ACCORD
THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES
Conference Paper
Issue 1 / 2012

An Overview of the Situation of Women in Conflict and Post-Conflict Africa[1]

By Dr Grace Maina

INTEGRER LE GENRE DANS TOUTES LES
PROGRAMMATIONS POST-CONFLIT C'EST
PROMOUVOIR UNE PAIX DURABLE ET
UNE SOCIETE PLUS EQUITABLE

Abstract

Conflict and post-conflict environments in Africa present unique challenges and opportunities for women. While violence and war periods have negative effects on women, it is suggested that 'peace time' has implications for women as well. For most women, the end of war and conflict is marked by the excessive effects of trauma and shame. There are still numerous accounts of rape and forced marriages that undermine the social position of these women in society. Due to these circumstances, many women struggle to participate effectively in the affairs of their societies. The lack of skills or education among many of these women means that their access to economic opportunities is greatly challenged. It is critical that the implications of conflict on these women be clearly understood. Furthermore, the post-conflict environment must also be interrogated, as there are concerning social, psychological, physical and economic implications that continue to challenge women.

Introduction

Over the years, the world has increasingly acknowledged the impact of conflict on women. This has been clearly evidenced through different international platforms, protocols, laws and resolutions. In analysing the security situation of women in conflict and post-conflict arenas, it is important to note that previously, conflicts were analysed through a 'traditional lens', and that emphasis was placed on the relationships between states. Following the Cold War, however, there has been a realisation that security must include the needs of the individual, and freedom of the individual from fear and want. Within this new view, security is not peculiar to relations between different states; rather, it has as its basis the social contract between the state and its citizens, in which citizens have traded their rights for the guarantee of protection, by their Leviathan, from acts of war (Hobbes 1985). This new idea of security encompasses two ideas: safety, which goes beyond the concept of physical security in the traditional sense, and 'social security', which ensures that people's livelihoods are guaranteed (Tadjbakhsh 2005).

Following the end of conflict through the signing of a peace agreement or cessation of hostilities, there is a presumption that this outcome means a positive reward for women. While the achievement of peace is critical, and violent conflict must be avoided at all cost, this paper seeks to interrogate women's experiences of not only conflict, but also of 'peace'. It is contended that while war has implications on women, peace following conflict has implications for women as well. These implications are both negative and positive. It follows that it is not enough to sign a peace agreement. These agreements in themselves do not necessarily result in security and holistic peace, and a constant interrogation of what peace means to different populations must be done. In this regard, this contribution is a modest attempt to review the situation of women in conflict and post-conflict Africa.

---

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Committee's Regional Consultation on the Proposed General Recommendation on Human Rights of Women in Situations of Conflict and Post-conflict, which took place from 12-13 April 2012 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Women's right to physical security in conflict and post-conflict environments

Violence against women has gained international recognition as a serious social development and human-rights concern and considerable evidence demonstrates the need to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in countries emerging from conflict (Mutisi, Ogunsanya and Ettang 2011). International women's rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Women's Convention 1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995), and United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, expressly condemn all forms of violence against women. Article 10 of UNSCR 1325 'calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict' (United Nations Security Council 2000).

In addition, Article 11 of UNSCR 1325 emphasises the responsibility of all states to put an end to impunity, and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls. In this regard, it stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible, from amnesty provisions. UNSCR 1325 thus emphasises the importance of addressing SGBV through prevention, protection and prosecution (United Nations Security Council 2000).

Studies of violence against women in conflict and post-conflict countries reveal that some of the most frequently mentioned forms of SGBV included structural forms of violence and direct violence. It is important to note that early and forced marriage and wife inheritance, in many of these societies, are often cited as problematic issues related to SGBV. Although these are considered traditional practices by some, such have been exacerbated by wartime experiences which tended to reinforce men's domination over women (Jok 2011).

Rape, gang rape, sexual mutilation and sexual slavery are other prevalent forms of physical violence, and are accompanied by immediate mental and health-related issues (Mutisi, Ogunsanya and Ettang 2011). There are also the devastating long-term social and economic effects such as stigmatisation, unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) – including the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). These effects have implications for the overall health and wellbeing of individuals, and are a cause of repeated patterns of psycho-social trauma. They are rarely considered in efforts to rebuild societies or to implement peace processes. Studies have shown that sexual violence often persists after the battle deaths have ended and the peace agreements have been signed (for an overview see Lindgren 2011). Examples here would include the systematic violence of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone after the Abuja Ceasefire (10 November 2000), the continued turbulence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) after the Final Act of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (2 April 2003), as well as in Liberia immediately after the Accra Agreement (18 August 2003) (Lindgren 2011).

Challenges of addressing SGBV

Reporting

A fundamental concern, when it comes to SGBV, is that of under-reporting. In South Sudan, for example, only about eight per cent of women who had suffered violence reported it to the police (UNHCR et al. 2011). There are several reasons for this. Firstly, violence that occurs within the family is often perceived to be a 'private' affair, meaning that the police, traditional courts, neighbours, the church, and other entities are not able to intervene – unless a report is brought to their attention. Secondly, fears of being stigmatised, and also being dissuaded by family members, inhibit full reporting on SGBV. Another key hindrance to reporting is that in many conflict and post-conflict states, security sector institutions post-conflict still exhibit patriarchal values which prevent women from reporting. Patriarchal thinking and cultural conservativeness of the personnel handling SGBV cases is also a challenge. One instance of this can be seen in South Sudan where concerns were raised over the difficulty in reporting to the security sector because it was dominated by men and paternalistic thinking. Furthermore, currently in Eastern Equatoria State, for instance, only 150 of the 2400 police officers are women. Police officers are perceived as representatives of the local culture and tradition, which typically lowly conceives the status of women. In many cases, police officers reportedly supported the husbands in cases of domestic disputes (ACCORD 2012).

