

Gender, Governance and Conflicts in Africa
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1. Introduction

"Civil War is Africa's self-inflicted wound. More than one African in five lives in a country that is fighting a war, and nearly 20 countries have experienced civil war since 1960. The continuing conflicts that ravage the African continent represent a heavy social and economic burden. During a war, most of the country's resources tend to be diverted away from development and towards supporting the conflict — War is estimated to cost \$1bn per year in Central Africa, without counting the cost of aiding refugees, which is estimated to be about \$500m in the region" (Bolle, 2000: 61).

"Women's contributions to war and peace have long been underestimated. In fact, women often contribute to the outbreak of violence and hostilities—in many cases, they are instrumental in inciting men to defend group interests, honour, and collective livelihoods. Women also play a key role in preserving order and normalcy in the midst of chaos and destruction. In times of conflict, when men engage in war and are killed, disappear or take refuge outside their country's borders, it is women who are left with the burden of ensuring family livelihood. Women struggle to protect their families health and safety—a task which rests on their ability to cope pragmatically with change and adversity. It is therefore not surprising that women are also a driving force for peace" (Sorensen, 1998: iii).

"Women's under-representation or lack of involvement in official efforts at resolving internal state conflicts is taken as a given in most situations. While they often bear the brunt of the war brutalities, and are increasingly involved in combatant activities, they are seldom part of the inner circles of peace negotiations, peace accords, or policies at the formal level to resolve conflict" (Boyd, 1994: 3).

The above three quotes basically summarize the main thesis of this paper, which argues that most of Africa's conflicts and related disasters are self inflicted wounds arising from bad/ undemocratic governance, partially manifested in gender inequities in the structures and processes of public governance, which in turn are reflected in the near absence of women's voices in key decision-making on strategic issues, including those regarding war and peace. This paper further argues that the question of resolving, managing and meaningfully addressing post-conflict reconstruction, cannot be divorced from the question of governance, as sustainable peace cannot be assured in the absence of a conducive governance framework. The paper also argues that despite women's marginality at the war-mongering tables, they are not only victims of war and other forms of violence, they are also active participants before, during and after civil war, serving as instigators, combatants, service providers, and reconstructors of the post-war battered political-economy and society. But in all of these roles, most of women's peace initiatives take place outside the formal governance frameworks, and hence their long term impact/influence on the overall objective of sustainable peace, cannot easily be determined. The paper therefore makes recommendations that suggest the vital need in all African countries for democratic governance and, for greater participation of women in key positions of decision-making, including the military and other security related institutions.

2. THE SELF- INFLICTED WOUND: Governance and Conflicts in Africa

The case is often made that conflicts are caused primarily by economic underdevelopment, resource scarcity, widespread poverty and limited access to and participation in processes of

political decisionmaking. While it is true that poverty generates tensions as people scramble for limited resources, such tensions cannot deteriorate into war, if institutions and mechanisms exist, that afford all citizens a conducive and enabling environment to earn a decent livelihood. Similarly, whereas tensions are bound to arise in any society in the course of interaction between various competing social identities and beliefs, such tensions cannot degenerate into serious conflict, unless the country's existing governance institutions, policies and ideologies are not adequately responsive to the diverse social identities and instead, tend to encourage social fragmentation rather than social cohesion. In such a situation, democratic culture of tolerance of social differences and beliefs, is also likely to be lacking. This kind of social context then becomes a fertile ground that can easily be exploited and ignited by the existing political leadership into a civil war, that only serves the hegemonic elite interests, rather than the interests of the country as a whole.

In my view therefore, most of the civil wars and violent conflicts that have occurred in Africa during the second half of the 20th and now the 21st Century, have their roots in undemocratic structures and processes of governance, unequal power and resources allocation, which are politicized and expressed in socio-cultural terms. In this connection, political leaders whip up and politicize citizen's ethnic, religious and racial diversities and use them as a means to justify and to get mass endorsement and participation in self serving wars. They do this not only because of their love of power, but because of their love for personal wealth which often degenerate into greed, exemplified in the licensing of economically motivated violence in such countries as Liberia and Sierra Leone (Berdal & Malone: 2000). Such conflicts therefore, are an indication that the governance framework lacks democratic structures and mechanisms for equitable participation, allocation and distribution of power, and resources and for the development of multiculturalism, tolerance and accommodation of diverse socio-cultural ideological and religious beliefs. Once armed violence is allowed to become a means of addressing such internal problems, the result is not only the destruction of the economic and social infrastructure but also the prevailing institutions of governance. So post-conflict reconstruction and attainment of sustainable peace entail the rebuilding of the social, economic, and political infrastructure and strengthening governance institutions to make them conducive to and supportive of economic and social development on a just and equitable basis, regardless of gender, ethnic, religious, cultural, racial and other social identities within society.

Most African countries that have experienced violent/armed conflicts are characterised by wide gaps in power, and resource distribution, both vertically among different classes, and horizontally among people belonging to different religions, ethnicities, clans, races, and regions. A close look at the historical and structural contexts of some of the major theatres of African civil wars and conflicts, e.g. in Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Rwanda, Republic of Congo etc, all indicate that undemocratic governance was a major causal factor. Analyzing the Somali case, one scholar argues that misgovernance has been the root cause of the war situation that has prevailed in Somalia since 1991. During the brutal and authoritarian regime of Mohamed Siyad Barre that continued for 21 years, the fabric of the society was slowly and meticulously dismantled. By the mid 1970s, Somalia had one of Africa's largest standing armies, and had spent from 40 to 50 per cent of its GDP in defence and security (Jama 2000:45). Siyad Barre's manipulation of clans had created an atmosphere of mistrust and hostility that gradually weakened both the traditional and the national institutions. So when the government collapsed in January 1991, the institutions were not solid enough to prevent the whole country from disintegrating. In this regard, the study notes that Somalia existed as a state only from 1960-1991, when the last military regime was ousted and the country

disintegrated into fiefdoms, controlled by rival factions led by predatory warlords. The prevailing situation henceforth has been a "Hobbesian nightmare, where there is neither rule of law nor institutions to regulate relations and protect the most vulnerable from the most vicious. Regrettably, after spending more than \$4bn, UN left the country in a situation no better than that which had prompted its intervention. Somalia is run by militias, merchants and mullahs, pursuing their private interests rather than the public good. The Djibouti government is now saying that the time of the warlords and the militia bosses is over. They want to encourage the Somalia 'civil society' to take political power. This civil society, however, is fragmented, lacks a solid social base and has very limited political resources. In many instances, civil society in Somalia is a one man or one woman show," (Mohamoud 2000: 40;41).

