TOWARDS IMPROVED GENDER INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA: POLICY IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Although several earlier studies have looked at peacebuilding and its limiting aspects, research on gender-inclusive peacebuilding dimensions remains limited, especially in Africa. Global events have continued to emphasise the inextricable pertinence of the interconnectedness between peace, conflict and gender. This reinforces how masculinity crises cause violence against some other genders. This study sought to examine gender-inclusive peacebuilding gaps in Africa and provide policy suggestions for improvements.

Methods: Qualitative research methodology was employed through an analysis of secondary data gleaned from available work obtained from academics, peace experts, research reports, international agencies and various organizations.

Results & conclusion: The study shows that conflict dynamics are essentially gendered and made out of gendered identities. Developing gender-inclusive peacebuilding processes, exclusively being attentive to intersectionality, involves bringing different views into peacebuilding processes. For improvement, some strategies and opportunities should involve altering power imbalances within structures to promote peace.

Originality/Value: This is one of the few studies that establishes gender inclusive peacebuilding in the African continent and provides cross-cutting policy implications rather than those that are country specific. Moreover, gender inclusive peacebuilding is a topical issue that occupies the peacebuilding global agenda.

Keywords: Gender Inclusive, Peacebuilding, Africa, Policy Implication.

RUMO A UMA MAIOR CONSOLIDAÇÃO DA PAZ COM INCLUSÃO DE GÊNERO EM ÁFRICA: IMPLICAÇÕES POLÍTICAS

RESUMO

Propósito: Embora vários estudos anteriores tenham analisado a construção da paz e seus aspectos limitantes, a pesquisa sobre as dimensões da construção da paz com inclusão de gênero continua limitada, especialmente na África. Os acontecimentos mundiais continuaram a sublinhar a inextricável pertinência da interligação entre paz, conflito e gênero. Isso reforça como as crises de masculinidade causam violência contra alguns outros gêneros. Este estudo procurou examinar as lacunas da construção da paz inclusiva em termos de gênero em África e fornecer sugestões políticas para melhorias.

Métodos: Metodologia de pesquisa qualitativa foi empregada através de uma análise de dados secundários coletados a partir do trabalho disponível obtido de acadêmicos, especialistas em paz, relatórios de pesquisa, agências internacionais e várias organizações.

Resultados e Conclusão: O estudo mostra que a dinâmica de conflitos é essencialmente de gênero e feita a partir de identidades de gênero. O desenvolvimento de processos de construção da paz inclusivos em termos de gênero, estando exclusivamente atento à interseccionalidade, implica trazer diferentes pontos de vista para os processos de construção da paz. Para melhorar, algumas estratégias e oportunidades devem envolver a alteração dos desequilíbrios de poder dentro das estruturas para promover a paz.

Originalidade/valor: Este é um dos poucos estudos que estabelece a construção da paz inclusiva de gênero no continente africano e fornece implicações políticas transversais, em vez de aquelas que são específicas do país.

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Além disso, a construção da paz inclusiva em termos de gênero é uma questão atual que ocupa a agenda global de construção da paz.

**Palavras-chave:** Gênero Inclusivo, Construção da Paz, África, Implicação Política.

**HACIA UNA MEJOR CONSOLIDACIÓN DE LA PAZ CON INCLUSIÓN DE GÉNERO EN ÁFRICA: IMPLICACIONES POLÍTICAS**

**RESUMEN**

**Propósito:** Aunque varios estudios anteriores han analizado la consolidación de la paz y sus aspectos limitantes, la investigación sobre las dimensiones de la consolidación de la paz que incluyen el género sigue siendo limitada, especialmente en África. Los acontecimientos mundiales han seguido poniendo de relieve la inextricable pertinencia de la interconexión entre la paz, el conflicto y el género. Esto refuerza cómo las crisis de masculinidad causan violencia contra otros géneros. Este estudio buscó examinar las brechas de consolidación de la paz inclusiva de género en África y proporcionar sugerencias de políticas para mejoras.

**Métodos:** La metodología de investigación cualitativa se empleó a través de un análisis de datos secundarios obtenidos de trabajos disponibles obtenidos de académicos, expertos en paz, informes de investigación, agencias internacionales y diversas organizaciones.

**Resultados y conclusión:** El estudio muestra que las dinámicas de conflicto son esencialmente de género y están hechas de identidades de género. El desarrollo de procesos de consolidación de la paz que incluyan la perspectiva de género, prestando atención exclusivamente a la interseccionalidad, implica incorporar diferentes puntos de vista en los procesos de consolidación de la paz. Para mejorar, algunas estrategias y oportunidades deberían implicar alterar los desequilibrios de poder dentro de las estructuras para promover la paz.