The problem of under-reporting is also compounded by weakness in capacity and technical skills. In South Sudan, reporting of SGBV is mostly done to customary leaders, because they are seen as socially closer to the people, and the process does not require extensive paperwork. Poor road and communication infrastructure is an additional obstacle preventing victims of SGBV from accessing formal authorities. Many of these formal authorities are under-resourced and incapable of addressing the needs of the individual. A further challenge to reporting is the perceived ineffectiveness of the institutions that victims are supposed to report to (ACCORD 2012). Graph 1 is an illustration of a survey done of 5 states in South Sudan for why women do not report incidences of SGBV. Nevertheless, there have been success stories in this regard. One such example is Rwanda, where more emphasis has been placed on reporting structures and instituting such structures down to community level.

Lack of capacity within government

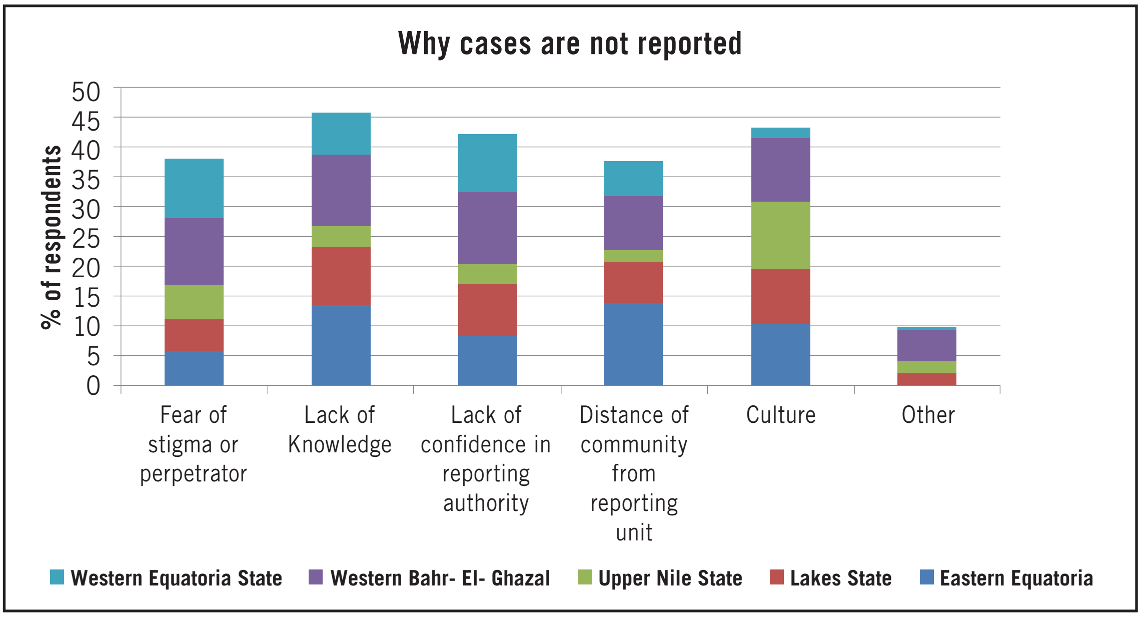
Even when reporting does take place, there are problems with the relating capacity of government institutions to address SGBV cases. The prevention of and response to SGBV would include the police, prisons and justice system. However, in many instances, police forces are neither well trained in forensic sciences, nor is there space or the necessary tools to support scientific investigation. While national or state provisions and laws that protect women in urban areas could be introduced, it would be a challenge to ensure that knowledge of this reaches rural areas.

The recording and documentation of SGBV cases in conflict and post-conflict countries is still a pertinent challenge. In part, this could be attributed to low levels of training, literacy and the general lack of know-how. In South Sudan, illiteracy and language are key barriers to effective documentation and subsequent responses (ACCORD 2012).

Amnesty and elusive justice in post-conflict communities

There is little documentation on how war has affected women. What seems clear is that the experiences of conflict and the repercussions of it for women have been fundamentally different from their male counterparts (Annan, Blattman, Carlson and Mazurana 2008). While the experiences of women are less recorded in comparison to men, even less is known about the impact of peace processes on women. There is a dearth of research on the peacebuilding experiences of women and how they have coped in post-conflict African societies. One such peacebuilding process that has not been interrogated for its implication on women is that of granting amnesty.

Graph 1: Causes for underreporting of SGBV in South Sudan



Source: ACCORD. 2012. *The Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in South Sudan*. Durban, Unpublished.

With the end of different civil conflicts around the world, many societies and warring parties have emerged from their violent past by drawing on amnesties as a channel for promoting reconciliation and peace. On different fronts, amnesties have been criticised as highly ineffective, because they promote a cycle of impunity with gross atrocities going unpunished, unacknowledged and without redress (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse 2003). There have been numerous debates about whether amnesties hinder or facilitate reconciliation.