Similarly, in the case of Sierra Leone's war, it has been noted that the root cause of Sierra Leone's war was "Siaka Stevens personalized dictatorship which exploited malleable political Institutions for power and wealth using corruption and violence, entrenching patrimonialism and disabling agencies of restraint and institutions for conflict management" (DPMF/OSSREA 2000).

The Sudanese conflict has also been traced to undemocratic governance:

"Both during and after colonial rule, Southerners have been underrepresented in terms of parliamentary membership and occupation of strategic government positions. Northerners were given more education opportunity and were made to occupy the lower government ranks during the colonial period. Though the northerners needed the alliance with the southern Sudanese in the struggle against British colonialism, when independence was achieved the alliance became outdated and the representation of Southerners in constitutional institutions became merely a decoration. Moreover, the government in Khartoum made it clear that it would suppress any attempt by Southerners that would threaten the country's unity" (DMPF/OSSREA, 2000).

3. Women's Role in Conflict Prevention, Management & Resolution

The building of peace is an activity in which all affected sectors of society have a responsibility to take part. Women are given special attention because they represent a vital resource for conflict prevention and sustaining peace efforts from the grassroots level upward. Moreover, women face new challenges and inherit additional responsibilities in the postconflict period, that need to be highlighted and addressed. On the other hand, the social transformation occurring in the postconflict context opens up opportunities which should not be missed by women to empower themselves and to strengthen and enhance their contributions to democratic governance.

In the rest of this paper we examine African women's various roles in conflict management, resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, starting with their role in political decision-making.

4. Role of Women in Political Decision-making on War and Peace

The discussion of women's participation in political decision-making (Nzomo, 1994 Meena: 2000) and in relation to war and peace (Mugambe:2000),infact predates the recent discussions of postconflict reconstruction. In 1985, the Nairobi Conference, which marked the closing of the United Nations Decade for Women, pointed to the need to involve women equally in

decision-making. The recommendations of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women stated that:

"Governments should be encouraged to increase the participation of women in the peace process at the decision-making level, including them as part of delegations to negotiate international agreements relating to peace and disarmament and establishing a target for the number of women participating in such delegations".

However, when the first review of the appraisal and implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies was conducted in 1990, the disappointing conclusion was that "women are no more prominent among those making decisions on conflict than in the past," and therefore "the United Nations and the international nongovernmental organizations concerned should continue to monitor and support women's increased involvement' in the peace process" (United Nations, 1992: 3). At the Beijing Conference in 1995, the issue was again raised at the international policy level, when the conference defined it as a strategic objective to "increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at all levels...and integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts...and ensure that bodies are able to address gender issues properly" (United Nations, 1995: 61). One of the important steps taken was to stress that women's involvement in decision-making was not only a question of quotas for women, but a process that also entailed increased gender sensitivity in general, requiring appropriate training and more research on gender issues.

It is often argued that women are well positioned to play more critical roles in peacemaking in Africa because of their socially constructed functions as the custodians of family and community values, and as nurturers, care givers and mediators within the family. While this argument to a large extent holds in the still highly patriarchal African societies, we need to be cautious that we then do not proceed to conclude that women as a gender, are central to decision-making on matters of war and peace. As a matter of fact as Vicker(1993:125) noted regarding women globally:

"Although women have as much right as the other 50 per cent of the human race to participate in policy making for peace, in which their perspectives are sorely needed, their actual role in the political fora where policies are made (are lacking)—Women were never consulted about the need for 50,000 nuclear warheads."

To date, despite the renewed commitment made in 1995 in Beijing by world governments to increase women's decision-making representation to a 30 per cent minimum, the reality is far off the mark in most African countries. Despite the fact that many countries emerging from armed conflict have adopted new constitutions that grant women equal political, social and economic rights, the implementation of these good intentions often runs counter to the existing social norms regarding gender roles especially the social division of labour, which has not changed in favor of women, but rather adds to their burden, thus posing practical limitations on the possibilities for active involvement in national affairs. Few women in Africa hold high level positions in public management and governance. By 1998, only a handful of African countries(Mozambique, Angola and South Africa) were approaching the 30 per cent minimum critical mass of women needed in governance positions, for them to be effective(Meena:2000).Hence, strategic matters of decision-making, and policy-making, including issues of war and peace, remain a male affair, with little or no input from women. Even when women are involved in peacemaking activities at the community level, they are often excluded when peace is being negotiated at the state level. Thus, even in the noted

exception of Somalia, where an invitation to participate in the peace conferences was extended to Somali women, their role was generally restricted to that of observer, which does not allow them to influence the ongoing debate directly. Furthermore, when at some point it was recommended that all regional representations to the Transitional National Council should include at least one woman, it turned out that many clans would not accept being represented by a woman (Jama, 1996).

