

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN IN A ARMED CONFLICT RESOLUTION - A STUDY OF WOMEN IN SOUTH SUDAN

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Abstract: This research paper has been written to look at challenges that women face during armed conflict resolution, the understanding of women's role in conflict resolution as well as giving true life events that women have faced during the conflict. This paper analyses why women's participation in conflict resolution is crucial particularly in South Sudan. South Sudan as one of the youngest nations in the world and is experiencing a period of civil war where the level of women's participation in conflict resolution has been very low in past years. The Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCISS) offers an opportunity for women's participation in peace processes and peacebuilding efforts. Women are essential social needs and actors, who take positions and are seen and perceived to participate in conflicts, however they intentionally play the role on the foundation of strategies hence goals and should not be looked upon seen as victims of circumstance or regional wars that occur within a region, Women always remain very hopeless and vulnerable in times of war and conflict situations, at the same time they remain a fundamental pillar in building peace and are viewed as the antidote to attain peace. In what ways do Women contribute in peace building and conflict resolution? The organizations involved in women conflict resolutions. The challenges involve how women do suffer and during the resolution there are certain responsibilities that women per take politically and economically to improve the conflict.

Keywords: Women, Conflict Resolution, Armed Conflict, Challenges.

1. INTRODUCTION

Women constitute half of every community and sometimes even more than half of the population and the impact of their existence is felt at all levels from the family unit, to the community and even at the national and international levels. Women's experiences of armed conflicts are unique to those of men. While they are often viewed as victims of rape and sexual violence during war and conflict, their level of participation goes beyond being victims. They are the central caregivers of families, they are also the advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators (Porter, 2007). It is because of these experiences that women are placed at an advantageous position for the success of any conflict resolution processes. Women's participation offers a comprehensive understanding of the causes of conflict and offers solutions that address varying needs hence encouraging sustainability of peace (Jaji, 2016).

Normally, every party gains more by getting involved in the negotiation. The difference may not be in way they perceive, but in the approach chosen to arrive at the goal, sometimes when parties have no concern other than protecting their own agenda. Hence to explain your own agenda and not discomfort to other parties becomes cumbersome.

Disagreements or conflict among parties is normal and natural among human begin in any form of relationship. Occasionally groups or parties may not be in agreement on everything at every given time. Talking of conflict does not often mean anything negative. And if conflict is handled in a positive way it greatly helps parties or groups learn to prevent future similar scenarios by creating harmony and peaceful coexistence this increases cooperation and mutual benefits towards achieving goals and success. To the contrary if conflict is not carefully handled it causes more serious and destructive damages that may not be easily solved. Hence this guide clearly illustrates how to positively approach conflict (Bujra, 2002)

According to the UNSCR 1325 (2000) women participation is directed at the roles they play in conflict resolution and peace building activities which on many situations geared towards promotion of peace, with gender mainstreaming being the pivotal pillar. According to the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) gender mainstreaming is the effect of both men and women according to the programs and policies that have been put across (Hadjipavlou, 2013).

Al-Ali and Pratt (2009) further assert women participation as a process of making known the experiences of women in a bid to benefit equally as men and hence eradicate inequality. This is in consideration that women and girls are both actors and victims and hence they have an integral part in peace building. Women have a challenge to be fully involved in the processes which cannot be considered complete without them. Women can participate in various levels which include personal, private and public spheres, though this is raised when women actively participate in peace and decision-making process (Faria, 2011).

Compared to men, women are directly affected by war and adding onto their experiences their psychological impact is more on women. It is perceived that women carry a huge burden compared to men in times of war, their views, skills and experiences, in most cases under-utilized and are often under-valued during the resolution. Hence in representation conflict resolution, women remain underrepresented when it comes to leadership positions across the globe (Lazarus & Taylor, 1999).

In addition to how women psychologically are impacted to the effect of conflict and war are for instances the post-conflict in the societies and increase of deaths of the heads during conflict, which increases the demonstration and impact in case of armed conflicts. It is very frustrating and impacts women directly which demonstrates the importance of peacemakers including women in the struggle to end conflict and prevent any future reoccurrence. On the other hand, any attempts to amend the harms and torture that women go through in the event of any conflict then the role for women in the peace process must be included (Agbajobi, 2010)