**Originalidad/Valor:** Este es uno de los pocos estudios que establece la consolidación de la paz inclusiva de género en el continente africano y proporciona implicaciones políticas transversales en lugar de las específicas de cada país. Además, la consolidación de la paz con inclusión de la perspectiva de género es una cuestión de actualidad que ocupa el programa mundial de consolidación de la paz.

**Palabras clave:** Género Inclusivo, Consolidación de la Paz, África, Implicación Política.

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1 **INTRODUCTION**

In Africa like any other human society, conflict is a common feature, which is not intrinsically problematical, but instead, it is a normal competition for societal change and resources (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023; Anaisse, Henrique,, Puget, & Ribeiro, 2023). The problem arises if this conflict is not well managed leading to violence. Peacebuilding is about developing the capacity to address and resolve conflicts without violence (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). Gender dynamics have become noticeable in modern-day settings, in all types of conflict (Chatham House, 2022). For instance, in 2023 the powerful revolution led by women and girls in Iran illustrates the close connection existing between political oppression and gender politics. This has deep regional (Africa included) and global implications for
broad systems of conflict and peace opportunities (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). In Ukraine, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as well as against boys and men, tragically occurs including to prominent political figures, the masses and women leaders (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). Therefore, gender analysis has to be viewed as central in preparing programmes of peacebuilding and policy formulation, and this needs a huge investment of resources and time (Catham-House, 2022). An approach, that is gender-related during peacebuilding and gender analysis, implies a broad description showing how relations and gender roles work in a given situation, as well as how gender differences intersect with other individual characteristics (Myrttinen, Naujoks & El-Bushra, 2014). It involves an evaluation of how such relations and roles influence people’s susceptibility to violent conflict, how these could be designed by violent conflict, and transformative opportunities for change presented to them. This study explores the gender-inclusive peacebuilding dynamics in Africa and offers policy suggestions that could improve the status quo.

2 BACKGROUND

The global agenda for gender mainstreaming has been there for a long time now as reported by the United Nations-Women (UN-Women, 2020). Right from its beginning the traditional gender approach has failed to cater for the richer elements that are concerned with the relational dynamics, norms or even intersectionality (Subrahmanian, 2004). In the past few years, leading gender thinking began to be understood by practitioners as they responded to some factors and global discourse. In Africa, these factors included lessons learnt from gender programming accentuating the significance of gender-relational approach and intersectionality to ensure effectiveness (Catham-House, 2022); focused on women's interventions for empowerment and women’s rights; experiences showing the essence of engaging boys and men and understanding masculinity thoughts; and evolving activism from sexual identity non-binary individuals and groups. Even with all this, most of the broadminded ideas concerning gender are yet to be digested and revealed in programming tools and policy (IPI, 2022).

Primarily, the policy agenda for the nexus between peace, security and gender in Africa has been identified as being located in the agenda of Women, Peace and Security (WPS) as espoused by the United Nations. This was established back in 2000 as a critical focus area amongst transnational partners (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). Reflecting the broader shifting sands regarding thoughts about gender, the WPS’s gradual swing from a traditional gender approach, seized with the protection of girls and women in times of conflict; and having them
empowered as peace builders can be noted as well (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). The UN system has progressively articulated the need to broaden the gender concept in scope while raising its supremacy, which is significant in addressing structural drivers of conflict (UN-PBSO, 2021). Gender as a concept has various imports generating contrasting views from different stakeholders and institutions more so in Africa. The meaning of gender is evolving continuously, notably if one looks at how young people, predominantly but not entirely from the Western communities, are less and less bound by the gender traditional binary ideas. The new gender language increasingly represents nuanced expressions and understandings according to Banfield and Groenewald (2023), this linguistic and semantic evolution is interesting, but confusing as well, given the newly developed frameworks and terminology, which often mean things that are different to various people. It is however helpful to recognise explicitly that the expanding conceptual understanding of gender is occurring in the current discourse of development as provided in the following perspectives.

3 GENDER PERSPECTIVES

For the purpose of this study, two main perspectives have been identified as applicable to the African situation in terms of gender-inclusive peacebuilding.