Women participate in different capacities in liberation and other types of wars. In such situations, many liberation movements claimed women's liberation as an integral dimension of their overall struggle for social justice and hence women's issues were included on the political agendas and women were urged and mobilized to participate actively in the fighting. But when official peace negotiations begin and the decisions on the consolidation of peace and rebuilding of the country are made, women are again relegated to the traditional role of service providers while male leaders assume the mantle of strategic decision-making. The political rhetoric during the war and early post-war period affirming gender equality and urging women to support the war is soon forgotten in the ensuing scramble for power. A case study of Zimbabwean women after the armed struggle demonstrates this point well. After women's active participation in the liberation war, and after they campaigned vigorously for ZANU and ensured the party's victory in the polls, Mugabe, the country's new leader, noted that:

"The principle of equality between men and women is basic to the political philosophy of our government. We learned throughout the liberation struggle that success and power are possible when men and women are united as equals. It was when women were free to fully contribute towards their own freedom that Zimbabwe was possible" (Lapchick & Urdang, 1982: 108).

But having recognized women as important players in the newly independent nation, soon after the elections, the male leadership "turned it's back upon them and pushed them aside—only occasional appeals to women to support ZANU and a consistently more ceremonial endorsement of ZANU's women league has been used to appeal to sections of women considered to be important enough to influence public opinion. The economic base of the new society remained fundamentally the same as it had been under the pre-war regime and offered women fewer openings than had been promised. Thus wartime expectations conflicted with post war realities and traditional norms. Women did not turn society on its head as had been expected rather they were marginalized by a system they had fought so hard to change."(Leda:1989:61-63). Leda therefore concludes that women themselves might have changed and expected to change society, but the male-led guerilla movements with whom they worked had not confronted the issue of gender equality to any real extent, relying on women primarily for popular support and their own well-being. Thus, the post-independent position of women and their exclusion from political and economic life is not such a surprise. (Leda, 1989:63; Staunton, 1990). Indeed, women have often found that fighting for their country's liberation and achieving more prominent public roles is not a guarantee that a real commitment to gender equality will follow victory.

On the other hand, data from Eritrea (Iyob, 1997; Marcus, 1996b; Selassie, 1992 Klingbiel et.al.1995, Wilson 1991), suggest that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), strove explicitly for a democratic society with greater gender equity. In this connection,, women organized around The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), not only played a major role at all levels within the movement, during the struggle for independence but also, EPLF made the improvement of women's status an indispensable part of the democratic goal.

Consequently, EPLF not only included the gender issue in its rhetoric, but also initiated skills training and educational activities for women, introduced appropriate technology, widely established primary health care programmes, and adopted progressive new marriage and labour laws. But as in many other cases, social norms and cultural values still work against women's equality; in addition, many different male social groups now compete for their share of resources and tend therefore to be less willing to grant women space.

The case of Mozambique resembles that of Eritrea insofar as FRELIMO also declared that the liberation of women was the fundamental necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a precondition for its victory. And as in Eritrea, a women's wing of the movement, the Mozambique Women's Organization, was established to mobilize women in support of the struggle and to protect their specific interests. Moreover, FRELIMO ensured that women obtained easier access to education, and made legal and constitutional changes to protect their rights. Despite this early attention to gender, some scholars note that the centrality of the women question significantly diminished after independence (Chingono, 1996; Jacobson, 1995; Urdang, 1989). But despite this setback, Mozambique still has one of the highest representation of women in legislative bodies of African countries.

The point to be underscored here is that, despite women general marginality in the corridors of power and conflict mongering they are often among the first to call for an end to conflict and to strive for order and rebuilding. In postwar situations, whether in groups or individually, formally or informally, women probably contribute more than government authorities or international aid agencies to reconciliation, reviving local economies and rebuilding social networks.

But because of women's exclusion from peace building negotiations and decisions, they lack direct influence in the identification of reconstruction priorities that are usually part of peace agreements. Nevertheless, women continue to play critical roles through their work in grassroots organizations working for peace and reconciliation. From within these organizations, women constantly challenge the authorities and other members of society with demands for peace, non-discrimination, accountability, recognition of human rights, etc. These organizations often demonstrate their ability to mobilize large numbers of women, and to translate individual grievances into legitimate social concerns. Moreover, many of them play an important role in building a new culture of peace at the local level by organizing peace education and community-based reconciliation and social reconstruction activities.

Women's organizations have also made remarkable contributions in many African countries towards the post 1990 democratization efforts by organizing civic education and legal counseling programme aimed at empowering fellow women to participate in electoral politics and in lobbying for legal and constitutional reforms that provide for gender equality and access to resources and opportunities for self advancement. Indeed, it is in the 1990s that we saw African women emerge as major contenders to male dominated political power. Examples include: Kenya and Liberia, where women were major contenders for the presidency in the national elections of the late 1990s; in South Africa, where women's presence in the legislature is significant, with one serving as the Speaker of the National Assembly; and in Uganda, where women played an active and effective role in the constitution making process, and by January 2001, the only African country with a woman vice-president.

It is women's determination and capacity to organize and their socio-culturally assigned role as nurturers and societal problem solvers, that has enabled them to play significant roles in the post-war political, economic and social reconstruction of their countries, some of which are examined in this paper, along with the strategies employed and the constraints encountered.

5. *Women's Role During Conflicts: Women as Combatants and Service Providers*

The history of liberation and other forms of internal wars provides us with evidence of African women's active involvement as combatants, in Angola, Eritrea, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Uganda etc, in some cases even holding high ranking positions (Bennett et al., 1995). In still other conflicts, women play roles as mobilizers and support soldiers by providing food supply, health care, etc. Because of this, some argue that most wars have been fought with the acquiescence and support of women (Ferris, 1993). The reasons women put forth for becoming combatants or giving support services, are similar to those of men and include forced recruitment, agreement with the war objectives, or economic necessity, which reminds us that women, like men, have many different social identities, which are culturally and socially constructed. But in general, most women, perceive armed conflict as something entirely outside their control, a struggle for power at a level beyond their reach. Furthermore, women may not identify with the objectives of the war, or may feel alienated from the mechanisms of war, its apparent irrationality and its destructive consequences, and hence the desire for its immediate termination and a return to stability (Bennett et al., 1995: 16).

