	46
4.3 Challenges	51
4.4 Chapter Summary.....	53
CHAPTER FIVE	54
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	54
5.0 Introduction.....	54
5.1 Summary of Key Findings	54
5.2 Conclusions.....	55
5.3 Recommendations	56
REFERENCES	58

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CST	Cultural Support Teams
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FET	Female Engagement Teams
GFP	Gender Focal Points
GFS	Gender Field Advisors
GHANBATT	Ghana Battalion
IR	International Relations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MINUSCA	United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
TCC	Troop Contributing Countries
UN	United Nations
UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peace Operations
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolutions
WIPNET	Women in Peacebuilding Networks Programme
WPS	Women Peace and Security

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This chapter is the introduction to this study which examines the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa: a case of Democratic Republic Congo. It covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, literature review, justification of the study, theoretical framework, study hypotheses, methodology, and scope and limitation of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Since the end of the cold war, the world has faced a number of conflicts that have underlined the importance of peace and security at an “international level. Most of the violent conflicts that confronted the international community in the aftermath of the Cold War were not products of power relations among states.”¹ Instead, they emanated from countries with structural inequities, religious or ethnic tensions or poor governance.

Peacekeeping is an effective tool employed by the United Nations (UN) to offer aid to affected countries as they try to overcome the underlying difficulties facing a transition from conflict to peace.² According to the UN Department of Peace Operations (UNDPO), “peacekeeping refers to activities that tend to create conditions that favour lasting peace.” Within the UN group of nation-

¹ Sabrina K and Kyle B, “*Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States*” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

² United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Handbook. “*Department of Peacekeeping Operations*,” 2013.

state “governments and organizations, there is a general understanding that at the international level, peacekeepers monitor and observe peace processes in post-conflict areas and may assist ex-combatants in implementing peace agreement commitments that they have undertaken. Such assistance may come in many forms, including confidence-building measures, power-sharing arrangements, electoral support, strengthening the rule of law, and economic and social development.”³

Historically, women more than men, form the majority key players on- the- ground when it comes to formulating conflict initiatives to implement peace agreements.⁴ For this reason, they must be fundamental agents in the peacebuilding process. Women are skilled negotiators in the peacebuilding process capable of solving problems across diverse ethnic, religious, political, and cultural segregations.⁵ Several social science findings show that women are more inclined to dialogues and compromise working together with communities to establish channels of reconciliation. Women have the upper hand in the peace reconciliation efforts due to their role as mothers which makes them seem less threatening.

In the last two decades, the United Nations peace operations have advanced towards gender streamlining and equality.⁶ However, fulfilling and surpassing the underlying objectives is part of a crucial incorporation for women in uniform. That integration needs a clear comprehension of the hinderances and the impracticable prospects that women in uniform encounter.⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Anderlini S. “Women Peace and Security in the Time of Corona,” London School of Economics and Politics, March 25, 2020.

⁷ Rosie S. “The 3rd Sex: Gender and Contemporary Conflict,” Wavell Room, January 29, 2019.

From the military perspective, the efforts to incorporate women has been through FETs, but the mechanisms involved are ad hoc, which means that they lack standardized training or definitive policy or.⁸ Female Engagement Teams have been in existence for close to a decade. It is comprised of female military personnel of different rank and file. “United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325” and then thereafter the “Women Peace and Security (WPS)” resolutions “have influenced UN peacekeeping documents and policies, at least on a rhetorical level, as most peacekeeping operations’ mandates refer to women or gender. Many hail this as a positive development, pointing out that these references to gender in mission mandates and UN Security Council resolutions signal a commitment to gender equality, and particularly to women’s representation at all levels of peacekeeping and peace processes.”⁹ Coupled with international and national efforts to establish “benchmarks for women’s participation, these developments signal progress toward gender equality. This progress has manifested itself across peace and security institutions and processes, including political transitions, negotiations, peace processes, national armed forces and police, and UN peace operations.”¹⁰

Between 1957 and 1989, the UN only had about twenty female military officers serving as its peacekeepers. However, this number has risen; as of January 2020, the UN has actively deployed uniformed women, who now account for approximately 6.4% of service officers.¹¹ This upsurge was gradual. According to Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley point out, “the integration of women into peacekeeping operations coincided with a strategic shift from men observing and monitoring peace in conflict-ridden countries” to peacekeepers, transforming local-based entities and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ UN Department of Peace Operations, “Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028,” pp. 4–6.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ UN Department of Peace Operations, “The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping: Handbook,” 2020.

affirming that assorted cultures, for instance, gender equality, are integrated.¹² The criteria for this transformation was put in a 2009 report from the “UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations” and “Department of Field Support.”

Africa as a continent has experienced conflict in different sub regions. In East Africa, there has been protracted armed conflict in South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Burundi.¹³ In West and Central Africa, the conflicts have been experienced in DRC, Mali, Central Africa Republic, Ivory Coast and Liberia. These conflicts have exposed the vulnerability “of women and children to conflict related sexual violence which includes rape, sexual slavery and mutilation. Sexual violence is often used as a tactic of war and terrorism by the armed groups and rebel organizations.”¹⁴ In response to these issues facing women and girls, on 31 October 2000, “the UN Security Council passed resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which calls for the participation of women in peace processes and the protection of women and girls and respect for rights. Member states then started to develop action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.”¹⁵ This year marks 20 years of the Resolution.”¹⁶

The inclusion of women in peace support operations leads to more effective peacekeeping by strengthening the protection efforts of peacekeepers, raising awareness of women’s concerns , moderating the behaviour of male cohort which may reduce incidents of sexual exploitation and

¹² Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹³ UN Peacekeeping, “Female Rwandan Police Officers Empower Vulnerable Women and Children in UN Protection Site,” October 1, 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Alex J. Bellamy and Paul D. “*Broadening the Base of United Nations Troop- and Police-Contributing Countries,*” Providing for Peacekeeping No.1 (New York: International Peace Institute, August 2012).

¹⁶ Ibid.

improving operational effectiveness.¹⁷ The 2015 High Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations identified the vital role that uniformed women play in engaging women and girls in local communities in order to improve planning and responses by peacekeepers. From this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa, a case study of FET in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

For many years, most UN peacekeeping missions have been masculinized, leaving female officers in the periphery. A number of military scholars have perceived the peacekeeping missions and other military roles from a physicality point of view. While “hard skills” are emphasized in most military activities, “soft skills” are rarely recognized. However, recent literature shows that the success of peacekeeping missions depends on soft skills, which are prevalent in female officers. Adding female engagement teams to combat units, besides ensuring a gender outlook to military activities in general, has the latent to introduce new competences and thereby also advance the effectiveness of operations.

Despite the evidence that female engagement teams can play a critical role in boosting peacekeeping operations in Africa and the UN Security Council resolution 1325 that mandates women to participate in peace processes, the role of female engagement teams in peacekeeping missions is still not profound. From this problem, this study seeks to examine the role of United

¹⁷ Chandrima D and Kelli M. “Milestone in UN Peacekeeping: Women Take the Lead in Cyprus,” United Nations Foundation, February 7, 2019.

Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams (FET) in peace support operations in Africa, a case study of FET in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.3 Research Questions

1.3.1 What is the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations?

1.3.2 What is the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa?

1.3.3 How effective are Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General Objective

To examine the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa, a case of FET in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations.
2. To examine the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa.
3. To assess the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.5 Literature Review

This section presents the theoretical literature, empirical literature and the gaps in literature. While the theoretical literature reviewed the debates on gender and peace/security, the empirical literature narrowed down to the specific cases of women involvement in peace support operations.

1.5.1 Theoretical Literature

While advocating for women's involvement in security, Enloe challenges "patriarchal presumptions and practices have been challenged by women and their male allies."¹⁸ Although "more than half of the national legislators in Bolivia and Rwanda are women and a woman candidate won the plurality of the popular votes in the 2016 United States presidential election, patriarchal ideas and relationships continue to be modernized to this day."

Enloe exposes the workings of everyday patriarchy—"in how Syrian women civil society activists have been excluded from international peace negotiations, how sexual harassment became institutionally accepted within major news organizations, or in how the UN Secretary General's post has remained a masculine domain." Enloe then proposes skills and strategies for questioning patriarchal operations and attitudes. Encouraging self-reflection, she guides us "in the discomforting curiosity of reviewing our own personal complicity in sustaining patriarchy in order to withdraw our own support for it. She proposes a feminist self-reflection and strategic action with a belief that exposure complements resistance."¹⁹

¹⁸ Enloe, Cynthia (2017). *The Big Push: Exposing & Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

¹⁹ Ibid.

To demystify the misconceptions about the involvement of women in peacekeeping missions, one must clearly understand the underlying patriarchal beliefs.²⁰ They include “understandings about whether sex is fixed at birth, whether gender is synonymous with sex, whether women and men are ‘naturally’ different; whether maleness is inherently rational, while femaleness is inherently emotional. Patriarchal beliefs also include understandings about whether humans of different races are ‘naturally’ ranked in a hierarchy, whether the core elements of human societies are biological families, and whether the world is a dangerous place that necessitates men acting as the protectors of women. Patriarchal beliefs include, as well, potent notions of fate and inevitability. A shrug of one’s shoulders can express a belief.” As Enloe further states, beliefs encompass the activities people do to make sense of their sophisticated environment and the broader world in which they live. Patriarchal values “are supported by patriarchal beliefs but are intended more explicitly to steer behaviour. Thus, we tend to make values the topics of our debates among friends, families and political parties, even if it is our differing beliefs that ignite the deepest conflicts with each other. Among the patriarchal values that have been most contentious are those assigning more worth to reason than to emotion, such as security.”²¹

Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward proffer that, considering modern-day military changes, “feminist theorizing about women’s military participation might be developed to take account of an emergent reality, the inclusion of increasing numbers of women in a range of roles within armed forces.”²² They provide “an overview of established debates within feminist scholarship on women’s military participation is provided and explore the trajectory of feminist” strategies for

²⁰ Enloe, Cynthia (1990) “*Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.*” Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Duncanson C and Woodward R. Regendering the military, Vol. 47, No. 1 (February 2016), pp. 3-21.