3.1 THE CLASSICAL GENDER PERSPECTIVE

In this approach, gender is sometimes viewed as largely a binary idea (differentiating female and male) which and is referred to as the classical gender approach (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023). Gender is viewed here as being constructed socially and therefore carries different meanings across historical times and places, based on biological actual or perceived differences. It refers to the identities of boys, girls, men and women. In terms of the international policy of development and practice, gender is the standard concept upon which the empowerment goal for women has originated. Deeply rooted in feminism, this empowerment is preoccupied with rectifying the underprivileged position of girls and women in economics, politics, society and culture in Africa, as it is worldwide. As popularised by Banfield and Groenewald (2023) classical gender research and policy typically put priority on women's inclusion. This is gender mainstreaming which means assuring that the perspectives and needs of girls and women are mirrored across all sectors of public policy. This informs attempts to ensure the allocation of resources, and that the allocation results are checked against data
systems tracking women’s position in society (Subrahmanian, 2004). Sometimes, this classical gender approach works in a simplistic and one-dimensional manner. However, as this evolved, the discourse on gender equality has deeply looked into the structures of power that permit women’s subjugation, together with how gender interconnects with class, race and some other identities as argued by Crenshaw (1991). Existing classical gender initiatives are focussing on the linkage between the intersectionality of power systems. For peacebuilding programmes, emphasising the intersectionality of gender is especially germane when helping to unpack and identify challenging power systems that sustain conflict in Africa (Close et al. 2020; Escucha, Chelala & Chelala, 2024). This implies examining the various pathways that power systems like class, age, sexual identities and ethnicity interrelate with gender to inform different actors as they engage with both peacebuilding and conflict (CR, 2019).

3.2 THE DESTRUCTIVE GENDER PERSPECTIVE

This gender approach increases the limits of how gender should be thought about as it builds on and deepens understanding of social dynamics, gender norms and intersectionality. The deconstructive gender approach conceptualises gender such that it deconstructs the female-male category and the binary sex stereotype (Reginold & Vögel, 2021). This helps practitioners and policymakers in Africa to think deeply about femininities and masculinities, as well as through an appreciation of sexual and gender minorities (SGMs) that transcend the binary categorisation of women and men (CR, 2015). The deconstructive approach to gender can provide deeper accounts and insights into the interdependence of cultural, political, social and economic systems that profile conflict and violence. This helps in exploring how relational or social dynamics through various identities could be supported to show how gender operates with some identity markers in shaping power relationships in general. For Africa, the deconstructive gender perspective could take the empowerment of women as a point of departure. Even though it will probably have to share the patriarchal criticism and the structures of power, it bears as suggested by the classical gender approach (Banfield & Groenewald, 2023).
4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of related literature will include; more recent insights, current United Nations (UN) and African Union (AU) gender peacebuilding normative frameworks, gender and vulnerabilities, and changing discourse.

4.1 MORE RECENT GENDER-INCLUSIVE INSIGHTS FOR AFRICA’S PEACEBUILDERS

A study in Mali showed that in some Touareg societies, social capital is generated through acts of combat or rebellion intrinsically linking social aspects of relationships like marriage to engaging in violence (Interpeace, 2017). In addition, the study by Saferworld (2016) in Yemen, Myanmar and Uganda revealed that predominant conflict dynamics like land seizure and intra or inter-societal land conflicts are all gendered be it in their drivers or causes including their effects. It has been revealed that high gender inequality levels in terms of employment, financial inclusion and education, adolescent fertility and close partner conflict, are correlated significantly with higher violent conflict risks (Saferworld, 2016). Yet attempts towards promoting equality influence conflict dynamics as well. The study by Interpeace on youth and gendered violence in Mali and Cote d’Ivoire reveals that the increased empowerment of women economically is an emergent conflict driver, especially as it changes the traditionally accepted gender roles (Interpeace, 2017). Barker and Ricardo (2005) revealed that a strong link exists between a young man who engages in violence and his incapability to accomplish anticipated gender customs for men like being employed and marrying. This coupled with disempowerment and hopelessness motivates young people to participate actively in violent conflicts and insurgencies as a means of challenging entrenched stratification. Saferworld (2014) reports on how in South Sudan gender norms associate gun possession and cattle rustling with passage rites for boys into manhood, causing conflict in communities.