Analysing the violent conflicts in Nigeria, Udom(2000 :1-2) cites several cases where women "have been sucked in by the situation to support their men, even against their better judgment, as refusal to do so would result in death. So in such situations, women actively participate as combatants, or carrying out supportive activities such as cooking for the warriors, nursing them or encouraging them. Women have even been known to lead the warriors armed with charms to the battle area". But she also notes that: "In all these crisis situations— Nigerian women and children have borne the burden of their men's folly, having not participated in the decision to engage in the conflict in the first place. In this kind of situation, women often find themselves carried along in waves of a situation which they neither understand, nor agree with. In the heat of these crisis situations, the warring factions are deaf to all entreaties. But when they have burnt themselves out, they are forced to seek solutions elsewhere. It is then that women sometimes get to be listened to."

Regarding conflict resolution strategies, she suggests that we may need to revisit some of the traditional methods of conflict resolution traditionally employed by women, such as the use of traditional paraphernalia, with cultural connotations and believed to have mystical powers of imposing discipline, and certain taboo acts of protest by women, for example, stripping naked, that is believed to result in very serious consequences on the offenders. These means were used effectively to stop unacceptable behaviour of men(Udom: 2000 :3). In Kenya, a group of women stripped naked in 1993, seeking public support and to pressurise the government to release political prisoners. The act certainly generated tremendous public support but did not immediately persuade the government to comply (Nzomo:1993).

The Rwandese case deserves special mention as it represents an extreme case of women's involvement not simply as combatants but in so many different ways actively supporting and participating in the genocide. The genocide of the Tutsi and the killing of the Hutu political opponents which took place in Rwanda between April _ July 1994 highlighted women's role

in sustaining conflict and their potential for inflicting extraordinary cruelty, with some women participating in the slaughter of others. However, the study by African Rights (1995), places the main responsibility for the genocide with the chief male architects of the genocide, and the few of Rwanda's well educated women. In this connection, it is argued that the extent to which many of them were willing and active participants, the encouragement they provided to illiterate women and the example they set is a significant factor in explaining why such a high proportion of women became killers. Hundreds of educated women:- Catholic nuns, ministers, civil servants, local government officials, doctors, nurses, teachers, school inspectors, journalists and the staff of local and international NGOs, used their education, experience and standing in the community to urge other women to commit genocide. They did so against the deeply ingrained habit in Rwanda of obeying official orders. The study further notes that most of the women who played the most prominent role in the killings migrated to other countries and only a small percentage of the approximately one thousand women that were detained, accused of complicity in the genocide, are the educated women who spearheaded the genocide(cf. Prunier: 1995).

The case of Rwanda therefore is a reminder that war, especially of the genocide kind, is not a normal situation and those involved, may behave abnormally and irrationally, regardless of their gender, depending on their perception of the situation at that time. Furthermore, women as a social category are heterogeneous and bear multiple social identities, of which gender identity is only one. So there is need to refrain from gender stereotyping, and idealizing women, by pegging higher moral standards on them than men.

6. *Political Participation: Examples of African women as actors in Conflict and Post Conflict*

Political reconstruction involves formal peace negotiations between representatives of the warring parties and reaching an agreement regarding powersharing and political priorities. In addition, it requires the establishment and development of legitimate, accountable and capable institutions which ensure a minimum degree of security and protection of all citizens' rights. But for women, it is also a struggle for inclusion in decision-making and shaping of the post-war political dispensation (Sorenson, 1998).

During postwar political reconstruction women share many interests and problems with their fellow male citizens, but they also differ on a number of issues. Women's specific concerns are shaped by the prevailing socio-cultural conceptualizations of gender roles and relationships and by the economic positions and obligations which they have within the family and the community, as daughters, wives and mothers. In addition, their postwar position will be partly determined by their former positions in the landscapes of conflict, as internally displaced persons, widows, single breadwinners, victims of rape or torture, excombatants, refugees, etc. Apart from contributing to the definition of women's specific postwar concerns, these structural and situational factors play a decisive role in defining the motivations as well as the constraints on women's involvement as social actors in the political process toward sustainable peace.

In post-war Uganda, the National Resistance Movement(NRM) government, recognized the role women had played in the liberation struggle and hence made women's advancement a priority of the new government. Among other things, women's participation in the government was assured by appointing women to several cabinet seats, including the position of the Vice- President. Boyd (1994:79-80) notes in this regard that:

"Women play a significant role in reshaping politics in Uganda and assisting in the resolution of violent political conflicts. From positions of leadership within the state, they appear to place on the agenda a different perspective and even a different negotiating style. They also appear to have some influence in the decision-making process. But there are still too few of them in senior leadership positions to make the impact that critical numbers make. (But) from even the few visible examples where women do assert themselves in relation to men for example, in the— Constituent Assembly elections where nine women won in their own right, and often overwhelmingly, against male candidates—Women in leadership are certainly influencing the process of transforming their society such that political violence and gender inequalities will be eradicated."

In conflict torn Somalia, women formed NGOs which, among other activities, organize peace education activities, that focus on alternative forms of behaviour that stress equity and social justice and nonviolent ways of dealing with tensions and conflicts (Jama, 1996; Warsame, 1996). Urban Women are also said to play a major role in shaping public opinion by organizing peace demonstrations whenever there was a threat or an actual eruption of hostilities between two clans, as well as holding peace demonstrations on International Women's Days, chanting slogans such as "Somali women want peace not war" (Warsame,1996). Women also actively participate in peace matches organized by other civil society organizations.