Amnesty in post-conflict Africa comes in a variety of forms: it can be blanket or limited, extended to all crimes committed within a particular period or restricted to less serious crimes or to less responsible actors, or both; it may cover all individuals within the classes named or require individual applications; it may affect criminal or civil liability, or both (Greenawalt 2000). The Optional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions – which relates to non-international armed conflict – provides for amnesty by stipulating that '[a]t the end of hostilities, the authorities in power shall endeavour to grant the broadest possible amnesty to persons who have participated in the armed conflict, or those deprived of their liberty for reasons related to the armed conflict, whether they are interned or detained'. This protocol, in providing for amnesty, however stipulates that amnesty will and should not be granted for war crimes and crimes against humanity, which are always punishable as stipulated in the Convention of the Non-Applicability of Statutory Limitations to War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity (The Optional Protocol II of the Geneva Conventions). In practice, however, this has not always been the case, and broad and blanket amnesties have been granted even for these crimes. Between 1980–2006 amnesties were a common feature of peace agreements and 22 of 30 peace agreements signed in this period provided for general amnesties (Vinjamuri, 2007).

This provisioning for amnesty has raised serious and complex issues on how justice will be served by granting amnesty to those who have violated communities, and more specifically women. A significant question to ask, is why post-conflict governments chose to grant amnesty to the rebels who have antagonised female populations. There have been various arguments advanced to explain amnesty granted by post-conflict governments: firstly they have also been responsible for their own share of bloodshed and lack moral authority to demand pure retributive justice; and secondly they seek to pursue peace at all costs and this desire can be both internal or external, with governments yielding to international pressure (Maina 2011).

Whilst there is recognition of the fact that post-conflict societies have to progress and grow, there is the consideration of what happens to women who have been violated during war. To what extent is the granting of amnesties an approval of the abuse of women? To what extent do these women get side-lined in these new communities where they feel compromised and unprotected? The social dilemma and fear of having to confront and deal with individuals who have inflicted abuse, is a daily concern in many post-conflict African countries. Justice has been deemed a privilege, and not a necessary component of post-conflict states. Many post-conflict states face the uphill task of rebuilding the country's infrastructure, and due to the material and logistical cost of criminal trials and hearings, these states cannot engage in efforts to pursue justice (Huyse 1995). There is also typically a lack of a rigorous penal system that could see only some selected individuals punished, and this can render the judicial procedures arbitrary and have an impact on the process of reconciliation.

Most post-conflict societies have advocated restorative modalities for achieving justice. This is, however, not without its own incoherencies, and raises questions on various fronts. These include: who is being restored; who actually should be restored; what should be restored; how do we gauge restoration; and why is restoration important (Kinyanjui 2008). There is consensus on the fact that the victim must be restored (Johnstone 2002). The complexity, however, lies in how to do this.

It is imperative to note, that with issues of justice, when it comes to offences to one's person, and for crimes such as rape committed against women, the mere payment of reparations is not a sufficient solution. The effect of such crimes cannot be cured merely by imprisonment or payment of a fine. The reality is that women, who have been victims of abuse in post-conflict African states, continue to live with the scars of abuse and violation after the conflicts have ended.

Social and psycho-social realities for women in conflict and post-conflict societies

The social and psycho-social concerns for women in conflict and in post-conflict settings are a huge challenge. This is both for women who form part of armed groups, and for those who remain resident in communities that were or are victimised by war. The devastating implications of war on these women have left many of them socially afraid and psychologically disabled. It is critical to understand what the challenges are, and how they weave into the other challenges that confront women in post-conflict societies, if solutions are to be realised.

Physical abuse and torture of women have been used as a weapon of war in many conflicts. An illustrative case is how rape is being used in the DRC against women. Such abuse cannot be addressed by a peace agreement, or by the prosecution of perpetrators. While these are useful and necessary processes to rid impunity, it is critical that they are not seen as a healing mechanism for the victim. Victims of rape and physical abuse are usually women who are severely disadvantaged, and their participation in post-conflict life is seriously inhibited by their experience. This is further compounded where perpetrators are given blanket amnesty for crimes committed during the conflict. The constant presence of the abuser or rapist in the post-conflict society is a defeating challenge for women who are victims of such crimes. This is a social challenge that continues to plague women in peace time.

Another significant challenge has to do with returning female combatants and the social and psycho-social experience in post-conflict communities. A number of the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) female returnees, for example, have returned to their communities with children, and yet many peacebuilding programmes fail to cater for their special circumstances, making their reintegration process very difficult (Annan et al. 2008). Many are shunned by their communities with their families refusing to accept responsibility for the 'bush babies'[2]. Many returning female combatants are the subject of excessive labelling and stereotyping abuse, with these women often treated as outsiders by members of the community in comparison to their male counterparts.

Many girls and women have had psycho-social challenges with returning into normal life. Many African cultures place value on women's chastity. This same value is not promoted for men in the same communities. For many girls and women who have both been involved in armed factions and sexually active, or women who have been raped, there is a real challenge for them to get married. Most of the female ex-combatants have little hope of marrying, and the prospect of having to provide for them for a lifetime causes their families to reject them. The possibility of getting a suitor in the community after what they have experienced is unlikely, and even in the rare instances where this has happened, most girls and women are so traumatised that they cannot maintain these relationships (Opong 2008). This is different from males who easily get married upon returning to their communities. While this may not necessarily be supported by the communities whole-heartedly, there is evidence that men have been less disadvantaged in their social reintegration. The traditional cleansing ceremonies that seem to work well for the men are insufficient for female ex-combatants, and many remain in need of more psychological help in order to readjust to the society. It is key to point out here that marriage is an important rite of passage in these communities, and the inability to go through this passage is a social criticism.