“change within both militaries and other institutions. They also discuss about the limitations of mainstreaming gender into security institutions, as a consequence of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.” They argue that that “existing feminist critiques often remain deterministic and have too readily dismissed the possibilities for change created by women’s military participation, given the context of military transformations. Drawing on the idea of the regendered military, the authors present a conceptual strategy for considering how feminist theorizing about the gender military nexus can take seriously women’s military participation while remaining alert to feminist political goals of gender equality, peace and justice.”²³

In terms of women and peacekeeping missions, Enloe states that patriarchal beliefs also define how each country engender military roles.²⁴ Considering regimes based on whether they are “militarily sophisticated and paternalistically authoritarian towards their citizens also demonstrates our absorption of patriarchal values. Patriarchal values often include admiration for what are imagined to be manly forms of leadership, and, as a patriarchal complement, admiration chiefly for women who devote themselves first and foremost to mothering. Thus, to anyone embracing such patriarchal values, hearing Leymah Gbowee praised for her successful mobilization of the Liberian women’s peace movement, without any reference to her behaviour as a wife or a mother, can feel uncomfortable.” Across many cultures, leaders’ “authoritarian inclinations are intertwined with their presumed manliness. Contempt for femininity even while showing off one’s ‘winning way with women’ is often coupled with masculinized authoritarian leadership.”²⁵

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Enloe, Cynthia (2010). *Nimo’s War, Emma’s War: making Feminist Sense of the Iraq War.* Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

²⁵ Ibid.

According to Reily, increasing the number of females to combat units, and bolstering a gender outlook to military activities has increased the chances of new capacities, which improves the efficacy of operations.²⁶ Women can also “provide specific competencies and perspectives that eventually improve the conduct of operations. Women in combat units, as well as the implementation of a gender perspective in operations, clearly have the potential to increase the information gathering and analysis capability of units. Gaining access to local women not only allows a unit to develop a better understanding of local conditions and culture, it can also improve the unit’s relationship with the community, its perceived legitimacy, and improve force protection of troops in the area of operations.”²⁷ Outright instances stem from Female Engagement Teams, “intelligence officers, cultural analysts, and interpreters who provide access to populations and areas that all-male units cannot engage or search.”²⁸ Another instance arises from “the difficulty in achieving civil-military coordination and cooperation in campaigns involving a broad set of actors. Male dominance of the military has been pointed to as one of the cultural features that create friction between military and humanitarian organizations. Female liaison officers could potentially build bridges between the two sets of organizations.”²⁹

Egnell argues that groups such as Gender Focal Points (GFP), Gender Field Advisors (GFA), Cultural Support Teams (CST), Female Engagement Teams (FET) and Team Lioness “have sought to improve situational awareness and intelligence gathering.”³⁰ By bringing local women closer

²⁶ Niamh Reilly, “How Ending Impunity for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Overwhelmed the UN Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: A Discursive Genealogy,” *Violence Against Women* 24, no. 6 (2018).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ MONUSCO, “GHANBATT Female Engagement Team Boosts Image of Ghana in UN Operations in DRC,” January 22, 2019.

²⁹ Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁰ Egnell R. “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness: Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. *Inclusive Security*,” 2016.

and seeking for their help, “they have adapted order templates and impacted operational planning and execution, they have arranged female jirgas and executed projects in order to empower local women and improve their situation.” In short, “they have served as force multipliers within a context that often required their participation for maximized effectiveness.” He further postulates that “the jury is still out on the effectiveness and impact of these teams and advisors, but that should not distract us from the fact that they were not introduced as a politically correct nicety to please the women’s movement, but as a direct result of operational necessities.”³¹

According to Tickner, concepts such as globalization, production, peace, security, and power are all criticized and interrogated for their one-sidedly masculine framing, abstractness, and narrowness.³² Thus, “power should not be understood only as domination and not also as emerging from cooperation.” Closely related, Tickner, Ann and True examine “feminism in international relations from the emergence of women's peace pragmatism during WWI to the development of the United Nations (UN) Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda a century later.”³³ They contend that the feminist movement came at the right time to international relations.³⁴ Moreover, they show how the principles “articulated by women peace activists at the 1915 Hague Conference represent distinct contributions to the discipline. These principles reflect a pragmatic approach derived from women's experiences of promoting peace and inclusion.” The “pragmatism of these principles is echoed by, and further developed in, four pillars of the WPS agenda as shaped by advocates of women's rights, working through processes of trial and error, to gain state support for advance principles of equal and lasting peace.” States “may have rejected discussion of women's

³¹ Ibid.

³² Tickner J. A “*Feminist Voyage Through International Relations.*” Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

³³ Tickner, J. Ann and True J. A “Century of International Relations Feminism: From World War I Women’s Peace Pragmatism to the Women Peace and Security Agenda.” *International Studies Quarterly*, 2018.

³⁴ Ibid.

rights as an appropriate matter for international negotiations in 1915. But with the evolution of women's political rights during the twentieth century, it is now possible to advance a feminist perspective on international peace and security.”³⁵

1.5.2 Empirical Literature

1.5.2.1 United Nations and Female Engagement Teams

Duriersmith postulates that the “importance of a gender perspective in peace operations and military affairs has long been established by feminist activists and researchers, and recognized in a number of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) on women, peace, and security.”³⁶ Indeed, UNSCR 1325, “as well as the subsequent resolutions within the area of women, peace, and security (most notably 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960), have created an international framework for the implementation of a gender perspective in the pursuit of international security and the conduct of peace operations.”³⁷

From the field experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, global military organizations are concluding that there is need to increase the deployment of female military officers in peacekeeping missions. Female Engagement Teams (FET) “have sought to improve situational awareness and intelligence gathering by engaging local women, they have adapted order templates and impacted operational planning and execution.” They have “arranged female *jirgas* (council of elders) and executed projects in order to empower local women and improve their situation.” In brief, they have played

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Duriersmith, “Engaging Men and Boys in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Beyond the ‘Good Men’ Industry,” LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, November 2017.

³⁷ Tickner, J. Ann (2011). *Feminism and International Relations: Conversations about the Past, Present and Future*. London: Routledge.

a key role “as force multipliers within a context that often required their participation for maximized effectiveness.”³⁸

According to Moore, introducing aspects of gender in the national security entities such as the national police service and the militaries has equally been stressed in both developing and developed states. On both the national levels and UN peacekeeping, “gendering security forces and institutions typically includes attempts to recruit more women soldiers and police officers, either as a stand-alone effort or as part of an overall strategy to mainstream a gendered perspective.”³⁹ In most of these contexts, “gender still translates as women.” Increasing the “deployment of female peacekeepers to peace operations significantly, contributes to achieving sustainable peace and the improved wellbeing of women and girls in conflict-affected regions. Security Council Resolution 1325 urges equal participation of women at all sectors of peacekeeping operations, including the military.”⁴⁰ This is also emphasized in the gender equality policy by the UN Department of Operational Support and Departments of Peace Operations and the rules for espousing gender narrative into the United Nations Military works.

Aoláin states that “female soldiers are not only able to perform in the same functions and capacities as their male counterparts, from command to frontline roles, they also bring an added value to military operations. Female soldiers bring an additional perspective in planning operations and in making key decisions, especially those affecting civilians, particularly women and girls.”⁴¹ This is significant point for a peacekeeping and enforcement mission as offers a multifaceted framework

³⁸ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

³⁹ Emma Moore, “Women in Combat: Five-Year Status Update,” Center for a New American Security, March 2020.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “Rethinking the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through the Lens of Resistance,” Just Security, April 17, 2017.

to fulfill its role in the contemporary evolving and sophisticated peacekeeping context. Some unique tactical skills “female military bring to this field include screening of female civilians and conducting of house searches in areas where it is not culturally appropriate for men to enter private spaces. Local populations in host countries often feel more comfortable liaising and sharing information with military troops that include women alongside men.”⁴²

The UN rightly emphasizes that “female soldiers and gender perspectives are absolutely essential for certain tasks in peace operations where military and civilian aims and tasks overlap.”⁴³ As an example, “they help address specific needs of female ex-combatants during the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration into civilian life. They can interview survivors of gender-based violence, mentor female cadets at police and military academies, and, as highlighted above, they can interact with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men.”⁴⁴ Besides, women in uniform can also serve as role models “in the local environment by inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes. While these competencies may be dismissed as unrelated to a traditional view of military fighting power, they may prove essential in the complex operations of today.”⁴⁵

There are a number of frequently articulated concerns or challenges stated that link the gender narrative to women. The first concern is the thought that women, generally, do not have the physical making fit for war situations. This stems from the misconception that their, most of the

⁴³ Lise Morjé H. *Power in Peacekeeping* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁴⁴ Henri M. “Locating Masculinities in WPS,” in “The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security.”