These are examples showing how gender influences conflict dynamics and conflict drivers. An analysis of the gendered conflict dynamics, or interrogating why gender matters, provides a deeper understanding of what drives conflict and establishes a comprehensive stance for formulating effective and relevant strategies for countering violence and peacebuilding. Gender analysis helps understand the complex connections, power dynamics and societal roles, serving as a great tool for conflict analysis and peacebuilding (Myrttinen, Popovic & Khattab, 2016). To ensure the sustainability of peace it is critical to adequately have the participation...
and representation of different stakeholders mostly women (Buranajaroenkij, 2020). However, women are relegated when it comes to processes of peace-building (Datzberger & Mat, 2018). This is demonstrated by the less pronounced inclusion of females in efforts of peacebuilding for some years. Diaz and Tordjman (2012) observe that between 1992 and 2011, negotiators constituted only 9%, chief mediators just 2.4%, witnesses only 3.7%, and signatories just 4% of women in the efforts of peacebuilding. Further, in the period 1990-2010, women (Diaz & Tordjman, 2012) directly signed only 16% of the 585 peace agreements. In a survey report on violence and health, it was shown that men (aged 15-44) being the main culprits significantly committed more direct violence compared to women (Kruger, et al 2002). Although these figures may not have changed considerably over time, research has since increased seeking to understand the relationship between violence and masculinity. It appears that generally men or boys experience the pressure of living up to inflexible ideals concerning how they ought to feel and behave as men (Greene et al, 2011). These customs and dictates of men’s conduct are usually submerged in the masculinity hegemony sometimes referred to as hegemonic masculinities, which implies societal thinking of what is seen as man’s ideals (Greene et al, 2011). Even though this ideal differs in time and location, it is associated usually with fatherhood, heterosexuality, authority, marriage, physical prowess and professional success (Greene et al, 2011). The ideal of masculinity hegemony is fully achieved only by a small number of men, but most of them comply with its basic aspects through what has been described as complicit masculinities by Connell and James (2005). The more compliance with this idea, the more men reap the benefits of their masculinity (Davis, 2020).

This expectation to conform to these masculinity ideals could be an important aspect that drives men into engaging generally in violence, and in particular in violent conflict. Those men whose situations make it difficult to comply with the ideals often devise means of challenging the ideals by exhibiting protest masculinities as Gwen (1990) puts it. Such masculinities are extreme practices of sex-type conduct by some men (Gwen, 1990). One example of such masculinities identified with protest masculinity is a high level of violent behaviour. The profile of protest masculinity includes force, violence, ferocity low levels of tolerance for any delayed gratification, heavy drinking, crime, and related temperaments (Gwen, 1990). A study in Cote d’Ivoire and Mali revealed that the positive women transformation drove some of the men into engaging in behaviours like gangster grouping, violent grouping and intimate partner violence to confirm their gender roles as family heads (Interpeace, 2017).
In fact, Vess et al (2013) argue that several factors have and continue to contribute to the engagement of violent conflict by men. These factors include but are not limited to contextual and structural issues, psychosocial and individual, interacting and overlapping in many ways. Heilman and Barker (2018) state that men and boys are usually socialised, raised, and perhaps motivated to be violent, dependent on their social environments and conditions of life. For instance, it has been noted that extreme brutality and violence were experienced in settings of conflict where erudite behaviours were strengthened at the communities’ level or families’ level by societal structures and learned through shame, modelling, coercion, reinforcement and overt threats (Barker & Ricardo, 2005). Other contributing factors to men’s engagement in acts of violence are early violence experiences, economic frustration, the exaltation of militaries and traumatic propaganda (Vess et al, 2013). Worldwide, men and boys challenge the rigidity of manhood ideals and participate actively in promoting social change in communities and households as they participate in public discussions (Greene et al, 2011). This is vital given that masculine identities and masculinities are neither fixed nor monolithic, even in post-conflict and conflict settings.

Equally, femininities are dynamic and diverse shaping how women are engaged in violent conflict. Research on conflict and gender has focused on how violence affects women observing the women's susceptibilities to conflict situations (Davis, 2020). Women are reported to be less frequently involved directly in violence or combat, but they indeed support combat through several indirect means, for instance, by offering social services to combatants, educating their children, and inspiring men to participate in violent behaviour (El-Bushra, 2012). While men and women often apply these approaches to participate in violence, the role of women in this case is less visible because they align themselves with their social expectations of femininity. However, in other circumstances, they are engaged directly in conflict – in the case of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India’s Maoist movement. Women indirectly or directly fuel or drive violence through their execution of certain activities like nursing, spying, fighting, fundraising and suicide bombers (Shekhawat, 2016). Interpeace (2015) revealed that historically women played pivotal roles resonating well with patriarchal values and norms, for example being partners, girlfriends, and mothers of some gangster members. Nevertheless, for some women, their roles transformed and started engaging in attacks, such as extortion, drug peddling and trafficking of arms and even directly engaging in violence. Another study reported that out of the 1200 youth who were surveyed, there existed a marginal variance between respondents (female, 29% and male, 34%) admitting to having
been involved in violent acts, more so here with more females than males admitting to having caused fatalities (Interpeace, 2015).