Rape is perceived as a weapon or a tool of war, that is often used against women more than men. Higher percentage of households in Africa that are displaced fall victims of sexual assault; Women are abducted to be army 'wives'. For instance, states such as; Mozambique, Angola, Kosovo where there is a higher number of widows which is half the population, many women turn to prostitution to support their families. This has led to high HIV/AIDS infection among female populations in conflict areas. Women actively take an important role in time of war, as the men get involved in the fight, they leave jobs unoccupied and automatically lose the family income. In formal sector, women carry out roles previously done by men; that was marked during the two world wars across Europe. Women provided for the family take up farming responsibilities, new roles in informal sectors which makes them be the head of their respective families, Examples are, in Sudan and Cambodia women who have been the heads of their families has been increased by nearly one third. According to Giffen, gender mainly needs to be utilized and recognized in conflict resolution (Eckel, De Oliveira, & Grossman, 2008) Similarly, Armed conflict is not a gender-neutral scenario; hence, the process of resolving dispute is designed in a way to settle armed conflict and should be biased and not neutral toward gender (Adelman & Peterman)

Conflict may however assist in gender relations; women are devastatingly looked down upon. Women remain slightly passive victims during conflict. They play an important role which leads to instability and fighting. However, on normal occasion women serve as forerunners in peace movements which eventually put to an end conflicts. However, a determining effort on women to end fighting is normally in most cases not recognized by many. According to the United Nation Security Council Resolution of 1325 of the year 2000, gives a clear contribution of women in times of war and conflict situation. Which has been looked down upon yet woman greatly contribute to peace keeping in conflict prevention, peace keeping and conflict resolution. Resolution 1325 (2000) stressed on the need of women having equal right as men and fully participate as active agents of peace and security (Rupp, 1997).

During the past events, controlling systems have often ignored and segregated women on the negotiating table, this has made women on normal occasion encounter overt prejudice when trying to influence armed conflicts resolution. Such instances normally happen, in times of armed conflicts. Whereby women being the main victims and children included fall victims of sexual slavery, rape and many other forms of sexual violence which are mainly used as weapons of war commonly in global international conflicts. During modern world however, the international organizations should work toward deteriorating their representations being imbalance and organizations need to consider gender with a lot of importance when planning and before implementing peace process through legal means which provides the needs of every woman (Roberts, 2000).

Similarly, in South Sudan women have held some leadership positions. Which included holding positions such as religious, clan and even political leaders. Ironically, the women dominance in some areas has been put to scrutiny and that it has for long not allowed for recalling this history of women's leadership, just before the beginning of foreign rule and the coming of colonizers in Sudan in 1821, women within the Nilotic society held positions in leadership unlike today. In her article *Women, War and Leadership in Southern Sudan (1700–1994)*, Stephanie Beswick alludes that during this period before coming of colonizers and foreign rule imposed to the South Sudanese society there has never been any objection to women in religious leadership which ensured that there is peaceful coexistence among communities and clans across Sudanese land. And during this time two female leaders in Sudan, and Man-Lang from the Nuer kingdom, and Abudok from the Shiluk kingdom, held positions of religious power which was highly respected by every member of the community (Aldehaib, 2010)

The women of South Sudan are actively participating in the ongoing peace talks both as direct representatives of the two sides of the conflict, and as representative of neutral civil society organizations advocating for the concerns and interest of all the women of South Sudan and the South Sudanese population. The women have expressed, through various forums, their strong desire to find ways of ending hostilities and to focus national attention to social cohesion and nation building.

2. CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan is the world's newest nation, in the center of Africa bordered by six countries. It is rich in oil, but following decades of civil war it is also one of the least developed regions on earth. The war began as a political conflict between President Salva Kiir and his then Vice President Riek Machar in December 2013. Although there was a power sharing agreement, signed between the two parties in August 2015, the clash continuous to date. Following clashes in Juba in July 2016, Machar went into exile, where he remains (Prorok, 2016). Both sides have committed abuses that qualify as war crimes, including looting, indiscriminate attacks on civilians and the destruction of civilian property, arbitrary arrests and detention, beatings and torture, enforced disappearances, rape including gang rape, and extrajudicial executions. Some abuses may also constitute crimes against humanity (Rolandsen, 2015).

The Violence hassled to farmers' disruption in planting and harvesting which has led to food shortage in the whole country. In July 2014, the UN Security Council declared South Sudan's food crisis the worst in the world. UN warned that some four million people which is a third of South Sudan's population could be affected and up to fifty thousand children could die of hunger. The conflict in South Sudan is categorized by the UN as a "Level 3" humanitarian emergency, based on the scale, urgency, and complexity of needs (KINYUA, 2005)

The participation of women in South Sudan conflict has been asserted by various international organizations which have insisted on the importance of women participation in the process. The Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace (SWEP), is among the premier women movements in South Sudan and was founded in 1997 with a projection of empowering women in political, social and economic sectors.

3. CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN SOUTH SUDAN CONFLICT

Women are important to the peace building process in many ways in the modern world today in different ways. Because of their number which is half the size of every community in any given place and putting in mind the difficult task of peace building in case of conflict women must partner with men. Women remain the central caretakers of every family and everyone is affected in one way or another when women are not involved in peace building. Women are also peace ambassadors, peacekeepers, mediators and relief workers. They play prominent roles in peace building processes and majorly in the Horn of Africa such as in Burundi and Sudan, where they have in peace keeping mission contributed as observers (Jok, 2014).