The changing social roles in post-conflict communities are another social impediment for women. It is also difficult to re-socialise girls and women into the patriarchal structures of societies when they have been accustomed to power, and after long absence from their communities. The same also applies for women who have become the breadwinners and heads of households during war. How does one socialise an individual who has been in leadership and economically providing for their family into a more 'submissive' role? This is further compounded in situations where women continue to work and to find economic viability to support their homes, but where the men are incapable of competing for economic opportunities. Where there is complex confusion over social roles, women have been victims to a social reproach that seeks to re-establish a patriarchal social order. In instances of returning female ex-combatants, many resort to violence because they have been hardened by their experiences, and the traditional systems of power make no sense to them upon their return to their communities (Child Voice International Official 2008). The social conflicts of a system imposed on women – which did not protect them during conflict – are an ongoing social challenge in post-conflict settings.

Health continues to be a concern for women in some post-conflict societies. In northern Uganda, for instance, many girls who were victims of LRA abductions and recruitment face the risk of contracting STDs, including HIV/AIDS (Maina 2011). Health risks, however, are a concern even for female members of the community who were not abducted. The return and reintegration of the formerly abducted person presents a unique challenge to the females. With most of the returnees having been exposed to risky sexual experiences whilst at war, many face a great risk of contracting STDs. Their health is greatly dependent on free access to health facilities. In a review done of the programmes supported by Save the Children in Uganda it was found that in some of the reception facilities children had been tested for HIV and other medical conditions, but were unaware of their results. Furthermore, they were not always sufficiently empowered to understand what the tests were for and how they could access them (Hassan 2008). The fact that not all the returning formerly abducted children were tested, and even those tested were not informed of the results, is indicative of a larger health problem (Hassan 2008). It is even more concerning that to encourage reconciliation, many returning male combatants, who had been exposed to such diseases, are encouraged to marry the girls in the community. The consequence of this is a continued transmission of HIV/AIDS in post-conflict communities. Timeously combating the problems of these diseases is an ongoing challenge that needs to be addressed in post-conflict communities. The other consideration of health challenges has to do with the burden of caring for individuals who return with diseases such as HIV/AIDS, or other physical afflictions. In many instances, the consequence of health complications becomes another burden that the local community has to bear, and usually it is the women who then have to devote themselves to caring for the sick, wounded and physically impaired.

---

[2] Babies that women and girls have had as a result of the sexual relationships they were forced to have in the bush.

Another concerning social threat in post-conflict communities is that of alcoholism. This is a dire challenge that has direct implications for women. Many men in these post-conflict societies have taken to drinking alcohol, with most forming addictions to locally-brewed concoctions. The environment of despondency and lack of progressive opportunities has seen men become victim to alcohol as a way to pass time, and then later on it becomes an addiction. This is a problem in northern Uganda and also in the Karamoja region (Odong 2011). Women have had to bear the brunt of living with alcoholic spouses or children, and providing for them both. This indicates to women that there is no difference between war and peace, as alcoholism has become the ‘new war’. There are also implications of gender-based violence as a result of drunkenness, and for some women the post-conflict situation is at times even worse than the periods of conflict.

Tied to the economic challenge of a lack of educational opportunities is a serious impediment to the transformation of conflict structures. The education and literacy levels in many post-conflict states are very low. Women have suffered disproportionately more compared to their male counterparts, resulting in more women being functionally illiterate. This has meant that – even in post-conflict societies – women struggle to compare and compete, and consequently their participation in different aspects of life remains limited.

Dealing with social and psychological concerns in the complex environment of post-conflict societies, is a challenge. The complex realities of everyday life, poverty and reduced survival opportunities are enough to leave these communities socially stifled. Programmes that have sought to deal with psychological issues and concerns are continually undermined by the dire living conditions and economic realities that face these communities on a daily basis. It is not enough to address social and psycho-social issues without addressing other challenges holistically.

Women’s economic security

The economic implications of conflict and post-conflict situations on women are diverse. Women generally have had difficulties in participating in productive economic activities in periods following war. There are various reasons for this: illiteracy amongst women; traditional practices; discriminatory financial-credit practices; and public policy – they all contribute to high levels of economic insecurity among women. Most post-conflict countries are characterised by high school dropout rates amongst the female populations, high levels of poverty, and in some communities incidences of early marriages or early pregnancies are common. All these factors undermine the future economic independence of women.

During periods of war, many young men find themselves as combatants in armed groups, as is seen in the LRA in Uganda, or the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) – and this consequently leaves a productivity vacuum in these communities. To fill this gap, the women left behind have had to take up economic and breadwinning roles. Paradoxically, at the end of conflict and during reintegration and peacebuilding processes, there are instances where these roles are conferred back to the returning males, thereby undoing the labour advances that women had made during the war. The result of this is that with most of the manual labour and farming done in post-conflict countries, it becomes easier to hire the returning men, thus reducing the opportunities for the women and girls to find work. This has had grave implications for many women who are widows and who are responsible for households (Maina 2011). The failure of peacebuilding programming and processes to take into account the plight of working women in these communities when the men return from war and conflict, speaks to a gap that has rendered these processes ineffective.