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

time “lower physical abilities and or supposed lack of mental toughness put at risk the combat effectiveness of the units.”⁴⁶ Second, “the inclusion of women and gender perspectives will ruin unit cohesion and military culture. In both cases, the problem with these concerns is that they assume that the existing standards are virtually perfect. Any change in standards or the way soldiers are trained, and units formed, will therefore be perceived as a negative impact especially if it is imposed by the political leadership.”⁴⁷ The issue of physical standards is “nevertheless easily resolved by not making accommodations for women and maintaining the existing physical standards and tests. Let everyone who passed the requirements be eligible for the job.”⁴⁸

Besides, any entity that wishes to transform should, from time to time, look for ways of bolstering the existing procedures and standards, considering the evolving “conflict and soldiering in the modern-day context.”⁴⁹ The Canadians “completely threw out all old standards and started anew with a close look at the actual demands of the job in the field of operations, and then scientifically created standards and testing procedures based on that rather than tradition.”⁵⁰

1.5.2.2 Female Engagement Teams (FET) in Peace Support Operations

Alongside efforts to “increase women’s presence in diverse roles across both individual posts and contingents,” Belli believes that “women’s integration has sometimes taken the form of female engagement teams (FET).”⁵¹ FET are strategic groups that collect information and access groups

⁴⁶ Georgina H. “Female Military Peacekeepers Left Feeling Overwhelmed After Inadequate Training,” *The Conversation*, May 29, 2019.

⁴⁷ Gabrielle B. “Strong Gender Focus Needed During UN Peacekeeping Discussions,” *NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security*, March 28, 2018.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Anderlini, S. “Women Peace and Security in the Time of Corona,” *London School of Economics and Politics*, March 25, 2020.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Gabrielle B. “Strong Gender Focus Needed During UN Peacekeeping Discussions,” *NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security*, March 28, 2018.

of people by “directly engaging host communities, and their tasks are often framed as responding to the gendered needs of those communities.” The level of “their engagement differs depending on the deployment, mission mandate, and mission leadership.”⁵² FET, as comprehended, were first applied by international military forces in Afghanistan and Iraq have been arrayed on an ad hoc arrangement in a number of UN missions recently.

According to Anderlini, in 2001, the US invaded Afghanistan after the 11 September 2001 attacks to dismantle the al-Qaeda.⁵³ This operation was supported by close US allies. Throughout Afghanistan, platoons of male soldiers from Afghan and American forces conducted daily patrols. During the patrols, they were likely to encounter children and women given they make up nearly half of the masses in Afghanistan. In Afghanistan culture and norms, “the male soldiers are prohibited from looking at or talking to women. In order to engage the female populace, the US Army established the Female Engagement Teams (FET).”⁵⁴

According to United Nations Peacekeeping, though the protection of civilians “(POC) agenda has typically been gender-neutral in its language, scholars point out that the understanding of civilians in armed conflict settings is partly gendered in a way that reinforces the notion of women as victims and men as perpetrators of violence.”⁵⁵ Moreover, “the POC agenda tends to overemphasize CRSV when it does introduce gendered language, reinforcing this gendered understanding of civilians.” The “women, peace and security agenda, on the other hand, does use gendered language” but has

⁵² Anderlini, S. “Women Peace and Security in the Time of Corona,” London School of Economics and Politics, March 25, 2020.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ United Nations *Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines*. New York: United Nations, 2008.

⁵⁵ United Nations Peacekeeping. *Department of Peacekeeping Operations*. United Nations, 2013.

“over-relied on female victimhood when discussing protection. It likewise tends to focus on CRSV, which is routinely discussed as a women’s issue, despite evidence to the contrary.”⁵⁶

According to Karim and Beardsley, the pervasive emphasis on “women and children” in “conversations about uniformed women’s participation involves a number of problematic assumptions.”⁵⁷ First, children and women “underlines the reductive view that women do not have agency in their own safety and protection and thus need to be protected. This reinforces the idea that women are innocent family members rather than independent actors.”⁵⁸ Second, it proffers that children and women, which are two distinct groups, share similar needs for protection, which “simultaneously infantilizes women and negates the complexity of children’s issues.”⁵⁹ Third, it holds that close to all women share a singular worldview that considers other women’s best interests and disregards all other interests.

Karim and Beardsley assume that women in warring countries in host communities are likely to make reports of looming violence to female peacekeepers due to their shared identity.⁶⁰ However, “this ignores intersecting factors such as both individuals’ race and the power that a security force uniform confers on its wearer regardless of gender. While anecdotal evidence points to local women in some contexts feeling more comfortable reporting to or approaching uniformed women because of their gender presentation, research has also shown that the perception of and trust in

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States.” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ Anderlini, S. “Women Peace and Security in the Time of Corona,” London School of Economics and Politics, March 25, 2020.

⁶⁰ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Female Peacekeepers and Gender Balancing: Token Gestures or Informed Policymaking?” *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (2013).

security forces is often gender neutral.” There is a high likelihood that local communities might “see the uniform before the sex of the peacekeeper.” In fact, “experts have noted that in some contexts women may even be more likely to report violence to men than to women because of assumptions about the amount of power a man has versus a woman, regardless of their respective military roles.”⁶¹

Conversely, a “third gender phenomenon has been witnessed in certain conflict contexts, whereby women soldiers end up commanding respect from men in societies that normally enforce a strict gender hierarchy.”⁶² This happens when the “masculine uniform on a feminine body places those soldiers outside of or in between typical sociocultural constraints and gives them greater military access to, understanding, and inclusion of the whole community.”⁶³ Developing the best civilian protection mechanisms requires a gender binary that perceives women as victims of sexual violence, which emphasizes a gender-binary response.

While there exists a number of possible benefits to be derived “from the inclusion of female soldiers and gendered perspectives, this should not, however, be seen as a silver bullet or be overly exaggerated.”⁶⁴ The effect won’t be revolutionary, “and without first changing the mindset of commanders and planners, the importance of women’s perspectives, information, and analyses is likely to be undervalued within a more traditional narrative.” The impact “is therefore likely to be limited until a more general mainstreaming of a gender perspective on operations is achieved,”

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Rosie S. “The 3rd Sex: Gender and Contemporary Conflict,” Wavell Room, January 29, 2019.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Fionnuala Ní A. “Rethinking the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through the Lens of Resistance,” Just Security, April 17, 2017.

and “even at that time it is still only one of many components that determine the effectiveness of an operation.”⁶⁵

1.5.2.3 Female Engagement Teams in Africa

In Africa, Female Engagement Teams have played a key role in a number of missions. In the case of Liberia, women were the primary instigators of negotiations and peace agreements. When peace talks stalled in 2003, their demands for gender balance were met and signed.⁶⁶ Women in civil society held conflicting parties accountable by forcing them to negotiation timetables, rally national support for the procedure, and facilitate the disarmament of reformed belligerents. When the UNSC established Resolution 1509, Women in Peacebuilding Networks Programme (WIPNET), it started demanding more female representation in the UN mission in Liberia. Women in Peacebuilding Networks Programme “was launched in November 2001 with the aim of building the capacity of women to enhance their roles in peacebuilding and post conflict reconstruction in West Africa.”⁶⁷

In January 2007, India sent 125 women peacekeepers to Liberia. To date, this contingent was the only PKO completely filled with women. Lesley J. Pruitt suggested that it was time now to change according to the necessity of the operations and their review to send a men-only contingent.⁶⁸ However, she highlighted the fact that mixed contingents are more operationally effective. Several reasons raised for their integration in UN mission are the facility for women to reach other women

⁶⁶ Pruitt and Lesley J. “*The Women in Blue Helmets: Gender, Policing, and the UN’s First All-Female Peacekeeping Unit.*” Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

⁶⁷ Council on Foreign Relations. 2018. “Liberia.”

⁶⁸ Pruitt, Lesley J. “*The Women in Blue Helmets: Gender, Policing, and the UN’s First All-Female Peacekeeping Unit.*” Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

and the advantage for interacting with the populace. They are useful at checkpoints; they can also easily approach victims of sexual abuse and violence, and other social threats. Liberia's fourteen years of civil war resulted in a quarter of million civilian displacement and demise of 60 percent of the masses.⁶⁹ At the beginning of the peace process in 2001, the Mano River Women Peace Network and the Women in Peacebuilding Network were the primary instigators of both sit-ins and formal peace negotiations. When peace talks stalled in 2003, their demands were met and signed.⁷⁰

In 2019, Female security officers from Somalia and the "African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM)" received specialized training on how to freely integrate with local communities in areas that had been freed.⁷¹ The 12 "Somalia National Army and Somalia Police Force" and 20 AMISOM female officers received adequate training on gender perspectives in operations, Somali context and culture, and civil-military coordination. The training helped "the female engagement team to assist Somali officers in engaging with the local population. It built their knowledge, skills and capacity. The week-long female engagement team course was organized by UK Mission Support Team and AMISOM to equip Somali and AMISOM female soldiers on how to engage with local communities in newly liberated areas."⁷²

Gaps in Literature

While a number of studies have looked at the role of female officers in the peacekeeping missions, only a few have focused on the Female Engagement Teams (FET). There are a number of female

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ *UN News*. "Hailed as 'Role Models All-Female Indian Police Unit Departs UN Mission in Liberia.'" 16 February 2016.

⁷¹ Xuequan, M. AU, "Somali female security officers trained on civilian engagement. Africa," 2019.

⁷² Ibid.

groups that have taken part in the peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions, but the FETs have an expanded role. Therefore, the study addressed this gap by focusing on the FET. Besides, a number of the available studies just focus on the role of FET, without examining critically the effectiveness of such teams. By narrowing down on the Democratic Republic of Congo, the study filled the existing gaps by looking critically at the effectiveness of FETs.

1.6 Justification of the Study

1.6.1 Academic Justification

Increased interest in gender mainstreaming has resulted in a number of scholarly studies seeking to debunk the role of female officers in peacekeeping missions. This has been further emphasized by the phenomenon of grouping women and children together, thereby belittling female officers and reducing the perception of their role. However, such studies are scanty in the African context, as most of them have been conducted in Europe and America. This study seeks to fill the knowledge gap by enriching the literature in female engagement teams and peacekeeping in the African context.