The UN, NGOs and all governments have a lot to do in terms of encouraging and assisting women to develop their role during the post-conflict resolution and peace building related activities. According to (Ali, 2011), these organizations have tried to encourage women empowerment programs which speak out gender equality in every sector. They have tried to encourage girl child development and education in order to make women feel more equal as their male counterparts. They have also tried to involve women in higher ranks of leadership other than overlooking them which has really increased the number of women participation in public programs (Al-Ali & Pratt, 2009).

According to (Miall, 2004) conflict resolution is a set out plan which are aimed at solving a conflict and are founded on prevention, stopping or changing the current situation through peaceful ways. The concept of conflict resolution was embraced after the Cold War though it had been used in the 1950s and the 1960s. This was in a bid to look for ways and means of preventing further world war occurring. According to the UNSC resolutions, peace process encompasses application of preventive diplomacy, peace –building through negotiations, infrastructure and humanitarian assistance (Porter, 2007).

During the civil war of (1983-2005) in Southern Sudan small weapons landed into the southern part of Sudan, fire arms became a way of life and were used as a form of paying dowry in some parts of the south. Women and children were physically targeted, with the spears used one had to be physically close to the target hence the act of killing or injuring a fellow human contributed mainly to humiliation and dehumanization of the other. Women accounted up to seventy percent of the south Sudanese people as per some analyst (Faria, 2011).

Liberation Army's official force estimated that in any event female were rarely in the frontline working almost completely as cooks, nurses and carriers (Shekhawat, 2015) Women and children become the started being targeted on was in 1991, when the pro- Khartoum breakaway liberation army Nasir killed proximately 2,000 civilians in Borr region and displaced close to 200,000 more civilians (Duffield, 2014) The atrocities committed included all forms of sexual harassments, rape which gave way to a set of new precedent for intra south Sudanese atrocities and brutalities committed.

Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War:

In the South Sudan conflict which involved killings of innocent civilians, cattle rustling, burning of houses, during this form of injustice committed women have been subjected direct sexual violence. Many rape cases have been documented, including gang rapes. Rape has been normalized because it has been happening almost on daily basis whereby it is reported in every village. People have been forced to watch militiamen gang rape women and then torture them by burning their faces. Women who have luckily escaped rape consider themselves luck. All women of all size, cultures and age including the elderly are often battered with sticks and ropes. Some pregnant women were beaten so hard till they had miscarriages (Faria, 2011).

The women and girls were being abducted and raped before being kidnapped by militia fighter to be there wife's and making other women and girls to take care for the ordinary domestic duties, and in some instances, they are made carry looted goods or even become herders of the stolen livestock. During kidnapping the women and girls were forced to walk on a journey for several days which was very tedious and very torturous. On their way they were also forced prepare cooked food for the fighters and were molested and humiliated as they worked. Majority of them are likely to remain captives and including the modern day doing the same works. This was really devastating and created a lot of fear to the women (Snowden, 2012).

According to (Totten & Markusen, 2013) in the recent days the government has called for amnesty since more than 100,000 fled their homes during the conflict period, thousands of people have sought refuge at the UN peace keeping mission camps for protection and safety, women and girls in most cases remain vulnerable and at risk of sexual violence like rape inside the camp as well, mainly when fetching water or even when using latrines during the night hours when they are attacked by these bad men and rape them. And to the contrary moving out of the camp poses a serious threat to the women and girls, especially then going around the bush collect firewood which requires crossing front lines around the thick bushes and since there is no security at all yet at the end of the day they have to cook and feed their families (Mayen, 2013).

In June 2010 in Juba, Borr, Nasir and Rumbek majority of women and girls were willing to volunteer and talk about their own experiences they went through but they all talked about women they knew that were raped by soldiers. These abuses were mainly carried out by the militia groups and troops, though South Sudanese women are viewed to be reluctant in speaking about them over many criticisms of the troops who lacked discipline. There are other soldiers operating in small groups or individuals often attack women. There were cases on women abduction and several children mainly from the Northern Bahr al Ghazal which as for long been a common place. Thousands of Dinka women were abducted by missiriya and Rizeigat militias and receiving support from the Khartoum Sudan government who were sold to forced labor to the North (Snowden, 2012).

Rape:

Sexual violence also a major cause of displacement as well as a prediction of a large number of people. Sexual violence uncounted women and girls who are refugees has triggered an enabling environment of an outbreak of war in Sudan (Beswick, 2001). There are other obstacles which have also made the refugee women more vulnerable in new environment. Many women did not have husbands neither male family members, young men were forced to sleep with extended family or neighbors' tents. Sexual violence within southern Sudan has since been driven along ethnic and political line, in the camps; and this is because of the existing traditional cultural believe of early and forceful marriage.