Just like men, there are different motives that women have as they engage in violent conflicts. In one study, it was reported that in urban areas for example, girls and women are motivated to engage in violence as they seek to fulfil their basic needs, look after their families and attain recognition (Gratius, 2012). Under these circumstances, women engage in violence as a means of liberating themselves from the norms of patriarchy and those of expectations. While this direct involvement in conflict offers freedom, which is temporary, these women could be faced with a gamut of gender imbalances during conflict and sometimes their post-conflict needs can be neglected (UNGA- UNSC, 2012). This is the period when most of them are anticipated to assume their ascribed traditional roles. Furthermore, in this situation, women could be labelled as sexual and violent both of which are deplorable traits of an acceptable woman. (Shekhawat, 2016). Still, even if women do not engage in direct conflict, they could play other belligerent roles in violent fights. Thomas et al. (2018) highlighted that girls and women frequently exhibit passive aggression without inflicting physical injury directly (Thomas et al, 2018).

This has been shown in several conflicts where the role of women is to cheer up and mobilise men, or inflaming violent masculinities expressions. In 2012, women were reported to have been in support of the rebellion experienced in Northern Mali by saving money for buying ammunition and related provisions for supporting the fight (Interpeace, 2017). Examples from Somalia and South Sudan have demonstrated that women can coerce men into committing violence, hence vindicating the complementary conceptions of passive femininity (Safeworld, 2014). The same phenomenon was noticeable in the United States and Britain when the First World War was being fought, as women mobilised campaigns to encourage men who failed to enlist in the armed forces rebuking them as cowards (Wright, 2014).

4.2 CURRENT UN AND AU GENDER PEACEBUILDING NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

In 2020, the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was the 20th anniversary of the undisputed adoption of this resolution; it also marked 25 years after the Beijing World Women Conference; and the consummation of the African Women’s Decade (CT 2021). From 2000 and beyond, the UN has since adopted 10 other resolutions and numerous strategies informed by the normative framework agenda of women, peace and security (WPS). In Africa, the African Union (AU) and African states have
been promoting the agenda of WPS through various normative frameworks, training manuals and legal guidelines. This includes Aspiration 6 for the African Union Agenda 2063, the 2004 Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the 2009 African Union Gender Policy (CT 2021). Moreover, in 2016, over 19 countries in Africa adopted Resolution 1325 national action plans in 2016, and the African Union adopted the Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (2018–2028) in 2018 at the regional level (Abdulmelik, 2016). The implementation mechanisms for Resolution 1325 by both the AU and the UN have been reviewed several times including reviews of the WPS agenda in Africa for the period 2018 to 2028 (AUC 2019). Other reviews include that of the 2016 Maputo Protocol in Africa (Sigsworth, Romi & Kumalo, 2016); the more recent 10-year review of the AU Peace and Security Council’s WPS Agenda (2020) (Amani-Africa 2020); and the 2015 UN Global study and UN review (Coomaraswamy, 2015). All these reviews were efforts to improve gender-inclusive peacebuilding. Regardless of progress in several areas, Smit and Tidblad-Lundholm (2018) lament that meaningful gender-inclusive peacebuilding and the gender equality promotion of peace and security remain sluggish.

Despite the slowness, there has been an increased acknowledgement of the significance of analysing and responding to gender conflict dimensions in the past two decades. Nevertheless, this conflict analysis often fails to consider gender through the sexual and gender-based violence lens. It fails also to understand how conflict interacts with gender and has continued to be about analysing the conflict impact (Safeworld, 2014). As a result, the focus remained limited to appreciating how gender values influence conflict dynamics and power.

4.3 GENDER AND VULNERABILITIES IN AFRICA

Despite the common argument that girls and women are affected excessively by violent conflict, it appears that this contention masks the deep impact of these conflicts on societies, communities, families and individuals. Although a study conducted in 2006 showed that armed conflict by way of indirect or direct effects, kills more women than it does men (Plümper & Neumayer, 2006), in 2015 it was revealed that it is not easy to determine figures showing how many women were killed during a violent conflict (SAS, 2015). This is a result mainly of the empirical and methodological challenges of determining indirect cases of deaths due to conflict regarding women. Nevertheless, the reports produced in 2011 and 2015 of similar studies revealed that men constitute more than 80% of homicide victims. Instead of making a
discussion on disproportionality, it is prudent to ascertain the various vulnerabilities that women and men are faced with during violent conflicts (Davies, 2020).