Similarly, women of Sierra Leone have demonstrated the positive impact of networking and political mobilization. Even in the face of threats and intimidation, they have taken up issues ranging from domestic violence and female education to the building of peace and democracy in Sierra Leone. Women's organizations have also worked hard to promote sustainable family life, and helped create a comprehensive system for monitoring and supporting the electoral process, before the occurrence of armed conflict. In this latter regard, during the 1995 parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone, local women's groups, notably, the Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN) and the Federation of Muslim Women's Association, organized themselves to mobilize other women to participate in the national elections, that most would not otherwise have participated. These women NGOs conducted a door to door campaign, ignoring threats to their security, to persuade other women to vote. Apart from directly influencing the outcome of the elections, their political action also generated a sense of solidarity among women, who were encouraged to organize themselves on a number of conflict prevention issues relating to social justice, economic and cultural development(Dunbar,1997). The critical role women played in these elections was acknowledged by the President-Elect, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in his inaugural address on March 29, 1996:

'To the women of Sierra Leone, old and young alike, may I pass on the special message, that perhaps more than your husbands, sons and nephews your efforts have made today a reality. For your support in favour of elections, democratic civilian government, and freedom: freedom to elect the leader of your choice, we applaud your courage and I here publicly acknowledge it' (IPA/OAU:1996).

Although women's political activism has not prevented Sierra Leone from reverting back to war, the lesson from this action by Sierra Leonean women is instructive. Among other things, it demonstrates that, even in a politically volatile situation, a combination of political will, and a well-organized network of women, can be a dynamic and powerful force for positive change in Africa.

Similar observations have been made regarding women's participation in political affairs preceding elections in post-liberation war Mozambique, where women's organizations prepared and disseminated alternative information pamphlets which reflected more directly women's everyday realities, explaining to women the relevance of certain political issues. Women's organizations also made a valuable contribution by reaching marginalized groups in society through civic education programmes, using their existing communitybased structures to reach the nonliterate sectors of the urban and rural populations. But all this was achieved against a backdrop of significant infrastructural constraints, funding problems and gender discrimination in the election monitoring process (Jacobson, 1995).

In the case of the Sudan , studies show that since 1994, the Sudanese Women's Association [SWAN] based in Nairobi, Kenya, has been seeking to build an enabling environment in which Sudanese women can work together across ethnic, cultural, political and religious differences, to promote peace, human rights, women's empowerment and development .For example, between 1995 and 1997, workshops and training seminars were held in Nairobi on food security and peace management issues for the Sudan. Women were also involved in a variety of formal and informal activities inside and outside Sudan, trying to unite women and men, for the common national objective of peace building. As a part of that objective, eight Sudanese women participated in the 1999 international conference: "The Hague Appeal for Peace". This was the first time that one united group of Sudanese women, representing all the political warring groups and civil society organizations, jointly appealed to the world to help bring peace to the Sudan (Nyoka : 2000).

The cases cited above, demonstrate women's often unrecognized role as political constructors and peace builders, who have the capacity to positively influence social change, if provided with an enabling (democratic) environment. In this connection, women have amply demonstrated that in their families, their communities, or their political movements, they can play a key role in positively reshaping the world.

7. *Constitutional Reform*

The importance of constitutions lie in their definition of people's political, economic and social rights, as citizens of a country and thus play a central role in empowerment. Access to and control over resources is a critical issue for women because opportunities to improve their overall status within postwar societies hinges on their economic empowerment. The loss of entitlement or restrictions on women's rights and access to resources rather than an actual lack of resources, may constitute the main constraint women face as they try to recover from a damaging war.

In South Africa, at the end of the Apartheid era, the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League lobbied hard to ensure not only adequate representation of women in governing bodies, but also for a national constitution that is gender responsive and with concrete guarantees for gender equality (Meer;1998; Mabandla:1995). Women's lobbying paid off and South Africa to date has the highest representation of women in decision-making and one of the most gender sensitive constitutions in Africa. In this regard, women even succeeded in pushing into the constitution a standing Commission on Gender Equality, that serves as a mechanism for monitoring and reviewing the progress made in implementation of gender related laws.

In Eritrea when the political leadership of independent Eritrea initiated its work on a new constitution, there was a clear continuity with earlier positions on gender equity. A draft text thus stated that "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role or participation is prohibited" (Tesfai, 1996: 30). Apart from recognizing women's basic rights in general, the constitution also guarantees women rights of access to land, prohibits female circumcision, dowry and brideprice, while rights to maternity leave have been extended (Iyob, 1997). But these Legal provisions have not translated into women's empowerment, due to socio-cultural resistance and inadequate political will for implementation (Iyob, 1997; Mama, 1992). Similarly, in Angola, after the Liberation war, female members of the ruling party developed a national wing of the ruling party, called Organization of Angolan Women (OMA), to lobby for the inclusion of women's rights in the new constitution. A similar lobby was organized by women members of professional and business associations. The totality of these efforts by women resulted in several laws being passed granting women equal rights with men, in matters of employment, the household, inheritance and public life (Sogge, 1992).

Legal rights to land have been high on the agenda among women, especially widows in Rwanda, where according to customary law, a widow must transfer her land to her deceased husband's family if she has no sons. Given that so many women lost their spouses during the genocide war, and in view of this gender discrimination, widows' lobby groups are said to have sprung up across postconflict Rwanda to ensure legal entitlements to property. But as elsewhere in Africa, customary laws die hard. Indeed it is worth remembering that even good legislations are not enough in Africa in the absence of civic and gender awareness, and a supportive democratic government.

In a nutshell then, the preceding discussion on women in decision-making, as combatants, service providers and post-conflict political activists, demonstrates the point that women are not merely victims of war. On the contrary, women have been actively involved in wars and post war activities at many levels; and this experience has sharpened their political awareness and raised their expectations of state and society. At one level, this has contributed to the mobilization of women in peace building processes, where some have played significant roles in organizing and sensitizing the society on important issues such as the need for human rights, gender equality, and accountability. Moreover, they have also attempted to define alternatives to violent conflict through peace education. Though Women are rarely participants at the level of formal negotiations for peace, they generally show a keen interest in the peace process, as it has a direct impact on their lives and their families.

In regard to efforts to create democratic institutions, as a step toward greater gender equality, women have also been active, organizing training materials and conducting civic education for other women, mobilizing women to take part in elections, demanding equal representation in democratic institutions, etc.