Land is an essential commodity in any post-conflict community in Africa. Due to the patriarchal nature of many African communities, it is difficult for females to have access to or ownership of land. This has meant that the return of more men following conflict has had adverse repercussions on women hoping to be able to get land to support their survival and that of their families. Since women in many of these communities do not own the means of production, they are more likely to be consistently employed for meagre wages. The inability to access land for farming by female members of society is a factor that continues to undermine the economic independence of women in post-conflict Africa. Failing to address the structural gender dimensions of land ownership sets the stage for continued structural conflict, and must be addressed if economic sustainability is to be achieved (Baare 2005).

The lack of skills or education amongst many of the females means that their access to economic opportunities is greatly limited. There is an urgent need for women to get training, in order to enhance their livelihoods. It is important to note here that war has enabled the proliferation of women's organisations that have worked to better the living standards of women in the post-conflict state (Fuest 2008). Despite the presence of these organisations, however, women continue to face economic hardship. This is because, firstly, the income earned by females and the days worked were lower compared to their male counterparts, and secondly, there is a lack of income generation opportunities for many of the returning females following war – as is evidenced in northern Uganda (Maina 2011). Much of the available training and skills enhancement support for women is concentrated in urban areas, and fails to benefit rural groupings of women.

The need for education to elevate the living conditions of women cannot be overstated. Getting more girls through school not only affects their own welfare, but also the welfare of other family members and the community. Women with primary school education have better economic prospects, fewer and healthier children, and are more likely to ensure their children go to school (Cahn, Haynes and Ni Aolain 2010). It is also a fact that mothers who have received an education are 50 per cent more likely to have their children immunised, meaning that the ability to have a full life is propagated by access to education. Cahn et al. (2010) contend that an increase in the women's labour force and earnings is likely to reduce general poverty and improve growth. It is therefore imperative that during post-conflict peacebuilding processes education be prioritised.

Access to credit has also been a fundamental challenge for women in post-conflict African states. The state of the economy in these societies can be defined in terms of the demand for labour; business opportunities; the availability of land and credit; and the characteristics of the target population in terms of education, skill levels, age, gender, and entrepreneurial ability (Baare 2005). Self-employment is a key feature of post-conflict societies, and the access to credit to enable this is imperative. The inability to access loans and funding for small projects continues to undermine the economic independence of women. The unavailability of data on the contribution of women to the post-conflict economy is perhaps also a factor that curtails the creative thinking and processes that secure the necessary funding for women.

Failing to address the structural gender dimensions of land ownership sets the stage for continued structural conflict

Whilst the economic situation of women in most post-conflict settings is a continuing challenge, there are spaces in which women have found creative ways to uplift themselves economically. The Burundian *Dushirehamwe* network is illustrative in this regard. By bringing women together across the ethnic divide, and identifying common priorities, its members recognised that displaced persons (mostly women and children) could not address conflict issues while confronted with economic insecurity. *Dushirehamwe* devised a strategy of combining joint economic activities with addressing security needs. Working across ethnic divides helped to strengthen cohesion and the bonds of solidarity between group members. In many districts, income generating projects have been developed across the conflict divide in order to meet the basic needs of all (International Alert 2006). Such creative initiatives have provided opportunities for women to uplift themselves economically.

Gender-focused economic development is a critical building block for sustainable peace in post-conflict countries. This can be enhanced by providing skills, ensuring basic education, creatively promoting business initiatives by women, ensuring credit, rebuilding infrastructure that supports the transport of goods to urban markets or centres of trade, and ensuring a balanced focus between urban and rural centres. A critical issue is the access to and ownership of land, as this is a primary capital asset necessary for economic survival in any post-conflict state.

Ineffective reintegration programming

The reality of the application of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes has been that girls and women in recipient communities have had limited access to benefits in the context of peace and demobilisation (De Watteville 2002). This is also true for those females who were not formerly combatants. In their defence, some reintegration actors in the region have argued for equal treatment for girls and boys, and men and women, in the course of the process. Whilst noble, that logic has informed ineffective programmes and policies, as women do have special needs that have to be taken into consideration in the course of reintegration if the process is to be considered effective. What is fundamentally wrong with the current DDR programmes, is that they fail to recognise the special circumstances of girls or women, for example those that return with children or with higher exposure to sexually-transmitted diseases. Gender has been treated as a side issue in the DDR debate. However, it is imperative that more consideration be given to gender issues so that post-conflict recovery processes can be enhanced. Without a greater understanding of who is at risk of violence (and from whom), what factors affect violence and acceptance, and a sense of the long-term impacts of war violence, it will be impossible to design effective and relevant reintegration programmes. Failing to understand the plight of a necessary group in a community, will often lead to wrong programming based on immediate and observable needs, and possibly erroneous assumptions about who needs help and what sort of help ought to be provided (Annan et al. 2008).

When girls join armed factions during conflict – willingly or unwillingly – they are subject to brutal treatment, and are often forced to become wives of commanders or to serve as slaves or porters. Many of the girls in the course of their abduction are raped and become pregnant, give birth under harsh conditions, and even face the possibility of being abandoned along the way and left to die if they are unable to cope with the armed groups' conditions (Fox 2004). The Survey of War Affected Youth project, in reporting on northern Uganda, notes that over one quarter of the girls abducted are forcibly married, and over 11 per cent of the returning girls come back with children – making their reintegration needs unique (Annan et al. 2008). In practice, however, because the girls did not play an active combat role, they are not seen as a primary group of respondents in need of assistance, and often are short-changed when it comes to receiving reintegration assistance.