Some findings by Heilman and Barker (2018) have shown that deaths of men due to violent conflict do not represent the main fraction of deaths related to active conflict, but evidence suggests that most of the deaths linked to active conflict, considering unintended consequences, are for children and women. The consequences for women, girls, men and boys include food insecurity, displacement, health risks and inaccessible resources among others. During the conflict period, due to the targeting of females or the absence of men, girls and women could take some roles, which they would not take ordinarily (Davies, 2020). For instance, they could become the breadwinners and could lead their families or even their communities, out of both frustration and desire for emancipation. While women could condemn the failure of men to protect and provide for their families and, they enjoy new opportunities afforded to them (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016). As others relish assuming new roles, some reach breaking points, exasperated by their addiction to dependents on adult males, waiting for the day when these men will be back to resume their responsibilities of fending for their families (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016). While these newly assumed economic roles do not essentially turn women to increased political power or social status, they exemplify how women become village chiefs in periods of conflict. In Myanmar, when the persecution of village male chiefs by the Burma Army intensified, not many men were prepared to risk their lives as chiefs; hence, women increasingly accepted these roles (KWO, 2010). In Africa, the post-conflict epoch exposes these women to political vulnerabilities when they retreat to their previously feminist-ascribed roles. They could find it difficult to exercise their civil liberties, feeling frustrated as they are excluded from the process of making decisions. Moreover, the ability of women to access fair grievance resolution and justice could also be curtailed, especially in post-conflict settings where mechanisms of traditional justice are restored or a dual justice system is adopted (state and traditional systems). In their study, Voz di Paz and Interpeace (2019) found that in Guinea Bissau despite a general gratefulness to the traditional justice role amongst both women and men, of reinforcing women's subordination to their spouses; women and their children were exhorted to consent to decisions made, even if they were against them. The study further revealed that participants who circumvented these traditional justice systems and opted for the formal justice systems exacerbated conflict and reinforced women’s rights resistance.

Men have also faced some vulnerabilities in the aftermath of conflict (Davies, 2020). Since conflict usually disrupts the social fabric, security, economic and political systems after conflict, men may fail to fulfil their traditional male roles as family breadwinners (Davies,
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2020). It is observed that crisis after conflict situations, become difficult especially for many young men to assume their prescribed societal functions and roles (Vess et al 2013). According to Green, Robles and Pawlak (2011), this happens because conflict ensues when men's potential to satisfy their social roles is defied by the destruction of livelihood insecurity and economic instability. In other cases, some men may travel to urban areas in search of jobs and may get jobs to support their families (Greene, et al, 2011). This leaves men with battered manliness and the only alternative would be to a battle-ready masculine identity where killing and violence help them to have a sense of control and power (Greene et al, 2011).

In addition, displaced men could feel disempowered because of their transposition, inaccessible resources and failure to meet their expectations like marrying to start a family. Depending on international partners solely for shelter, food, school fees and health costs undermines the responsibility of man as a family provider and decision-maker (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016). This is exacerbated given that men’s vulnerabilities and specific requirements are usually discounted during development and humanitarian interventions causing further frustrations. These compounded frustrations lead men to internalised issues of violent norms, alcohol and drug abuse, mental health and sexual violence (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2016), this later significantly affects girls and women, families and the community in general. These frustrations could also lead to an increase in domestic violence and gender-based violence since men attempt to reclaim lost power and control.

4.4 CHANGING DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

Contemporary research is shifting from essentialist assumptions and arguments on the benefits made by women as they participate in peace operations and negotiations (Davis, 2020). The essentialist contention often depicts gender stereotypes, for example, that women are more compassionate and peaceful compared to men, which could make women be considered for particular roles in peace missions, like gender consultants or focal persons for sexual violence victims (Rupesinghe et al, 2019). This is illustrated by the rhetoric, which concerns female involvement and the decrease in sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) during peace processes. Hernandez states that a problem arises of seeing women being there to make quick fixes of sexual abuse challenges during peacekeeping missions (Hernandez, 2020). However, the benefit of the discourse of women who are involved in peace initiatives is receiving criticism due to some other reasons. For example, it is argued that there is no evidence showing the link between sustainable peace, increased effectiveness in operations and female participation.
(Wilén, 2020). This indeed is a pertinent issue interrogating the established traditions about women's participation, methods used, data generated and the outcomes. The discussion that ensues between those justifying female participation and operational improvement, and those opposed to these shared assumptions is notable between experts and actors like the UN Security Council (Davis, 2020). In August 2020, the Council adopted Resolution 2538 on peacekeeping and women with a change in the phraseology concerning the female peacekeepers’ benefit (Blue, 2020). Some Council members used a language, which was stereotypical about the indispensability of the role of female peacekeepers as they discussed the prevention and protection of SEA during peace processes (Dustin & Gretchen, 2020). This resulted in changing the language used in Resolution 2538. Although it remains fixated on the effectiveness of operation, it circumvented direct associations between the degree of SEA and female peacekeepers in peace operations (SCR, 2020). The wording linked protection directly to the balance of men and women in the operations, not just the mere women’s presence (Dustin & Gretchen, 2020). This underscores the changing discourse. Several assumptions about the benefit of women to peace missions appear to obscure the debate between empirical and normative discourse, such that any arguments regarding women adding value become weak for gender equality (Ghittoni, 2018).