These efforts by women notwithstanding, and despite some progress at the level of legislations, the gap between ideology and practice remains very large. Women continue to be underrepresented in decision-making bodies at all levels, and for various reasons, they often cannot exercise even established rights. Obstacles to gender equality as noted, can be identified at many levels, and include lack of appropriate policies, a lack of human and financial resources to implement policies, and strong socio-cultural resistance to the transformation of gender roles. Women increasingly raise their voices on these issues, but as

the case of Rwanda illustrates, female solidarity cannot be assumed as women do not always act and speak from a shared vision.

8. *Post-Conflict Economic Reconstruction*

In postwar economic reconstruction, during which most women's responsibilities for their own wellbeing and for the progress of their households and communities increase, a major concern is whether the emerging economic environment will be conducive to women's empowerment, or will reinforce economic marginalization and increase their vulnerability. In postwar societies, women's economic situations and interests vary greatly, as do the economic strategies they employ in order to restore economic livelihoods. Traditional socioeconomic rights and obligations, their recent experiences as de facto breadwinners or dispossessed persons as a consequence of the dislocations of war, the present conditions under which they live determine women's economic prospects and the role they play in revitalizing the economy.

The economic reconstruction of a country emerging from war is crucial and complex, and directly or indirectly shapes women's postwar livelihoods. While governments and external financial institutions play a crucial role in the recovery of economies shattered by war, postwar economic life is really undertaken by individual men and women who have no choice but to develop individual or collective strategies for basic survival, seeking to exploit whatever opportunities legal or illegal that they can find, to escape further poverty and marginalization.

The agricultural sector in many African countries, is the primary form of livelihood and the major source of income for a majority of the population. Consequently, agriculture is often also expected to be the main sector for labour absorption in the postwar period. In such a situation, where production has been curtailed by armed conflict, compounded by extensive destruction of physical infrastructure, environmental degradation, landmines, displacement, lack of farming implements, inefficient administration, etc, all impose serious constraints on economic recovery.

In Zimbabwe, the post-liberation phase witnessed state economic failure and rising male unemployment rates, which then put increasing pressure on women to secure income generating activities, consequently large numbers of women entered into informal trade networks that spanned several countries. However, the fact that women thus transgressed social boundaries meant that female traders were often stigmatized as prostitutes. And as they became increasingly successful in economic life, maledominated state institutions adopted regulations and practices that undermined women's entrepreneurial activities and marginalized them as "problem citizens". "Thus, the newly found mobility of women had become threatening to male interest, as it had opened up possibilities for women to compete in economic and social spaces which were previously the nearexclusive domain of men but were now beyond the male control (Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1996: 199). In other words, women's post-war economic strategies may indirectly exacerbate gender tensions in different arenas at different levels.

In some instances, women have ventured into areas that had previously been the domain of men. Describing the postwar situation for women in Uganda, Kabera and Muyanja (1996: 103) observed:

"New developments have included the involvement of women in petty trade and even wholesaling—carpentry and building work, and better techniques of poultry farming and fruit growing—maize cultivation has been widely adopted—Beer brewing—has become more common—. Trading networks between villages have intensified, and travelling by bicycle over quite long distances has become a normal practice. This has all been the consequence of exposure to ideas from outside the local area" (Kabera and Muyanja, 1996: 103).

In Chad, prior to the war, female kin occasionally organized traditional parties to raise money for major social events. After the war, female refugees returning to Chad revived this tradition, but turned it into a commercial business. The parties were now organized in public bars and restaurants, open to everyone. The result of this activity was significant income from the sale of drinks at the party that enabled women to accumulate large sums of capital for small development projects as well as strengthened ties of female solidarity beyond the immediate kin group (Watson, 1996:). Women returnees in Chad also found crossborder trade to be a lucrative occupation, taking advantage of the permeability of national borders, to trading in cloth, cosmetics, and alcohol (Watson, 1996: 136).

Women in Sierra Leone crossed not only national borders, but also "enemy lines" in the so-called "attack trade"- a risky affair that demanded that women constantly negotiate with the belligerent groups and field commanders to obtain their approval and protection. The attack trade not only provided the individual woman and her family with a good income; it also played a significant role in the economic rehabilitation of the country and the promotion of peace (Richards, 1996).

Studies on postconflict Eritrea and Chad, tell similar stories, especially in regard to cross-border trade: of women's sheer ingenuity, innovativeness, courage, endurance and capacity to reconstruct destroyed economic livelihoods, with limited resources (Bascom, 1996, Ahmed (1996) Marcus, 1996b).

Documentation of the postwar situation in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and many other post-conflict African countries, indicate that women generally face far more difficulties entering the formal sector than men do (Barron, 1996; Cheater and Gaidzanwa, 1996; ILO, 1995a; Sogge, 1992) primarily because criteria for formal sector employment is closely linked to levels of education and skills training on the one hand, and the political manipulation of gender roles in response to national economic priorities on the other. But studies on Angola, Eritrea, and Namibia show that even when women have the same level of education as men, they may still have difficulties in entering the formal sector (Sogge, 1992).

However, despite these obstacles, some women have managed to enter the public or private sector and put the skills they have gained to an advantage. An interesting example is in Eritrea, where six female excombatants formed the Eritrean Veteran Women Fighters' Trading and Investment Share Company, which by 1995, had 600 female fighters and exfighters who owned shares worth a total of around 1 million Birr, some of which they intended to invest in a hotel project in Eritrea (Klingebl et al., 1995: 70). The project however faced many of the same problems, including lack of adequate training in management and other business skills.

The above survey demonstrates that before, during and after conflicts, women remain important economic actors, as individuals and participants in selfhelp groups and extended

networks. They not only make a contribution to the economic recovery of their families, but also play a major role in revitalizing the economic sphere at large.