1.6.2 Policy Justification

Globally, a number of policies and resolutions have been formulated on how there can be increased participation of female engagement teams in the UN peacekeeping missions. The findings and recommendations from this study will not just help inform such policies but will customize them to fit the African setting. Africa still lags behind in terms of gender mainstreaming policies in military operations. The findings will also help nations to adopt policies that will ensure drafting of more female military officers in their forces.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Standpoint Theory of Feminism

Ann Tickner, “considers how the gendered construction of knowledge helps to understand traditional topics in international relations and is alerting us to the idea that gender may be structuring how we think in the international context.”⁷³ Feminist contributions can be understood “through their deconstruction of gender both as socially constructed identities and as a powerful organizing logic.”⁷⁴ This means recognizing and then “challenging assumptions about masculine and feminine gender roles that dictate what both women and men should or can do in global politics and what counts as important in considerations of international relations. These assumptions in turn shape the process of global politics and the impacts these have on men and women’s lives.” Rather than suggest that “traditional IR was gender-neutral that is, that gender and international relations (IR) were two separate spheres that did not impact on each other feminist theory has shown that traditional IR is in fact gender-blind. Feminist scholarship therefore takes both women and gender seriously and in doing so it challenges IR’s foundational concepts and assumptions.”⁷⁵

In making women visible, the standpoint theory of feminism also emphasizes on the absence of women from major institutional structures and decision-making. One of the “core assumptions of traditional perspectives that feminism has challenged is the exclusionary focus on areas” that are “considered high politics for example, sovereignty, the state and military security.”⁷⁶ The

⁷³ Tickner, J. Ann. *“A Feminist Voyage Through International Relations.”* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

⁷⁴ Sabrina K and Kyle B. *“Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States”* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁵ Niamh R. “How Ending Impunity for Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Overwhelmed the UN Women, Peace, and Security Agenda-A Discursive Genealogy,” *Violence Against Women* 24, no. 6 (2018).

⁷⁶ Lise Morjé H. *“Power in Peacekeeping”* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

traditional focus “on states and relations between them over-looks the fact that men are predominantly in charge of state institutions, dominating power and decision-making structures. It also ignores other areas that both impact global politics and are impacted by it. This is a gendered exclusion as women contribute in essential ways to global politics even though they are more likely to populate those areas not considered high politics and their day-to-day lives may be considered peripheral.”⁷⁷ Traditional worldviews that have little regard for gender not only ignore women’s contributions and the impression universal politics has on them but also continually validate this exclusion.

Conventional military values and standpoint feminist perceptions are from time to time seen as conflicting, resulting in a zero-sum game.⁷⁸ Within this game, “implementing a gender perspective or including women in combat units simultaneously means lowering military effectiveness and fighting power. At the same time, efforts to increase military effectiveness are generally viewed as a step back for women’s rights by supporting the existing patriarchal system in which the logic of war and violence prevails.” This zero-sum worldview is both unhelpful and inaccurate for those seeking to advance international stability and security.

In overall, theorists in the military realm often label military competence or “combat power as a combination of physical factors, conceptual factors, and moral factors, more so the will of the soldiers.”⁷⁹ Concerning arguments on fighting power, “traditional theories of military capability and effectiveness have often overemphasized physical military factors, such as troop numbers and the quality of equipment, while paying less attention to the more intangible factors that influence

⁷⁷ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States.” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷⁸ Lise Morjé H. “Power in Peacekeeping” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

a state's capacity to use its material resources effectively like moral, culture, education, and doctrine. However, the many cases where the numerically and technologically inferior win battles and campaigns suggest that such explanations of military capability are misleading especially when they fail to acknowledge the importance of the policies for which the military instrument is used.”⁸⁰ Integrating female officers to “combat units and a gender standpoint to military activities has the potential to augment new capabilities and, in the process, improve operation effectiveness.”

1.8 Hypotheses

H₁ Female Engagement Teams (FET) play a significant role in UN peace support operations.

H₂ Female Engagement Teams (FET) are not effective in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

1.9 Research Methodology

1.9.1 Research Design

The study used descriptive research design, which enabled the researcher to formulate crucial knowledge principles as well as solutions to the underlying problems. The researcher used descriptive approach, which involves fact-finding and enquiries to examine the role of United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa, a case study of FET in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This methodology entails reviewing a number of related literature to come up with information that corroborates the study objectives.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

1.9.2 Data Collection

This study used both primary and secondary tools to collect data. As for primary data, the study used semi-structured interview schedules to collect data from key informants. The study used female engagement team members who have taken part in the UN mission in Congo. In total, the researcher telephoned 25 participants to interview them, out of which 18 accepted to participate in the study. Secondary data was collected from library research. Some of the sources that will be used to provide data include books, journals, organization websites, and reports among other scholarly sources.

1.9.3 Data Presentation

After coming up with pertinent data, the findings were presented in form of narratives. These narratives were used to form themes, which helped in forming conclusions and study recommendations.

1.10 Scope and Limitations

The study only focused on female engagement teams that have served in the Democratic Republic of Kenya. It was also delimited to the UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC. In terms of limitations, the prevailing COVID-19 situation restricted the researcher from collecting as much data as possible. While the researcher could not conduct interviews physically due to COVID-19 protocols, the researcher overcame this challenge by telephoning the schedules to the sample population.

1.11 Chapter Outline

Chapter one of this study covers the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, and literature review, which encompasses both theoretical and empirical literature. The chapter also contains the justification of the study, theoretical framework, study hypotheses, methodology, and the scope and limitations. Generally, the chapter outlines what is expected of the entire study.

Chapter two discusses the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations. The chapter covers the participation and activities of FET in the UN peacekeeping operations across the globe.

Chapter three examines the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa. The chapter derives data from the available literature on the UN peace support operations in Africa.

Chapter four assesses the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo. DRC is among the countries that have received extensive support from the UN peace keeping operations. Narrowing down on it helped to highlight the role of FETs towards peace and stability in the DRC.

Lastly, chapter five presents the summary of the research findings. It infers conclusions, which help to inform the recommendations to the underlying problem.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS (FET) AND PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS

2.0 Introduction

This section discusses the role of female engagement teams in the United Nations peace support operations. Under this, the gender perspectives in peace operations, FET and peacekeeping operations and challenges facing FET in peace operations are highlighted.

2.1 Gender Perspectives in Peace Operations

The importance of a gender worldview in peace and enforcement activities and military events has long been established by “feminist activists and researchers and recognized in a number of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) on women, peace, and security. Indeed, UNSCR 1325, as well as the subsequent resolutions within the area of women, peace, and security (most notably 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960), has created an international framework for the implementation of a gender perspective in the pursuit of international security and the conduct of peace operations.”⁸¹ Recruiting women in uniform in the United Nations peace activities is “not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing because they can win the hearts and minds of the local people with whom they work. The FET mission statement has undergone many modifications but can currently be summarized as follows: influence the population through persistent and consistent interaction to create stability and security.”⁸²

⁸¹ Bertolazi, F. “Women with a Blue Helmet - The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions”

⁸² Rohwerder, B. “*Lessons from Female Engagement Teams* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1186).” Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2015.

The UN insists that “female soldiers and gender perspectives are absolutely essential for certain tasks in peace operations where military and civilian aims and tasks overlap. As an example, they help address specific needs of female ex-combatants during the process of demobilization and reintegration into civilian life.”⁸³ They can hold interviews for the victims who have just encountered gender-based violence, “mentor female cadets at police and military academies, and, as highlighted above, they can interact with women in societies where women are prohibited from speaking to men. Moreover, female soldiers can also serve as role models in the local environment by inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes. While these competencies may be dismissed as unrelated to a traditional view of military fighting power, they may prove essential in the complex operations of today.”⁸⁴

A scrutiny of the UNSCR 1325 and the “U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security” reveals that “they are intended to be strategic frameworks for conducting more effective and sustainable peace negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and conflict resolution interventions by the international community.”⁸⁵ They include a variety of sophisticated issues, “including judicial and legal reform (as part of state building), security sector reform, formal and informal peace negotiations, peacekeeping, political participation, and protection from and responses to sexual violence in armed conflict. UNSCR 1325 and four subsequent resolutions “also under the umbrella of the women, peace, and security agenda (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960) thereby lay out actions to be taken by governments, the United Nations and other international” and

⁸³ Coll, A. “Evaluating Female Engagement Team Effectiveness in Afghanistan. Wellesley College Digital Scholarship and Archive,” 2012.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ UN Department of Peace Operations. “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security,” 2020.

national actors. Military “organizations are at the very heart of this process. On the one hand they are seen as the problem, by virtue of being the perpetrator of violence against women and as maintainers of the existing patriarchal system.” On the other hand, “they are also called upon as protectors of women and civilians in violent conflicts.”⁸⁶

2.2 FET and Peacekeeping Operations

Women integration into peace enforcement operations is supported by the four frameworks of the resolutions on women, peace, and security. Starting with participation, “this pillar speaks to the importance of full participation and inclusion of women (including civil society actors) in the decision making and execution of activities related to peacemaking, post-conflict reconstruction, and the prevention of conflict. Military organizations can support this process by working internally to ensure women’s full participation within their own ranks, as well as making sure that engagement with civil society and local leaders also includes and empowers women.”⁸⁷ Coming to protection, “the protection of women and girls in armed conflict is an obvious military role that nevertheless requires profound understanding of gender perspectives to be effective.”⁸⁸ This would involve “internal training of military personnel in the protection of women, including zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse of local populations, as well as making sure that gender becomes an integral part of advising and assisting, Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes.”⁸⁹ Military organizations therefore, have a chance to participate in both short-term protection long-term events.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ghittoni M, Lehouck et al. “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.” DCAF, 2020.