The assertion made by Wilén (2020) highlights how the dialogue on the concept of benefit in peace operations by women generates a high burden of proof. This means female peacekeepers are obligated to show their benefit, whereas men have no such obligation (Wilén, 2020).

5 DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

Apart from general findings and discussion, seven main findings are discussed under specific themes namely: promotion of gender norms transformation; tackling of the historical women marginalisation; empowerment of women without excluding men; an acknowledgement that gender-inclusivity does not take everyone on board; practices of gender marginalisation and exclusion; design and implementation of gender-inclusive initiatives; and changing gender norms could be essentially conflictual.

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, there exists a spectrum of pathways to which issues of gender interconnect with political thoughts, including the extreme cases, across various milieus in Africa. This study confirms the centrality of gender in violence and conflict in the continent; accordingly, it is an important aspect for inclusion in peacebuilding programming. The study shows that gender norms are shaped by local, national and continental
power structures that influence conflict and peace. In Africa, gender identities have a bearing on how people are involved in conflicts. These identities also affect the different vulnerabilities of individuals to violence as well as their abilities to participate in peace and conflict throughout the process. It is therefore crucial to understand, identify and tackle explicit gender-related vulnerabilities in Africa to avoid the recurrence of violence, offer options for peace and create strong societies. Meanwhile, participating in gender-based programming could provide opportunities for building cohesion and trust outcomes (on the contrary, this programming can as well be insensitive to conflict and aggravate the situation).

A more comprehensive outlook of conflict is revealed as it relates to Africa, which supports the formulation of improved strategies for managing violence and peace promotion. It entails that dealing with gendered conflict implies unpacking the link between gender expectations and norms, and how they interrelate with some of the identity markers like race, geography and class, to locate individuals in the conflict dynamics. Gender norms impact invariably on how groups and individuals contribute, shape and influence peace operations. The African community has generally acknowledged that gender inclusion and the promotion of gender equality are vital to the desired social change expected from development and peacebuilding. However, the implementation of gender-inclusive programmes during peacebuilding has numerous issues that should be managed carefully and including the factors below.

5.1 PROMOTION OF GENDER NORMS TRANSFORMATION

Transforming gender norms in Africa is necessary for the meaningful advancement of gender inclusion in decision-making and peacebuilding. However, these transformations could at times result in violence increases, both in other violent acts and intimate partner violence as a reaction to the loss of power and privilege. Knowing this challenge obliges practitioners of peacebuilding to make sure that programmes are gender sensitive and inclusive.

5.2 TACKLING THE HISTORICAL WOMEN MARGINALISATION

The marginalisation and exclusion of women in Africa remains a very common and widespread way of gender inequality. However, exclusion might occur depending on several identity markers of intersectionality. Gender-inclusive programming should effectively balance
the necessity to tackle the historic marginalisation of females and ensure the effective participation and encouragement of other excluded and marginalised groups.

5.3 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WITHOUT EXCLUDING MEN

Over two decades ago, gender-inclusive programming in Africa has focused primarily on the empowerment of women, and this unintentionally excluded different groups of males and worsened women’s vulnerabilities to violence. While the masculinity role in violence and men’s vulnerabilities are understood better, an increased thrust on masculinity has been witnessed. This has raised fears among advocates for women that programming could become male-dominated again risking women’s expectations, perspectives, experiences and needs. Complementarity and balanced empowerment of masculinities and women’s programming is imperative so that programmes are indeed gender inclusive and sensitive.

5.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT GENDER-INCLUSIVE DOES NOT TAKE EVERYONE ON BOARD

Gender-inclusive programming requires being sensitive to all aspects of intersectionality and brings different voices into processes of state-building and peacebuilding. However, some processes require distinct smaller working groups to achieve particular objectives. In this case, it is difficult to have all groups participating or represented. However, formally participating is not the only way of ensuring inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives. Peacebuilders should seek other means of bringing different experiences and perspectives into the official programmes, even in cases where seats for physical participation are limited.