Sudanese female depression due to sexual violation drives women to the comps despite them being single and are on several occasions forced to follow the rules that are put in place by male or elders of the families and clans. In addition to early and forced marriages, other women and girls were forced out of the camp for marriage and this has been triggered by the heavy bride price in terms of livestock at especially in southern Sudan. In Kakuma refugees camp women and girls who attempt to abandon their families were ruthlessly dealt with and even put on the Sudanese cell camps and prisons. And because of their natural nature of fear women and the girls will remain submissive as a way of survival (Jaji, 2016).

The human rights violation committed in the recent past reveals shocking and horrible form of crime committed, brutality, rape, sexual assault are also not left behind (Askin, 1999) Rape could on some occasion take place during a broad day light and in full view of other criminals, and those who survive the only nearest rescue was the United Nation camps, on the other hand, Southern Sudan do not have the political good will and an enabling judicial structure to try offenders who have committed the crime which made the act of impunity to be passed on from one generation to another

Illiteracy:

There is a high level of illiteracy among the South Sudanese women which inhibits the peace processes due to lack of proper communication and poor interaction among the women organizations and the community at large. There is also lack of finances to facilitate educating the women. The women organizations lack proper coordination and advocacy plans to enhance participation, beat cultural impediments and accountability. The organizations also lack proper documentation of the crimes meted out against women with limited access if any to the victims (Cobham, 2005).

Lack of Political Will:

There is a missing link between the women organizations and the government which needs to be linked together despite women being used as vessels for peace they are blanked out of the peace talks and do not partake in the decision-making process. The existing regime s not keen in placing the women in influential positions, hence they are not able to push the women agenda and taking the position of underdogs in the political circles. (Moser, 2001)

The duties of women in family also inhibit their participation in politics, due to limitation of time. Peace process is a venture that requires a lot time due to the long process of organizations and meetings which needs a lot of input in time factor. This puts the woman in an awkward position whereby they should balance time between family and the organizations (Cobham, 2005)

Poor Logistics:

There organizations lack consultation and communication networks, hence leaving out the women in participation. Despite women bearing the brunt of violence, they are rarely consulted in a process that pertain insecurity and reframing the same. Despite the women innovating their ways to address security, they are faced with challenges of translating the same in the national set- up and are not able to front the same for discussion; hence there is a challenge to link the national and the local policies for the benefit of women within the community level (Branch, 2011)

Traditional Set – Up:

Women organizations in South Sudan face the traditional patriarchal set- up which limit the participation of women. The security aspect is viewed as a man's duty and hence it intimidates women who ventures in to it, as the man also have a different eye on the women. The women organizations should tackle the situation from two perspectives which include the male domination and the gender discrimination as well as try to put the security issue on a national perspective (Erickson & Faria, 2011). The organizations face the stereo-type social set-up which distinctly states the roles for man and women in both public and private issues.

Implementation of Security Council Resolution:

Women participation is also hindered by the obstacles fronted by the government commitment and implementation. Despite the Security Council resolution 1325, South Sudan is yet to incorporate and implement the provisions set forth. The resolution has stipulated female representation which is yet to be adhered to. This is evident due to the fact that leadership positions are not yet available in both national and community levels. The government has not only been reluctant to offer leadership training hence incapacitating the participation of women in conflict resolution process (Dharmapuri, 2012)

Insecurity:

Women in South Sudan have not been able to fully participate in the security process due to the insecurity the country has been experiencing. This has greatly hampered the women's ambition of taking over positions which would otherwise endanger and expose them to danger. Women have also been heavily inflicted by war and are widowed. This gives them the role of sole providers to their families, hence taking a lot of their time and responsibility (Grabska, 2006).

4. CONCLUSION

It is evident that the participation of women cannot be ignored since they undergo the same challenges as men during conflict. Women tend to suffer violations which are quite different from men's. Women take the mantle of the family as men go to war or die during the process, hence putting pressure on the women which is economically and emotionally based. Women are also exposed to other violations like rape and sexual exploitation, hence making them the most vulnerable during war. This only asserts the importance of women participation in conflict resolution as they are best suited to address the issue.

The women of South Sudan undoubtedly face horrific circumstances in the ongoing conflict. Nevertheless, numerous organizations, including the ones mentioned here, remain committed to finding solutions so that the next generation of South Sudanese women doesn't grow up under the same circumstances. The new republic in the South cannot achieve its political, economic and social objectives without a successful integration of women into the nation-building project.

The UN Security Council urgently needs to step in. It must either help establish an independent hybrid court or refer crimes committed in South Sudan to the International Criminal Court. The Security Council should also establish an arms embargo on both government and rebel forces.

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