⁸⁸ “UN Department of Peace Operations. Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security,” 2020.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

When it comes to prevention,

“the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence is a complex matter that requires changing the behavior of perpetrators, and FETs can be effective in such roles. This may involve a range of activities depending on the nature of the perpetrator and reasons for the sexual violence. Preventing sexual violence used as a weapon of war requires changing the cost-benefit calculations of the perpetrating units by using force or the threat of force to deter such behavior. While such deterrence is ideally conducted by legal systems, “in the midst of conflict it is often only the military that has the muscle to provide a convincing enough threat to change behavior. Addressing broader societal sexual violence requires ending impunity by increasing the capacity of the justice system, as well as by changing the cultural values of the society. Protection of victims and witnesses “may also be included in preventive activities. While these are not primarily military tasks, military organizations can serve as role models in how they treat women within the organization as well as in the local community.”⁹⁰

António Guterres, the UN boss, emphasizes that “greater numbers of women peacekeepers lead to more credible protection responses that meet the needs of all members of local communities”.

Women “in patrol units are better able to reach both men and women, and that the female presence at checkpoints has been credited with promoting a less confrontational atmosphere.”⁹¹ The increased number of women in combatant activities is also “credited with higher reporting of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as lower incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse.”

In January 2020, “a team of 15 Pakistani women officers received major recognition for being the first all-female group from Pakistan to serve in a UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).”⁹² This first contingent of “Pakistani Female Engagement Team (FET) was deployed in South Kivu on 18th June 2019.” The team of “15 women provide a range of resources to the region. They are psychologists, stress counselors, vocational training”

⁹⁰ Reimann, C. et al. “Peace Agreements, Peace Processes and Regional Organizations: The Roles of Women in Peace and Security, Research paper for UN Women, unpublished report by mediatEUr,” 2012.

⁹¹ UN Department of Peace Operations. “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security,” 2020.

⁹² UN. MONUSCO, 2020.

officers, “gender advisors, doctors, nurses, operations officers, information officers, and logistics officers. Seventeen additional Pakistani women officers joined them on 3rd February 2020.”⁹³

FET play a significant role in ensuring solid trust among the local community by socializing with the female niche and comprehending their problems.⁹⁴ This helps “not only in giving women and children a greater sense of security but sharing their problems besides gathering valuable information. FET’s interactions with the local female population during patrols improve information-gathering especially with respect to women and children, allow to assess the security situation and to identify genuine need for quick-impact projects.”⁹⁵

FET also enhance “local women’s engagement at grassroots level and allowing the contingent commanders to develop all-encompassing understanding and resultant strategy to benefit this relatively neglected but needy segment of the population.”⁹⁶ They also provide “psychological support to local women as they grapple with conflict-related violence, including sexual abuse and the resultant depression and stress.”⁹⁷ They also deliver “awareness sessions for women regarding health, female empowerment, self-protection against violence, child abuse, among other issues, provide vocational training such as sowing, embroidery, first aid, computer skills,” which “enable women to become effective contributing members of the community,” establish medical

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Swaine, A. and Rooney, E. “The Long Grass of Agreements: Promise, Theory and Practice’, *International Criminal Review*,” 12, 24 July 2012.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Reimann, C. “Trainer Manual – Mainstreaming Gender into Peacebuilding Trainings, GIZ, ZIF and BMZ,” Berlin, 2013.

⁹⁷ Bertolazi, F. “Women with a Blue Helmet: The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions,” 2020.

“camps in/or near villages to offer free health care especially to children and women, and provide training to female staff of the National Police and Army to enhance their professional capacity.”⁹⁸

Societies with prevalent gender segregations pose problems for winning the host communities’ hearts and for protecting the force as it makes it difficult to approach and search women, and this is where FETs come in. In Afghanistan, “the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) initially failed to engage much of Afghan society, remained blind to its gendered nature, and did not realize the potential of female engagement for almost a decade into its presence in the country.”⁹⁹ In 2009, “ISAF began a radically new approach with Female Engagement Teams (FETs) which were created to help overcome these challenges and help with the counter-insurgency strategy on the basis of lessons from female engagement in Iraq. FETs consist of female soldiers trained to conduct engagement activities in a culturally respectful manner in order to build confidence and support for the host nation government and the ISAF security objectives.”¹⁰⁰ In some cases, “FETs developed into Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), which were designed to provide persistent presence and engagement.”

It was believed that “it was important to engage with local women in Afghanistan as a result of the influence they wield over their husbands and sons and because of their local knowledge.”¹⁰¹ This “influence could help create a critical mass of support to give momentum to the counterinsurgency. However, a deeper understanding of Afghan culture indicated that Afghan women do not have the influence originally suggested.” The deescalating “effect of FETs was the most obvious and useful

⁹⁸ UN Department of Peace Operations. “Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security,” 2020.

⁹⁹ Ghittoni, M, Lehouck, L. & Watson, C. “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations.” DCAF, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ “National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security.” PRISM, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Bertolazi, F. “Women with a Blue Helmet: The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions,” 2020.

impact they had. Afghan males generally accepted females being searched as long as it was done by other females, so female soldiers were a welcome presence for searches.”¹⁰²

FETs were assessed as “helping ISAF military units gain greater acceptance from the local population.”¹⁰³ FETs are reported to have “earned goodwill amongst women who previously viewed international troops with fear through their engagement with women and provision of humanitarian supplies and health care. Women are reported to have given FETs important information about local personalities, economics, and grievances, as well as about the enemy; although FETs were never meant to be an intelligence collection asset and the information provided was not really of military value.”¹⁰⁴ Besides interacting with local women, FET soldiers “frequently engaged with local men. FET soldiers reported that they engaged very frequently with local males during missions. During their deployment, 93 per cent of FET soldiers engaged with local males, whereas only 81 per cent of FET soldiers engaged with local females.”¹⁰⁵

2.3 Challenges Facing FET in Peace Operations

The low rates of “uniformed women’s participation result from complex challenges, many of which extend beyond the UN system. Since peacekeeping troop contingents are provided by national militaries, and the UN is limited in its ability to enforce an appeal for member states to increase women’s deployment, domestic dynamics in TCCs are critical.”¹⁰⁶ This can lead to the

¹⁰² Reimann, C. “Trainer Manual – Mainstreaming Gender into Peacebuilding Trainings, GIZ, ZIF and BMZ,” Berlin, 2013.

¹⁰³ Bertolazi, F. “Women with a Blue Helmet: The Integration of Women and Gender Issues in UN Peacekeeping Missions,” 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Rohwerder, B. “Lessons from Female Engagement Teams (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1186).” Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ Tickner, J. Ann (2011). “*Feminism and International Relations: Conversations about the Past, Present and Future.*” London: Routledge

“assumption that a significant increase in the number of women in those contingents is dependent on similar increases at the national level. This is not necessarily the case, however. Notably, Karim and Beardsley have shown that there is significant variation around the ratios of women in national armed and police forces to women in military and police contributions, which underscores the many factors that should be considered when assessing what is either encouraging or precluding uniformed women’s participation.”¹⁰⁷

The lack of “definitive UN policy and guidance on FETs has made it difficult to standardize trainings. The UN Office of Military Affairs has included a policy on engagement platoons in the most recent UN Infantry Battalion Manual, which is the first step in standardizing training and implementation.”¹⁰⁸ Integrating the FET into combat activities has always been gradual. As of now, “implementation of these gendered intervention strategies remains ad hoc from mission to mission and largely dependent on individual military gender advisers and TCCs' own training practices and priorities at the national level.”¹⁰⁹ Training troops for community engagement tasks has been mandated to “TCCs or initiatives like the US State Department’s Global Peace Operations Initiative with little to no standardization.³⁰ This can lead to disparities between the content of trainings and the roles of FETs once deployed, with some women peacekeepers reporting that they felt ill-equipped to directly engage with traumatized community members.”¹¹⁰

This lack of “adequate training could be due, in part, to functionalist assumptions by leaders in national militaries.” For example, a study conducted of Rwandan peacekeepers reveals that several

¹⁰⁷Coll, Anna C., "Evaluating Female Engagement Team Effectiveness in Afghanistan" (2012). *Honors Thesis Collection*. Paper 2.

¹⁰⁸Vermeij, Lotte. “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” IPI, 2020

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

leaders made an assumption that female officers knew how to handle women's issues naturally.¹¹¹ It was thought that they "inherently possessed the required skill set, incorporating the traditional feminine traits of empathy, compassion, communication and the ability to care for vulnerable people."¹¹² In the DRC, "female members of the UN mission's troop contingents have been sent to distribute books and water to school children and are cited by the mission as role models for local women."¹¹³

Some experts, however, "have also pointed out that UN training requirements that are too rigid are likely to be ineffective. Trainings need to account for factors such as the diversity of TCCs' cultural contexts, financial and training resources, force demographics, and internal norms."¹¹⁴ Moreover, "creating a policy or providing guidance does not necessarily mean that these will be implemented, since troops are ultimately still trained by TCCs and other external actors."¹¹⁵

In spite of the calls to have increased participation of women in various fields, uniformed women "continue to face numerous barriers. At a February 2020 roundtable at the International Peace Institute (IPI), uniformed women described using equipment designed for standard (i.e., masculine) body types that was not suitable for them to use safely."¹¹⁶ If a mission lacks the basic protective gear that can be donned by female officers, then these officers might not be sent on patrol, making them remain to perform base duties. Female officers also blamed their difficulties on limited bathing units, sleeping bases, and insufficient medical gadgets, septically for women.