5.5 PRACTICES OF GENDER MARGINALISATION AND EXCLUSION

Despite the effects caused by exclusion and marginalisation on the conflict dynamics, gendered inequalities among others can be entrenched in cultural norms such that an attempt to address them may not be a priority for peacebuilding in the long term. However, experience in Africa shows that real transformation entails local leadership’s buy-in as a priority. While it is imperative that gender-inclusive programming for peacebuilding addresses inequalities concerns, local leadership as far as possible should lead this effort.
5.6 DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE INITIATIVES

Effective policy implementation and guidance in Africa depend on the institutional will and capacity. One way of proving an organisational will is through the preparation of a guidance note, which should be complemented by the organisation’s commitment to enhance gender-inclusive programming in building peace. Yet, organisational will and guidance notes require institutional capacity for effective implementation. Designing a strategy for implementation needs to be informed by a conflict analysis through the lens of gender inclusion. Conflict analysis involves a deep understanding of intersectional and relational aspects as these inform how gender affects conflict dynamics. There is a strong connection between meaningful women's participation in attempts for conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding, and the lasting sustainability and effectiveness of those efforts. Although there is not much research on the participation of some actors through other identity markers in Africa, it is generally accepted that inclusion is the foundation for sustainable and effective peacebuilding. Inclusive dialogue and participatory action research are some of the participatory approaches often employed by various groups as initiatives for peacebuilding. These can be strengthened to make more space for inclusion of the excluded target groups of girls, girls, men and women.

5.7 CHANGING GENDER NORMS COULD BE CONFLICTUAL

It is observed that transforming gender norms could be inherently conflictual like any other change process. It is therefore compelling to carefully approaches that promote gender inclusion, such that they become appropriate for the situations in which interventions are executed. Fundamental to this adaptation is the participation of the local actors’ leadership in the search for gender-inclusive peacebuilding. As alluded to before, it is prudent that local actors and their leaders be tasked with transforming gender norms. It is broadly acknowledged that sustainable peacebuilding gains and efforts rest on local leadership and ownership.

6 POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN STATES

The findings above are quite revealing that conflict dynamics are naturally gendered. Hence, an analysis of this gendered disposition of conflict dynamics grows understanding of conflict and puts a solid foundation for creating effective and relevant strategies that counter violence and promote peace. Issues for policy implications are highlighted below.
Expressions of femininities, masculinities, and gender identities have an influence on how women, men, girls and boys participate in violent conflicts. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the correlation between femininities and masculinities, and the way they express themselves in conflict dynamics. This relationship is key for building strategies meant to transform relationships and behaviours to advocate for more peaceable expressions of femininity and masculinity for durable peacebuilding.

Gender by itself shapes the forms of vulnerabilities faced by individuals earlier, throughout and in the aftermath of violent conflicts. In the context of peacebuilding in Africa, it is essential to distinguish, appreciate and deal with these particular vulnerabilities to avert chronic cycles of conflict, provide options for peace, and create communities that are quick to recover from violent conflict. Gender affects the potential of the resilience exercised and developed by groups and individuals during violent conflict. Recognising the gendered character of these capacities of resilience and the way they manifest during and after conflict settings is imperative. This could allow peacebuilders to tie together, build on these capabilities to expand peace support and steer different actors into the process of peacebuilding. Gender norms influence how groups and individuals, engage in, shape and affect peace interventions. If gender-inclusive initiatives should contribute positively to efforts of peacebuilding in Africa, they should move further than merely having delegates. They should include strategies and opportunities that fully transform and challenge the authorities for more gender-inclusive decision-making.

7 CONCLUSION

In the context of improving gender-inclusive peacebuilding in Africa, it is critical to understand, identify, and tackle these particular vulnerabilities to avoid recurrent cases of violence. This includes presenting peace alternatives and building societies that are resilient enough to violent conflict. Genuine inclusion of girls, boys, men and women of various backgrounds has proven to enhance the effectiveness of attempts to build peace and prevent violence. The first step for practitioners is to recognise through conflict analysis the challenges besetting gender-inclusive and conflict-sensitive programming in Africa. Creating navigating strategies for the identified challenges provides opportunities for innovation and learning in peacebuilding programming. Practitioners neither should condone nor be disheartened by gender-inclusive challenges but confront them head-on and advance gender inclusivity. Putting efforts into peacebuilding and gender equality in local situations in collaboration with strategic
local actors is critical. Approaches adapted should have circumstantial relevance to help traverse existing complexities in light of changing the discourse on gender inclusion programmes. In some African societies, the argument for promoting women's rights does not bode well with the general populace. In those conditions, it is worthy to customise the message and allow for the adoption of gender equality values, then have a constructive discourse that improves gender inclusivity in governance and peacebuilding. Gender-inclusive programming in peacebuilding should above all be anchored in locally-led ongoing efforts and mitigate risks of setting back and undermining progress made.
REFERENCES


Towards Improved Gender Inclusive Peacebuilding in Africa: Policy Implications