Documentation of women's economic strategies in waraffected countries suggests that, the informal sector, which links local, national and regional areas, plays an increasingly important role in women's lives as the primary source of income or as a supplement to farm incomes. The literature moreover suggests that women are generally marginalized in formal sector training and employment, either because they lack formal qualifications or because they lack social support to assist with domestic tasks and/or because male employment is given higher priority. Thus, while women are important contributors in economic recovery, in postwar phase, they face further marginalization which may result in increased tensions within and between households.

9. *Social Reconstruction*

At the social level, postwar societies face two separate challenges. One is the rehabilitation of a partially damaged or totally collapsed social sector, the other is the facilitation of a longterm process of social integration. With regard to the place of women, a major concern is whether the social sector addresses women's particular needs and concerns in an appropriate and adequate manner and recognizes and incorporates women's capacities and skills into the provision of social services.

Most intra-state armed conflicts often target the social sector institutions directly and aim at massive social dislocation and disintegration, and hence the tasks of social reconstruction are immense and complex. At one level, social reconstruction requires the allocation of resources to rehabilitate the social infrastructure and institutions to provide populations with health care, education and other services. This is a precondition not only for people's survival, but also for enabling them to contribute to the overall rebuilding process. At another level, social reconstruction is expected to heal the psychological wounds, and to generate an inclusive social environment with a minimum of stigmatization, marginalization, or exclusion. It demands the restoration of mutual respect, trust, confidence and solidarity building, as prerequisites for reducing the risks for renewed violent conflict.

Despite great eternal differences, women as a social category share certain experiences and interests which may generate a level of solidarity and mobilize them as rebuilders, displaying courage, fortitude and great resiliency in seeking to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives—some attempting to reactivate distant ties of kinship others reaching out to other women to create new forms of female solidarity and still others resolutely drawing on their inner strength and demonstrating their capacity for self preservation.

The importance of education for prevention of conflict cannot be overemphasized. As Kuzwe (1998 : 38) points out: "There is not a shadow of doubt that illiteracy and lack of education provide the ideal cultural environment for the propagation of conflict".

Women understood this. And so in Mozambique, Uganda, Somalia, Rwanda, Algeria and elsewhere, female teachers were observed trying to continue children's primary education in refugee camps and welfare for internally displaced people, and in post-conflict phase children's and adults' education is also a field of activity for many grassroots women's organizations. (Jama, 1996; Byrne, 1996d). For example, in Uganda, a group of women organized a local support group, the Gulu Support the Children Organization, which aimed

primarily to help children who had been withdrawn from school to participate in the armed struggle but who wished to escape from warfare and continue their education (Sorenson : 1998).

In the health sector of most waraffected societies, female health professionals have put their skills and experiences to good use, by joining relief and health organizations such as the Red Cross, or by forming voluntary associations which not only provide medical assistance, but also organize training and discussion groups on healthrelated issues (Kasmann and Korner, 1996; Marcus, 1996b). Aside from taking part in providing primary health care, women often also play an important role in developing new mechanisms to respond to the many new health problems occurring as a result of war, such as psychosocial trauma, rape, warrelated injuries, poor nutrition as a result of displacement and loss of livelihoods, etc. The importance of women's resources in this field is widely acknowledged. Consequently, it has been argued that targeting women for professional health care training is a key to improving the community's health status. Moreover, it may provide valuable opportunities for longterm employment. However, in practice many programmes continue to discriminate against women when enrolling people in training activities. And when women are involved in the health sector, they typically occupy mainly lowlevel jobs.

Violence against women is rampant even in those African countries that have not experienced war. However, the situation tends to be worse in post-conflict societies. Postapartheid South Africa is a case in point, as it continues to be ridden with violence at all levels. Women experience this at home, where they and their children are physically and verbally abused by husbands and fathers, and in the public arena, where they are at risk of rape, violent attacks and harassment. People Against Human Abuse (PAHA), an organization founded by a group of women in Pretoria in 1994, has managed to assist a large number of victims, and more importantly, it has initiated a dialogue with teachers, police, magistrates, health staff, staff from the welfare department and others who may be instrumental in reducing physical and psychological violence and reestablishing trust and justice (Makhoere, 1997).

On the one hand, life in urban areas is fraught with difficulties, as women often lack a social network that can assist them with shelter, childcare, and so on, and the environment is extremely competitive. On the other hand, for the women who decide to return to their home villages integration may also be more difficult than expected. Barron (1996), Brunt (1997), Tapscott (1994) and Watson (1996) all give examples of hostile and suspicious social attitudes facing women from Chad, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone. The returned women frequently experienced domestic violence and abuse, in most cases related to alcohol abuse, which in turn was linked to their husbands' sense of insecurity due to unemployment or recent release from the armed forces. Outside the domestic sphere, women often met jealousy or resentment among local people, and were discouraged from assuming a public function. Namibian women accustomed to leadership in exile had to suppress their skills so as to achieve community acceptance. And in Chad, the returnees found their home environment hostile; with nobody to help them in agriculture, childcare, etc, and in some cases they had to pay higher prices at the market. Thus, while kinship and other intimate social networks may prove valuable in getting people back on their feet, it can never be taken for granted that relatives and friends will offer help and support the many female victims of war: disabled persons, widows, women who have been raped, orphans, etc. Accommodating these various groups then is a major challenge, for many societies, as these groups often require more resources than normal. The erosion of traditional social bonds and breakdown of extended family networks may, not only have serious consequences for economic cooperation, but may

also mean that distrust and rivalry, play an increasingly important role in everyday social interactions. This situation constraints post conflict social reconstruction.

But with some external assistance from such institutions as the UNCHS (Habitat) women in war torn societies do begin to find a new place in society as decision makers, peace makers and developers. UNCHS' attempt to support the improvement of women's position in postwar societies is based on the assumption that women are particularly qualified and interested in the reconstruction of human settlements. The programme strives to ensure that new settlements meet women's needs, and envisages that women's involvement will have other longterm outcomes, in the form of women's empowerment; contribute to healing war traumas, facilitate processes of reconciliation, and generate new social relations. Habitat has introduced this programme: Women Rebuilding Their Lives, in Rwanda, Burundi and Ethiopia (UNCHS, 1995).