¹¹¹ "The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security," Chapter 17.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Rosie Stone "The 3rd Sex: Gender and Contemporary Conflict," Wavell Room, January 29, 2019.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley, "Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Moreover, “they feel that the baseline for performance excellence is higher for them than for their male counterparts.”¹¹⁷

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has looked at the role of female engagement teams in the United Nations peace support operations. The section has covered the gender perspectives in peace operations, FET and peacekeeping operations and challenges facing FET in peace operations. Under the gender perspectives in peace operations, the study has emphasized on the importance of including women in security operations as grounded in “UNSCR 1325, as well as the subsequent resolutions within the area of women, peace, and security (most notably 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960).” The section has also noted the importance of female engagement teams in peacekeeping operations, which include providing psychosocial services as well as gathering intelligence. Some of the challenges facing FETs is lack of will by the TCC to send more troops in missions, lack of adequate training and lack of a clear UN guidance and policy on FETs, which has made it hard to normalize trainings.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS IN AFRICAN PEACE SUPPORT PROGRAMS

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion on the nature of female engagement teams in peace support programs in Africa. From the discussion below, female engagement teams in Africa are characterized by female compositions, lower numbers, and embedded in cultural norms.

3.1 Composition of FETs in Africa

From the field data, the countries in Africa that FETs have served include “Liberia, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Mali and Somalia.” When asked to state the nature of Female Engagement Teams in Africa, one respondent stated that “Female engagement teams in Africa are made up of only uniformed women though there has been some debate over the definition and they represent only one role of many that women play in peace operations’ military components. They are tactical sub-sub-units, and as such, FETs are not a strategy to meet the numerical targets laid out in the uniformed Gender Parity Strategy.” Relatedly, Sabrina and Kyle shows that “women are more inclined to dialogues and compromise working together with communities to establish channels of reconciliation. Women have the upper hand in the peace reconciliation efforts due to their role as mothers which makes them seem less threatening.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States” (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

In a similar study, Spink argues that incorporating women into active military activities has always been difficult, until when the FETs were formed. As Spink further postulates, one of the initial adopters of the female engagement teams idea was MINUSCA, which comprised a Zambian battalion.¹¹⁹ FETs were created with the assumption that women in conflicting areas would easily accept units made up of female officers. From that time, the FETs idea has been used by a number of missions and has been recognized by the UN as one of the significant breakthroughs to engagement.

Previous studies, that is, Wibben & McBride, also show that FETs have always been employed in the U.S Afghanistan-based mission to support its counterinsurgency (COIN) determination.¹²⁰ While these teams were taken from the existing troops on the ground and did not receive sufficient training, this trend changed from 2010 when 40 marines were identified to work as FET in Southern Afghanistan. Their mission was to “engage Afghan women, the other half of the population whose hearts and minds need to be won over to ensure the success of the COIN campaign. COIN, a traditional mainstay of colonial rule, was resurrected as an appropriate strategy. General David Petraeus, who had success with population-centric warfare in Iraq, also led its adoption in Afghanistan under General Stanley McChrystal in 2009.”¹²¹

3.2 Limited and Stereotyped Role

When asked to state about the role of FETs in Africa, one respondent stated, “Currently, there are a number of instances of troop contributing countries (TCCs) deploying women but only”

¹¹⁹ Spink, L. “WPS20: Assessing the Effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FETs) in UN Peacekeeping Operations Centre for Civilians in Conflict,” 2020.

¹²⁰ Wibben, A. & McBride, K. “Counterinsurgency and Gender: The Case of the Female Engagement Teams. E-International Relations,” 2012.

¹²¹ Ibid.

assigning “them on-base roles, so those women are effectively invisible beyond their barracks and offices. Therefore, for some missions particularly those with protection of civilians mandates, engagement teams, mixed-gender or otherwise, add value at least in part by including uniformed women in off-base activities, making them visible to host populations.”

To corroborate this statement, Holliday, in her study found out that the U.S military efforts towards promoting FETs are still ad hoc, not well organized with no proper and standardized employment, coordination and training.¹²²

Another respondent stated “uniformed men sometimes patrol with FETs, but with a mandate to protect the uniformed women rather than sharing the team’s primary community engagement goals. This sort of situation can actually exacerbate existing gender stereotypes and reinforce essentialist images of what men and women soldiers can and should do, respectively.”

Another respondent stated that it is difficult to define the role of FETs in Africa because “the length of time the UN has been using FETs in peacekeeping, especially in Africa, is difficult to assess because they became part of the UN system on the initiative of individual TCCs, and there is no official UN policy on them. While there is no definitive evidence of when the first FET was formed, early interviews indicate that a FET formed by uniformed Zambian women at the UN Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2016 may have been the first. Even now, FETs often lack a clear structure or defined, standardized capabilities. Instead, they continue to be formed on an ad hoc basis, often at the mission level, after troops have been trained and deployed.”

¹²² Holliday, R. (2012) “Female engagement teams: The need to standardize training and employment. *Military Review*,” 92 (2): 90-94.

The researcher also asked the respondents to state the particular role of Female Engagement Teams in Africa. From the field data, one respondent stated

“The publicized roles of FETs across various missions in Africa include improving the image of TCCs in host countries, information gathering, and improving local women’s access to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) reporting, among other things. While enabling gender-responsive, diverse engagement teams has its positives, the perennial problem of gender being equated to women rather than representing the whole range of gendered experiences in communities persists. This has a dual effect of essentializing women and erasing men as also being gendered members of both peace operations and the communities within which peace operations function.”

The current findings support the previous literature, for example, Sabrina and Kyle postulate that “Female Engagement Teams (FET) have sought to improve situational awareness and intelligence gathering by engaging local women, they have adapted order templates and impacted operational planning and execution. They have arranged female *jirgas* (council of elders) and executed projects in order to empower local women and improve their situation. In short, they have served as force multipliers within a context that often required their participation for maximized effectiveness.”¹²³ To further support this, Aoláin states that “female soldiers are not only able to perform in the same functions and capacities as their male counterparts, from command to frontline roles, they also bring an added value to military operations. Female soldiers bring an additional perspective in planning operations and in making key decisions, especially those affecting civilians, particularly women and girls.”¹²⁴

Another respondent stated that “When uniformed women are used to connect to women and children, peacekeepers are not also sensitized to the unique, gendered protection and engagement needs of men in host communities, UN peace operations are ultimately not considering” the full

¹²³ Sabrina K & Kyle B, “Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping: Women, Peace, and Security in Post-Conflict States. New York: Oxford University Press,” 2017.

¹²⁴ Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, “Rethinking the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through the Lens of Resistance, Just Security,” April 17, 2017.

“range of a community’s needs, nor are they considering” the interrelated “protection concerns of community members. Likewise, women peacekeepers can be then relegated to traditionally female roles, regardless of their training.”

When asked to state what characterizes Female Engagement Teams in Africa, one respondent stated, “Reporting appears to be inconsistent and mission-dependent, and even when reports on FET activities are filed, the lessons learned therein are not necessarily institutionalized.”

Participants also expressed their concerns that most FETs in African UN missions did not have clear roles. As one respondent stated, “Currently there is a lack of strategic, operational, and tactical clarity on what is the end state and what is intended on the ground to be achieved with gender-integrated patrols. To be useful, sector and battalion commanders have to recognize their value, and the missions need to strategically deploy them. Missions should also better monitor and make use of their reporting and ensure that key personnel, like Force Gender Advisors, have access to their reports.”

This is also supported by Vermeij, who postulates that,

“the Marine Corps needs to take a progressive role in the training and employment of increasing female engagement efforts in Afghanistan before harm comes of our actions. The ad-hoc nature of much of the training, and the lack of integration of the efforts by FETs can backfire and undermine the overall mission: When FETs are in conversation with women in a particular area and promise follow-up on one or another issue, but are unable to deliver because their efforts are not considered important enough, this is likely to lead to further mistrust, and undermine the overall effort to shift support from the insurgency to

coalition forces. Engagement, then, creates expectations upon which the U.S. and her allies must deliver.”¹²⁵

Another respondent stated that “While most peacekeepers believe that, under the right circumstances, mixed engagement teams can be an asset for missions, they also stress the need for all peacekeepers to be better-trained, empowered, and responsible for effectively engaging civilians on gendered-threats. If the problem is community engagement at large and how the force is conducting patrols, this is the issue that needs to be addressed. We should not use these FETs as the silver bullet. ...FETs could be used in certain areas, but don’t address the basic issues of troops who don’t speak the language or who don’t stop in villages to speak with people.” That is why, for this reason, the UN “emphasizes that female soldiers and gender perspectives are absolutely essential for certain tasks in peace operations where military and civilian aims and tasks overlap.”¹²⁶

3.3 Embedded in Cultural Norms

When asked to state how culture affects FETs performance in Africa, one respondent stated that “The UN mission in Africa, especially those touching on FET role, have a cultural impingement around them.” She further stated that

“Women’s roles in our society and culture also have changed over time. Long gone are the days of a woman’s place being in the home and a man’s duty to protect the women of his society. A cherished position in one era is discarded for another. Public opinion and societal norms are a fluid and ever-evolving entity. While some religious and ethical beliefs regarding the division of duties for the genders may remain, Africa should relegate this as an anomaly. While women may or may not choose to do so, the overwhelming majority of people across believe in the right of each individual to pursue goals based solely on an individual’s capability, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, creed, or religion.”

¹²⁵ Vermeij, Lotte. “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” IPI, 2020.