The DDR programming currently in place is more focused on re-inserting female returnees into the community. This is an ongoing challenge when analysed for how effective this process has been for ensuring the freedom and enhanced life of women in periods following conflict. The question that one is compelled to ask is whether women have better lives in post-conflict states following DDR processes.

With the DDR processes in most post-conflict countries, there is an emphasis on the combatants – who receive benefits for withdrawing from the different armed factions. The DDR processes have been criticised for failing to recognise that most of these individuals fall into family units that are headed by women as a result of the war, or in some instances returning male combatants are encouraged to marry local girls. It is important, therefore, that if the reinsertion packages are to make a difference and cater for the wellbeing of all, and in this case women, they be given in the context of the family unit. Table 1 is an illustration of DDR beneficiaries in South Sudan.

Women's curtailed participation

The political participation of women in rebuilding post-conflict countries is a key indicator of the progress of

Table 1: DDR beneficiaries in South Sudan

State	Able-bodied ex-combatants	Disabled male ex-combatants	Female able-bodied ex-combatants	Female disabled ex-combatants	Women Associated with Armed Forces	Total
Central Equatoria	1 115	172	60	6	763	2 116
Eastern Equatoria	276	127	578	96	0	1 077
Lakes	1 247	191	2 000	101	136	2 675
Western Bahr-El-Ghazal	553	59	689	9	0	1 310
Northern Bahr-El-Ghazal	1 846	37	874	7	80	2 844
Total	**5 037**	**586**	**4 201**	**219**	**979**	**11 022**

Source: Stone, L. 2011. Failures and opportunities: Rethinking DDR in South Sudan. *Human Security Baseline Assessment (HBSA) Small Arms Survey* Issue Brief Number 17.

women in these communities. It is interesting that this particular component has had meaningful progress over the years. While the percentages are far from ideal, the increasing number of women participating in political leadership in post-conflict African countries is remarkable. In 2010 Rwanda, South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Uganda and Burundi were all post-conflict African countries ranked in the top 30 countries worldwide with more than 30 per cent of women in their parliaments (Fuest 2008). It is significant that war has increasingly enhanced the legitimacy of women in leadership. Women in post-conflict states have increasingly presented themselves as political leaders at both national and local levels (Fuest 2008).

Some post-conflict states have opted for affirmative action, which favours the support of women – so providing economic and political opportunities, protecting their human rights, and entitling them to education and other such opportunities. Liberia, for example, has adopted policies that strongly favour this kind of affirmative action, so as to boost the participation of women in society (Fuest 2008). In some parts of Liberia, there is now evidence of higher primary school enrolment of females in comparison to males (Fuest 2008). In Liberian society, and gradually in other post-conflict societies, there is a growing perception that girls are equal to boys, and that they too have something to offer (Fuest 2008). The growing acceptance of girls and women as equal has been a positive trend in post-conflict societies, and the same needs to be enhanced.

Following the end of conflicts or the cessation of hostilities, some agreements have expressly articulated the inclusion of women in political processes. Other agreements have given a general provision to gender balance in appointments, and advocated strongly that women be nominated (Bell 2004). The inclusion of women quotas in political participation has been difficult in many post-conflict African countries, as most of them struggle with basic ethnic and clan quotas. The advocacy for the importance of ensuring that women participate then seems marginal compared to ensuring that all ethnic denominations (or in cases such as Somalia, all clans) are represented.

The inclusion of women during peacemaking processes has, however, seemed to focus on mobilising women outside of peace processes, rather than in securing their participation within formal peace processes (Bell 2004). There are several instances of women participating in mainstream peace processes. Examples are the Kenyan case that involved the participation of Madame Graça Machel and Honourable Martha Karua, or the involvement of Dr Anne Itto, Honourable Nunu Jemma Kumba, Honourable Awut Deng and Honourable Agnes Kwaje Lasuba, who were all members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) delegation in the CPA process. The number of such involvements is, however, far from ideal.

With the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, there is an advocacy, and obvious intention in some instances, to include women. When international actors such as the UN are involved as a third party, then there is more reference to the participation of women. This, however, is something that needs to be further researched, and information on whether the inclusion of women has naturally progressed within African communities or is an external conditionality, is required. The representation of women in public institutions such as the police, judiciary or public administration, still remains low in most post-conflict African countries (Bell 2004).

While there has been recognition of gaps in terms of women's participation in peace processes, there have been very few advances in terms of ensuring that women secure top-notch positions. The UN, for example, has never appointed a woman as a lead mediator, and over the years only eight women have served as UN special envoys, and only 2.4 per cent of all signatories to 21 major peace agreements in the past 20 years, have been women (Ayo 2010). This suggests that, whilst there has been a commitment to elevate the status of the participation of women, there are gaps between this obligation and actions that ensure this happens.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia, speaking at the United Nations in New York in 2008.