In a nutshell, Social reconstruction is a complex process that involves the very foundations of any society social identities, roles, relationships and institutions, and social welfare. In the wake of massive dislocations and disruptions that have challenged and partly dismantled the prevailing social structure, there is a need to redefine the social basis of the nation, as well as the local community and household.

In most post conflict societies, women more than men, generally put great emphasis on the rehabilitation and development of the social services sector. Under difficult circumstances, women reestablish children's education, build up primary health care services, and address the social consequences of traumatic war experiences. The particular approaches that women adopt in such cases, often promote cooperation across various social and professional lines. However, even when women's efforts in this field are widely acknowledged to be of crucial importance, women's work is generally perceived as a natural extension of their domestic work. While it is true that women's particular experiences and social positions in most cases make them especially qualified for social work, the failure to admit that this is a professional status may jeopardize women's access to training and remuneration, lower the status and respect that the work entails for them.

10. Concluding Remarks

Women clearly play a crucial role in conflict prevention, management resolution and post-conflict reconstruction. But their marginality in high level decision-making, including those decisions regarding war and peace, constrain their ability to decisively influence and/or impact on conflict prevention and attainment of sustainable peace. There is need therefore, not only to enact and endorse gender responsive legislative measures and policies, but also to translate such commitments into action, including affirmative action and proportional representation in the electoral political context. Women themselves must seek to organize and become active players at all levels of decision making in their societies, including in the management of conflict. They need to develop mobilization strategies for dealing with conflict situations and to strengthen sub-regional networking with other women groups around key issues relating to peace, and training in conflict management. In this regard, there is need to continuously lobby and spearhead gender and civic education programmes aimed at changing those elements of socio-cultural attitudes and practices that are resistant to gender equity.

But fundamentally, the most important challenge facing Africa as it seeks to put an end to increasing violence and armed conflicts on the continent, is the establishment of sustainable structures and processes of democratic governance. While recognizing that the building and consolidation of democratic institutions and processes take time, the change process in that direction need to be reflected in national legislations, policies and social practices, including the development of a democratic culture and building political systems that promote respect for basic human rights as well as giving all citizens a voice in determining who governs them. Women as members of civil society can work towards creating more open and democratic structures and processes starting by democratizing their own organizational management and decision-making structures. For example, they can strengthen their lobby for change in the larger national institutions.

Women's groups generally form the core of civil society in most African countries. In many situations of conflict, women constitute the only sector widely seen as untainted by the partisan nature of such conflicts. Using this legitimacy, women can mobilize effectively in support of peace as they tend to span the political and ethnic divisions of the society and, hence, can be a powerful vehicle for peace. Women by virtue of their socially constructed traditional roles as caregivers and nurturers in society, are also in a special position, to address the psychosocial traumas that often accompany violent conflict. Women in civic associations, already play a vital role in promoting programmes for civic education, exhorting people on the virtues of mutual tolerance and respect, peace and non-violence. This momentum needs to be sustained and strengthened. In particular, in situations in which state structures have been organized around the de facto ethnic hegemony of one tribe or community, women can promote values and national symbols that encourage mutual respect and tolerance among all groups, as for example, in response to the conflicts of Rwanda and Burundi.

Women cannot sustain peace on their own. Thus, networking and collective action across gender is vital for developing common strategies and plans of action and for promoting the development of more inclusive and democratic governance structures. Women's organizations must reach out to other like-minded civil society groups, to prevent conflict and to help resolve the factors which give rise to conflicts. Indeed, peace agreements are more often the product of a large confluence of forces, involving many people, rather than one or two mediators. Networking among civil society leaderships within a country is therefore extremely important. Networking also facilitates social dialogue which is so crucial for developing a common set of values and standards or code of conduct, that will guide individual and collective action, during periods of both war and peace.

At the heart of any long term strategy for preventing violence is the development of institutions for managing disputes and conflict. These can take a number of forms, ranging from legislations to the promotion of social dialogue and relevant peace enhancing cultural traditions. Such arrangements should establish the means by which disputes can be peacefully settled. In addition, a range of economic, social, and political measures would be required to avert impending conflicts, or de-escalate existing ones. More importantly, the successful management of the ethnic, racial, religious and other social diversities within many African countries, require the development of power sharing mechanisms; the reduction of economic disparities, and the construction of inclusive national identities. The most critical aspect of the management of diversity therefore entails the development of institutions that accomodate all groups within a state's boundaries. Systematic marginalization or the disenfranchisement of a group breeds animosity and often prompts conflict. In many African countries, the institutions of the state are controlled by one group who assert its hegemony over others. This relationship

creates conflict perpetuating dynamics, whereby the group in power, perceives the suppressed group as a threat and the latter view the extinction of the former as essential for its liberation. African societies need to reflect their societies' multi-ethnic character, ensuring that political power and resources are equitably shared rather than being a source of violent conflict.

In situations where post-conflict reconstruction is underway, peace efforts must address the underlying causes of the conflict to prevent a recurrence of violence. In particular, scholars should accelerate the production and dissemination of knowledge that is necessary to understanding the root causes and evolutions of conflicts. They can also provide policy recommendations to governments and inter-governmental institutions on the best strategies for managing conflicts. Women scholars should be more active in the production of knowledge and analysis of conflicts and must also be proactive in seeking to reach a wider audience through popular media, including print and electronic media. Furthermore, during violent conflicts, academics on both sides of the divide can work together as advocates of tolerance and peace. As with women's organizations there is a need for more effective networking among intellectuals to enhance the quality of scholarship and the dissemination of knowledge. In particular, there is need for gender disaggregated data and gender-focused analysis, which pays attention to how gender roles and relationships are continuously constructed and contested by different actors, and which recognizes the gender dimension as inherent in all aspects of post-war situations.

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