¹²⁶ Lise Morjé H. “Power in Peacekeeping” (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

In support of the current findings, previous literature shows that “women, in general, are not fit for war, that their often-lower physical abilities and or supposed lack of mental toughness put at risk the combat effectiveness of the units.”¹²⁷ These findings corroborate Erwin 2012, who found that religious and cultural norms have, for many years, prevented male officers from accessing female populations in Afghanistan. Therefore, female engagement teams play a key role in reaching out to the greater populations, besides helping in the gathering of intelligence and counterinsurgency strategies.¹²⁸

3.4 Lower Numbers

As another respondent stated, “The level of women in national military and security institutions is mirrored at the regional and international levels, where the presence of women in peacekeeping missions is also not import. Even though the African states have taken the lead in TCC to UN and AU peacekeeping missions, the total number of female personnel in the UN Organization Stabilization Mission stands at lower numbers.” This is also corroborated by the existing literature. According to Bouka and Sigsworth 2016, who states that “data on troop and police contributors by country from 2014 to 2021 show a quasi no-female representation in both MINUSCA and MONUSCO. Some countries have taken the lead and showing integration progress like Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi.”¹²⁹

The findings are also supported by Baldwin 2020 who found out that on most occasions, troop contributing countries deploy their female officers but only delegate them with on-base roles,

¹²⁷ Georgina H. “Female Military Peacekeepers Left Feeling Overwhelmed After Inadequate Training,” *The Conversation*, May 29, 2019.

¹²⁸ Erwin, S. *The Veil Of Kevlar: “An Analysis Of The Female Engagement Teams In Afghanistan.”*

¹²⁹ Coll, Anna C., "Evaluating Female Engagement Team Effectiveness in Afghanistan" (2012). *Honors Thesis Collection*. Paper 2

thereby making them “effectively invisible beyond their barracks and offices.” Consequently, for some missions, and especially those with the mandate to protect civilians, female engagement teams or even in some instances mixed-gender teams add value by encompassing uniformed female officers in off-base activities, something that makes them visible to populations in host countries.¹³⁰

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the nature of female engagement teams in Africa. From the findings, FETs in Africa are made up of only female officers. This is in contrast to some definitions, which consider FETs as battalions made of mixed genders but majorly female officers. The section also reveals that FETs in Africa are restricted to limited roles such as counselling and gathering intelligence. Unlike their male counterparts, female officers are rarely allowed to go for combat activities. This is also due to lack of proper training for FETs and stereotyped societies.

¹³⁰ Baldwin, G. Beyond “Women and Children. Gendered Community Engagement Strategies in UN Peace Operations.” Reliefweb, 2020.

CHAPTER FOUR

FEMALE ENGAGEMENT TEAMS AND THE PURSUIT FOR PEACE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

4.0 Introduction

This section presents findings and discussions on the effectiveness of female engagement teams in pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The findings emanate from the primary data collected from interviews conducted with the sample FET members who have served in the DRC. The interviews were done through telephone.

4.1 The Current State of DRC

Participants were asked to state what had inspired their mission in the DRC. They all stated that it was because of the ongoing civil conflicts that had prompted their action. As one respondent stated, “The DRC is currently involved in a civil war, and over 200,000 people have fled South Kivu to escape the conflict between armed groups and government forces. A coalition of militias who identify as Indigenous Congolese are fighting a Rwandan cattle-herding group for power and resources. Rebel groups from neighboring countries are also thought to be contributing to the violence.”

From the previous literature, Baldwin 2020 purports that “while there is no definitive evidence of when the first FET was formed, early interviews indicate that a FET formed by uniformed Zambian women at the UN Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in 2016 may have been the first.”¹³¹ Even in the contemporary age, FETs do not have a defined structure or standardized

¹³¹Baldwin, G. Beyond “Women and Children”: Gendered Community Engagement Strategies in UN Peace Operations. Reliefweb, 2020.

competences. In its place, they remain to be “on an ad hoc basis, frequently at the mission level, this is after troops have been trained and deployed.”

The researcher also sought to find out how many FET members served in the DRC and what was their main role. From the interviews, one participant stated that “We are a team of 15 women stationed in the DRC from June 2020 to participate in a wide range of activities in the region. The team comprises of psychologists, stress counselors, vocational training officers, gender advisors, doctors, nurses, operations officers, information officers, and logistics officers.”

As another respondent reacted, “Local community members feel more comfortable sharing information with military groups that include women and men, according to the mission. Female peacekeepers act as role models in the local environment, inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes.”

A senior personnel stated that “So far FET has launched many successful projects. The group is actively supporting South Kivu with vocational training, medical outreach, regular trauma support sessions for students, women, and teachers, and psychological workshops for Congolese authorities.”

4.2 Effectiveness of the Role of FET in the DRC

Most of the FET members in DRC were from Ghana. As one key officer stated,

“Female Soldiers of the Ghana Armed Forces have performed ground breaking roles in the ongoing peace operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Showcasing this, female military personnel are gradually shifting from service support roles as previously undertaken to more complex operational roles in peace operations. This accentuates the fact that the role of female soldiers has evolved within the modern concept of Multi-Dimensional Peace Operations.”

Another respondent stated that “The Ghana Battalion (GHANBATT) Female Engagement Team (FET) deployed in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Congo (MONUSCO) epitomizes such an evolution with the deployment of female soldiers in combat roles. The team composed of female soldiers with vast experience have developed trust-based and enduring relationships with women and children in the local communities they encounter during patrols in the GHANBATT area of operations in the DRC.”

While the FETs are deemed to have succeeded in one way or another in the DRC, a previous study by the U.S. Army Research Institute reveal that FET employment protocols, integration, training, selection, and assessment do not have clear standardization¹³²

In another study, Rohwereder 2015 shows that the FET program was effective. Afghan males “generally accepted females being searched as long as it was done by other females, so female soldiers were a welcome presence for searches. FETs were assessed as helping ISAF military units gain greater acceptance from the local population. FETs are reported to have earned goodwill amongst women who previously viewed international troops with fear through their engagement with women and provision of humanitarian supplies and health care.”¹³³ As Coll further reports, Afghanistan women gave FETs crucial information about grievances, economics and local personalities and even the enemy. However, FETs were not enrolled to play the role of intelligence collection, thereby making the information they collected of military value.

Another respondent reiterated that

¹³² Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, S. “Seeking out their Afghan sisters: Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan. CHR. Michelsen Institute,” 2014.

¹³³ Coll, A.C. (2012). “Evaluating female engagement team effectiveness in Afghanistan.” Wellesley College.

“The deployment of the GHANBATT FET is an essential operational strategy employed by the Battalion to adequately achieve set objectives of the mission. This is aligned with the mandate and concept of operation of the MONUSCO force. Thus, in pursuit of the objectives of MONUSCO, the United Nations Security Council authorized the Mission to take all necessary measures, to support the authorities of the DRC, based on information collection and analysis, and taking full account of the need to protect civilians’, and to mitigate risks before, during and after any military operation.”

This corroborates Karim and Beardsley, who assume that “women in host communities will be more likely to report violence to women peacekeepers based on their shared identity.”¹³⁴

To further state their role, another member stated that “The FET’s operational responsibilities in the DRC include the conduct of routine long, medium and short-range patrols. During such patrols, members of the Team encounter deprived women and children who are a substantial portion of the population of the DRC. In order to effectively engage the population, the GHANBATT uses the FET idea to fulfill the Force Concept of Operations in consonance with the UN mandate for the Mission.”

Another member stated that

“The FET is used to conduct reconnaissance and battlefield visualization as part of the operational task assigned to GHANBATT. The operational necessity of the mission requires the FET to put operational analysis into action as a measure aimed at benefiting the communities and to enhance the Battalion’s usefulness in the mission. The Team has therefore, given MONUSCO and GHANBATT in particular an added tool of reaching out to the neglected but important part of the local population. The FET also carries out targeted operations as directed by the Western Sector Headquarters of MONUSCO either independently or jointly with the Formed Police Units of the mission. The operations are

¹³⁴ Sabrina K and Kyle B. “Female Peacekeepers and Gender Balancing: Token Gestures or Informed Policymaking?” *International Interactions* 39, no. 4 (2013).

conducted in highly mobile and versatile manner and in strict compliance with the MONUSCO mandate and international law.”

In a related study, India sent 125 women peacekeepers to Liberia to play a similar role.¹³⁵ Similar responses were also echoed by other respondents. “The core mandate of the Peace Operations in DRC is Protection through Projection. The mission has therefore applied the requisite comprehensive intelligence-gathering capabilities using the FET concept by GHANBATT to effectively achieve this objective. Accurate intelligence is vital for peacekeeping operations. Mission leaders and commanders utilize intelligence to map out potential threats and identify armed groups and their leaders for effective planning to engage them. Commanders are also required to analyze the types of insurgents, motivations, behaviours and goals, and understand the context the armed groups evolve and operate. The inclusion of the female soldiers of Ghana on combat patrols facilitates better interaction and boosts the confidence of the locals in the communities in the DRC. The FET on many occasions have obtained information that has assisted the mission to conduct preventive deployments aimed at Protection of Civilians.”

Another respondent stated that “the GHANBATT FET has undertaken a number of Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) activities in rural Kinshasa as part of the mandate of the mission. They provide educational, medical and socio-economic support to the local populace. The aim is to Win the hearts and minds of the Congolese people. At Menkao IV, a suburb of Kinshasa, the FET distributed books to pupils of ECP School and also shared foodstuffs and drinking water to the children and teachers during such interactions. Other communities in the outskirts of Kinshasa the team visited include Pema, Maluku, Mutiene, Mbankana, Bita and Yumbi. GHANBATT through the FET taught English lessons in the schools at various communities as part of the CIMIC

¹³⁵ Pruitt and Lesley J. *The Women in Blue Helmets: Gender, Policing, and the UN's First All-Female Peacekeeping Unit*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

responsibilities. The medical team of the FET provided general medical care and dental services among others to the local population during operational visits to the various local communities. With the outbreak of ebola in the country, the medical team used the opportunity to educate women and children on the effective measures of preventing the spread of the ebola virus. Other CIMIC activities undertaken by the FET include visits and donations to orphanages, tree planting exercise and clean-up exercises in the various communities.”