A critical concern when it comes to the issue of participation of women is whether an increase in the number of women equates with an improvement in the life of ordinary women. There are suggestions that the reason why women should be involved in peace processes at the local level, is because they are by nature peacemakers (Hunt 2005). There are, however, studies that point to the contrary, and the involvement of women in direct combat is proof that women can also be violent. There is also the argument that increasing women's decision-making power in post-conflict governments can increase the legitimacy of post-conflict institutions, decrease government corruption, broaden the political agenda, and promote consultative policy-making and collaboration across ideological lines and social sectors. Increased participation also broadens the political debate to address a wider range of constituent interests, social concerns, and local issues. Economic and individual security deficiencies are key in influencing women's participation in the public sphere. The question as to whether the advancement and participation of some women amounts to substantive changes in the status of women is one that must be further interrogated. The divide, or growing divide, between elite women and local grassroots women is a growing concern, and drives the argument for increased representation of women and its consequent dividend.

A critical factor that has influenced the disregard of women in leadership and decision-making in most post-conflict African states has been the patriarchal structure of most of these countries. With current peacebuilding processes, there are now discussions over whether traditional justice and leadership systems should be strengthened as a judicial and leadership oversight over some post-conflict communities. A case illustration here would be the Karamoja region, where arguments have been made that these systems would have better governance over these populations. These traditional systems are, however, based on very patriarchal cultures that regard women as those to be governed and not those to govern. With the new trend of advocating that traditional structures of governance be strengthened, the implications of this on women need to be further interrogated, and suggestions made as to how these systems can embody the participation of women.

Other factors that hinder or undermine the political participation of women are the lack of solidarity between women and their failure to articulate a unified advocacy strategy. The unification of women around one common goal has been difficult to achieve, and this has undermined their participation. Social commitments weigh more heavily on women, while family obligations and time constraints have curtailed the involvement of women in political life and leadership. Tied to the economic constraints that characterise the lives of most females in post-conflict Africa, these constraints continually undermine the willingness and capacity of women to participate.

Participation is key if women are to reap the dividends of peace, but the challenges discussed above must be countered to ensure that their participation is meaningful. There is a need to find men who will champion and advocate for the participation of women. Increased quotas for women must continue as a temporary solution that seeks to establish balance. Decentralisation in governance structures will also create more spaces in which women can be involved.

The spaces for actors that advocate for the cause of women must be sought, so there can be continual advocacy for the participation of women and to consolidate a unified approach in order to enhance the lives of women.

Conclusion

The conflict and post-conflict environments in Africa raise a number of worrisome gender issues. There have been some positive trends in addressing some of the challenges that plague women in these societies. These successes are, however, small when the grander scheme of challenges is considered. The post-conflict phase has in many cases deepened the fear and needs of local female populations. Their lack of skills, absence of support to learn a skill, and their inability to get work, has greatly increased their inability to provide for themselves. Their want has increased with the return of a larger population of males who have taken up traditional roles, thus displacing women. Violence, abuse and further stigmatisation of female populations have increased their level of fear. The elusive justice that characterises most of these paternalistic societies is a grave concern, as the psycho-social aspects of the crimes committed against women remain unaddressed.

To ensure that peacebuilding processes in post-conflict environments are successful, it is imperative that gender considerations be central. Sustainable peace processes require that all people live free from want and fear. Post-conflict reconstruction can only be considered effective if all members of the community positively gain from the process. Post-conflict reconstruction represents a moment when societies can take stock and plan for a brighter future, and it is vital that all members of these societies, and more specifically the women, be involved in this process (Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004).

As female populations in post-conflict African states still struggle with deprivation, want and exclusion, it is difficult to speak of meaningful and durable peace. Communities, and women more specifically, must put their hands to the plough in creating what they would see as peace. Their participation in defining their destiny is critical to ensuring durable peace in their various capacities, and at several levels. It is important that women who get opportunities are constant in their engagement with those that they lead, so as to ensure that the dividends trickle down, leading to durable peace.

Post-conflict environments must guarantee women protection, access to economic opportunities, social and psycho-social consideration, and full participation, in order to enable them to contribute effectively to rebuilding their communities.

References

ACCORD. 2012. *The Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in South Sudan.* Durban, Unpublished.

Annan, J., Blattman, C., Carlson, K. and Mazurana, D. 2008. *The state of the female youth in northern Uganda: Phase II.* Uganda, SWAY.

Baare, A. 2005. *An analysis of transitional economic integration.* Stockholm, Swedish Initiative for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (SIDDR).

Bell, C. 2004. Women addresss problems of peace agreements. In: Coomaraswamy, R and Fonseka, D. eds. *Peace work: Women, armed conflict, and negotiation.* New Delhi, Women Unlimited.

Bloomfield, D., Barnes, T. and Huyse, L. 2003. *Reconciliation after violent conflict: A handbook.* Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.

Cahn, R., Haynes, D. and Ni Aolain, F. 2010. Returning home: Women in post-conflict societies. *Baltimore Law Review*, 39, pp. 339–369.

Child Voice Internartional Official. 2008. Interview with the author on 24 September.

De Watteville, N. 2002. Addressing gender issues in demobilisation and reintegration programmes. *Africa Region Working Paper Series.* Washington DC, World Bank Institute.

Fox, M. 2004. Girl soldiers: Human security and gendered insecurity. *Security Dialogue*, 35(4), December 2004, pp. 465–479.

Fuest, V. 2008. 'This is the time to get in front': Changing roles and opportunities for women in Liberia. *African Affairs*, 107(427), pp. 201–224.