As findings from a previous study by Beals show, “many Pashtun men show a preference for interacting with female soldiers over male soldiers. Pashtun men tend to view foreign women troops as a kind of third gender. As a result, female servicewomen have the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of both genders, they are extended the respect shown to men, but are granted the access to home and family normally reserved to women.”¹³⁶

Therefore, “GHANBATT FET has already proven to be an invaluable asset for the MONUSCO mission. The role that the FET has undertaken over the period include combat patrols, intelligence gathering, educational support and role modelling to women. This has engendered a change of mind-set and whip the enthusiasm of the local population of the DRC. The relationships established by the FET in the local communities has won the hearts and minds of the Congolese people. The confidence of the local population within the local communities has improved as a result of the operations of the FET. In general, the population has shown improved appreciation towards the MONUSCO mission as a result of the excellent role that the FET has undertaken in the GHANBATT area of operations.”

¹³⁶ Beals, G. E. (2010). Women marines in counterinsurgency operations: Lioness and female engagement teams. Marine Corps Combat Development Command. Retrieved from <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a604399.pdf>

Previous findings by Jones show that the success of individual FETs depended significantly on resources and appropriate training. One of the fundamental assumptions of these teams is that “all women have an understanding and interest in gender issues. Even though the female engagement teams expected women to volunteer to be in the teams, this does not ensure that all women are concerned with gender issues. Especially considering when the FET’s were first implemented, US women were restricted from combat and thus participation within the FET allowed for increased engagement within the operational environment.”¹³⁷ As Jones further state, female engagement teams were not just an attempt at improving social networks with the local population but they were also an effort towards ensuring efficacious gender mainstreaming in the military.

4.3 Challenges

The researcher also sought to find out some of the challenges the FET teams were experiencing in the DRC. One respondent stated that “Despite the known benefits of female peacekeepers, and the UN’s efforts to increase female participation, women still make up the minority of these groups.” Most participants believe that one of the main reasons for low female participation “is often due to women not knowing these opportunities were available.” This can be attributed to what Vermeij refers to as lack of “definitive UN policy and guidance on FETs.”¹³⁸ With no proper guidelines, it becomes difficult to realize the available opportunities regarding peacekeeping and enforcement missions.

From the previous literature, Azarbaijani found out that the major challenges facing FETs across the globe are insufficient female interpreters, lack of sufficient leadership support, coordination

¹³⁷ Jones, Ann (15 November 2010) “Woman to Woman in Afghanistan” *The Nation* pp. 11-15.

¹³⁸ Vermeij, Lotte. “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” IPI, 2020

and training, disrespect from male military officers, “lack of understanding of gender and institutional memory on women and gender programming, overly ambitious programming and no clear goals, potentially damaging FET activities, lack of good assessments, not rooted in the military, and loss of FET skills.”¹³⁹

Another challenge emanates from the gender limitations. As one respondent reacted, “The common argument that women are weaker than men for the continuation of current combat exclusion is that of the inherent biological, psychological and sociological dissimilarities between the male and female of the human species and how those pertain to combat performance and capability.” Closely related, a previous study in Rwanda found that “many leaders assumed women naturally knew how to respond to local women’s needs.”¹⁴⁰ Such assumptions limit women’s opportunities in peacekeeping.

Beyond these real-world happenings and anticipations of how they perform professionally, “most female officers normally encounter stigmas and taboos. Given that “UN troops come from different countries and therefore myriad cultural, military, and political backgrounds these are particularly challenging to study.”¹⁴¹ A good instance is, women with children “who deploy describe being perceived as bad mothers, as though they are relinquishing their familial duties or bucking tradition. Many have also described the stigma faced by single women before and during deployment, whereby the wives of their male peers perceive them as a threat. Such perceptions can bar uniformed women from being fully accepted into a contingent and create additional

¹³⁹ Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, S. (2014). “Seeking out their Afghan sisters: Female Engagement Teams in Afghanistan. CHR. Michelsen Institute.”

¹⁴⁰ “The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace, and Security,” Chapter 17.

¹⁴¹ Pruitt, Lesley J. “*The Women in Blue Helmets: Gender, Policing, and the UN’s First All-Female Peacekeeping Unit.*” Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016.

stress.”¹⁴² Many women have developed mechanisms to overcome and deal with tension. However, this process is time-consuming, for example, one female officer “spent the weeks leading up to deployment getting to know every wife individually in her off-hours, in the hope that this would reassure them that she was not a threat to their marriages. This demonstrates how the burden of change often falls on individual women rather than on institutions.”¹⁴³

From the previous literature, Halliday found that, one of the major challenges facing female engagement teams was that they were made up of female officers with no proper skills for the task ahead. Based on this, other countries decided to adopt the mixed teams idea, instead of women-only teams.¹⁴⁴ Some countries that decided to adopt the mixed teams include Great Britain and Netherlands in their mission in Afghanistan. As Harding postulates, mixed teams still permitted communication between the officers and local Afghan women.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the effectiveness of female engagement teams in pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From the findings, the major reason why the FETs have been deployed in the DRC is because of the ongoing civil conflicts. The findings also reveal that most of the FET members serving in MONUSCO are from the Ghana Battalion (GHANBATT) Female Engagement Team (FET). In as much as the team has succeeded in accomplishing some tasks, it still encounters some challenges, mostly emanating from gendered stereotypes.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Halliday, Janet R. (2012) “Female engagement teams: The need to standardize training and employment” *Military Review*, 92 (2): 90-94.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study sought to find out the role of the United Nations peacekeeping female engagement teams in peace support operations in Africa: A case study of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The objectives of the study were to: Analyze the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations; examine the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa and assess the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

From the first objective, which was to analyze the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations, the study started by looking at the gender perspectives in peace support operations, which has drawn worldwide debates from various feminist activists among other scholars. From its standing, the UN emphasizes the importance of female soldiers in a number of peace support operations, especially when the civilians and the military overlap. The chapter also looked at FET and peacekeeping operations, whereby there is an advocacy to have women take part adequately in peace support operations through the four main pillars: participation, protection, post-conflict reconstruction and prevention. Under this chapter, the challenges facing FET in peace support operations were identified as lack of “definitive UN policy and guidance on FETs, lack of adequate training, and rigid and ineffective training.

From the second objective, which was to examine the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa, the study found that FETs have served in a number of countries in Africa, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Mali and Somalia. The FETs are also characterized by limited and stereotyped roles where women are assigned “softer” roles as compared to men. It is also difficult to define the role of FETs in Africa because “the length of time the UN has been using FETs in peacekeeping, especially in Africa, is difficult to assess because they became part of the UN system on the initiative of individual TCCs, and there is no official UN policy on them.” The activities befalling female engagement teams are also embedded in cultural norms where women have always been traditionally perceived as not fit for battlefield. Lastly, the study also found that the FETs in Africa are characterized by lower numbers.

The last objective was to assess the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo. From the findings, the ongoing civil conflicts prompted for the action and deployment of FETs in the DRC. The FET in the DRC comprised of 15 women. The role of the FETs in the DRC was effective “because female peacekeepers act as role models in the local environment, inspiring women and girls in often male-dominated societies to push for their own rights and for participation in peace processes.” Female military personnel “are gradually shifting from service support role as previously undertaken to a more complex operational roles in peace operations.” Besides, the presence of FETs has helped create a positive relationship between the civilians and the peacekeepers, making it easy to accomplish their mission.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the first objective, which was to analyze the role of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in United Nations peace support operations, the study concludes that the female engagement teams

play a crucial role in the UN peace support operations. The study also concludes that the role of FETs in the UN peace support operations has increased due to the mounting pressure from activists and the establishment of the 4 pillars which require women to fully take part in participation, protection, post-conflict reconstruction and prevention of conflict.

Based on the second objective, which was to examine the nature of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in peace support programs in Africa, the study concludes that FETs are still not popular in Africa and they are still perceived from stereotyped lens. While FETs have had successful operations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Mali and Somalia, they are still not allowed to conduct some activities, which stem from the cultural impingements on female soldiers. While the participation of FETs in UN is slowly expanding, there is need to put in more effort to ensure that the FETs' role is recognized in Africa.

Based on the last objective, which was to assess the effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams (FET) in the pursuit for peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the study concludes that FETs have played a significant role in the DRC in peace support operations. These teams have not only pushed for women in the DRC to take part in the peacebuilding process, but they have also created a positive relationship between the civilians and the peacekeepers. By creating a synergy between the peacekeepers and the civilians, FETs in the DRC have helped in ensuring that peace is attained as fast as possible.

5.3 Recommendations

From the findings, the study recommends that:

- i. The UN should develop proper guidelines on the operations of the female engagement teams. Currently, the UN does not have a definitive policy and guidance on FETs,

- which makes it hard to standardize trainings. With proper guidelines and trainings, FETs will have effective structures that will enable the expansion of FETs across the globe.
- ii. Second, there is need to change the narrative and perception about the abilities of female soldiers in Africa. While a number of countries have changed laws to allow female soldiers to participate in peace support operations, the role of these soldiers is limited to “softer” tasks because of the misconceptions surrounding women within the society.
 - iii. Lastly, African countries should come up with gender-balanced policies that promote the growth and development of female soldiers. From the DRC example, it is only a few African countries, for example, Ghana, that have a substantive number of female soldiers in peacekeeping missions. These policies should ensure that right from recruitment, there is a gender balance in the way military officers are enlisted.

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