Greenawalt, K. 2000. Amnesty's Justice. In: Rotberg, R. and Thompson, D eds. *Truth v justice: The morality of truth commissions.* Oxford, Princeton University Press.

Hassan, T. 2008. *Review of return and reintegration programme for the children formerly abducted by the LRA.* Nairobi, Save the Children.

Hobbes, T. 1985. *Leviathan.* London, Penguin Books.

Hunt, S. 2005. Moving beyond silence: Women making peace. In: Durham, H. and Gurd, T. eds. *Listening to the silences: Women and war.* The Netherlands, Brill. pp. 251–271.

Huyse, L. 1995. Justice after transition: On the choices successor elites make in dealing with the past. *Law and Social Equiry*, 20(1), pp. 51–78.

International Alert. 2006. *Local business, local peace: The peacebuilding potential of the domestic private sector.* Available from: <http://www.international-alert.org/resourcespublications/local-business-local-peace-peacebuilding-potential-domestic-private-sector-sr> [Accessed: 13 October 2011].

Johnstone, G. 2002. *Restorative justice: Ideas, values and debates.* Devon, Willan Publishing.

Jok, J. 2011. *Diversity, unity, and nation building in South Sudan.* Washington DC, USIP.

Kinyanjui, S. 2008. *Rebirth of restorative justice for juveniles? A genealogical analysis of the criminal justice system in Kenya.* Leicester, University of Leicester.

Lindgren, M. 2011. *Sexual Violence Beyond Conflict Termination: Impunity for Past Violations as a Recipe for New Ones?.* Policy & Practice Brief ≠015, Durban, ACCORD.

Maina, G. 2011. *The complexity of applying UN Resolution 1325 in post conflict reintegration processes: The case of Northern Uganda.* Durban, ACCORD.

Mutisi, M., Ogunsanya, K. and Ettang, D. 2011. *Resolution 1325 in 2020: Looking forward, looking back.* Durban, ACCORD.

Odong, M. 2011. Interview with the author on 28 September.

Opong, M. 2008. Interview with the author on 24 October.

Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977. Available from: <http://www.icrc.org/ihl.nsf/full/475?opendocument> [Accessed 12 December 2011].

Stone, L. 2011. Failures and opportunities: Rethinking DDR in South Sudan. *Human Security Baseline Assessment (HBSA) Small Arms Survey* Issue Brief Number 17.

Tadjbakhsh, S. 2005. *Human security: Concepts, application and implication with an application to post intervention Afganistan*. Paris, CERI.

UNHCR, UNFPA, UN Women and MOGCSW (UNHCR et al.). 2011. *Gender based violence and protection concerns in South Sudan. South Sudan*: UNHCR, UNFPA, UN Women and MOGCSW.

United Nations Security Council. 2000. *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*. (S/RES/1325).

Vinjamuri, L. 2007. Trends Regarding Peace Agreements and Accountability from 1980 to 2006 - Expert Paper "Workshop 6 – Negotiating Justice". International Conference – Building a Future on Peace and justice.

Zuckerman, E. and Greenberg, M. 2004. The gender dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction: An analytical framework for policymakers. *Oxfam Journal*, 12(3).

About the Author Dr Grace Maina heads the Knowledge Production Department at ACCORD. She joined ACCORD after completing her Doctoral Research at the University of Bradford, UK. Dr Maina's research interests include: post-conflict peacebuilding in Africa; human security; preventative action; and youth. She holds an MA in Development Studies from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa. She also has a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree majoring in Political Science and Sociology from the University of Nairobi, and a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) degree from the University of Nairobi. She also has postgraduate diplomas in Research Methodology (University of Bradford) and Law (Kenya School of Law).

ACCORD The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) is a civil society organisation working throughout Africa to bring creative African solutions to the challenges posed by conflict on the continent. ACCORD's primary aim is to influence political developments by bringing conflict resolution, dialogue and institutional development to the forefront as an alternative to armed violence and protracted conflict. ACCORD specialises in conflict management, conflict analysis and conflict prevention. We intervene in conflicts through mediation, negotiation, training, research and conflict analysis. ACCORD Conference Papers are outcomes of conference presentations by both academics and practitioners and seek to stimulate informed and relevant discussions in the field of peace and security. They are produced by ACCORD's Knowledge Production Department (KPD). The role of KPD is to establish ACCORD as a positive and constructive learning organisation that enhances theory, policy and practice in the field of conflict management. The department's activities and outputs are aimed at promoting effective and sustainable peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding in Africa and beyond. All ACCORD publications, including research reports, the *Conflict Trends* magazine and the *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* can be downloaded at no charge from our website.

Copyright © 2012 ACCORD. Short extracts from this publication may be reproduced unaltered without authorisation on condition that the source is indicated. For rights of reproduction or translation, application should be made to ACCORD. Views expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the individual author(s) and not of ACCORD.

ACCORD
THE AFRICAN CENTRE FOR THE CONSTRUCTIVE RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

ACCORD, Private Bag X018 Umhlanga Rocks 4320 South Africa,
Tel: +27 (0)31 502 3908, Fax: +27 (0)31 502 4160,
Email: info@accord.org.za, Website: www.accord.org.za

20 YEARS 1992–2012

Photos in order of appearance: ©UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran; ©ACCORD adapted from UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe; ©UN Photo/Ky Chung; ©UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran, ©UN Photo/Erin Siegal