The Challenges of Involving local Communities especially Women's groups in Rebuilding Society

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Abstract

More of today's conflict is replete with hostilities within states- intra state conflict as opposed to interstate conflict-hostilities across borders, owing to the need to own, control, resources by groups within a defined territory, ruled by a central government. Studies advanced that some women had fought along with women in some battles. But, usually in most conflict situations, while men are killed, women and children are the worst hit in the affected countries, during and after cessation of hostilities.(become widows, are forcefully abducted, raped, etcetera). Interestingly, they assume new roles, different from their traditionally assigned roles (private)- cooks, nurturers, and care givers and become bread winners (essentially, a role played by men), trying to fit into the Public sphere heavily dominated by men. In spite of the allowances of UN Resolution 1325,others; Patriarchy, Masculinity in the mold of cultural relativity, other factors had hampered the activities of women groups, some organized women networks in rebuilding conflict ridden societies in Africa, making unique contributions to peace initiatives domestically, in different African countries, globally unrecognized. The Colombian peace process is a recent example. Sustainable peace occur when women at the grassroots, and men agree to work, combine skillfully at bargaining tables.

Keywords: Women, Peace, Gender, Peace Building, Women Groups

1.0 Introduction

Most of today's conflict situation may be understood by the volatility of intrastate rivalry that is; conflict within states as opposed to interstate conflict (fighting) across borders. Unfortunately, the repercussions of armed conflict are largely borne by women, and children- the most vulnerable groups, that ultimately become either internally displaced or refugees. (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003 in Best, 2014:205, Mazurana&Carlson 2004; Agbalajobi, 2009).

This could be in their own country or neighboring country like the case of ongoing Syrian conflict. Just like men, women are sufferers of murder, persecution, forced disappearance, and physical attack during intra state conflicts. Importantly, Women are more likely to be the victims of gender violence in contrast to men who can defend themselves. Gender-based crimes comprises of rape, forced prostitution and marriage, and many other inhuman acts.

During the Mozambique civil war, the feet, hands, and arms of some women were severed off to limit them from doing domestic work for their opponents. At present, the amputees cannot ably sustain their families by doing work (Jackson, 2014). In statistical terms, it is estimated that close to 90 per cent of current war casualties are civilians, the majority of whom are women and children, compared to a century ago when 90 per cent of those who lost their lives were military personnel. (United Nations Department of Public Information May 2007).

Nonetheless, Oluyemi-Kusa (2003) opined that, this is partly explained by the level of political rivalry, dysfunctional economy, rat race for scarce resources, which when ignored, or left unattended to properly, have spiral into brutal conflicts. Although, it is relative to continents, the question is how do we cooperate as human beings - men, and women to solve the attendant consequences of armed conflict - if peace building is not to be an arduous task?

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Similarly, peace building like rebuilding society is not to be viewed presumptuously as the exclusive preserve of those usually involved in armed conflict-mostly men, any longer. Viewed differently against some popular ideas; women consist of a major proportion of mercenaries in intra state conflicts. As mercenaries, women battle along with men, and they are liable for many killings and losses in different hostilities. Women are engaged in armed conflict for a variety of grounds that comprise showing their dislike, or having an aversion to tyrannical regimes, and display unity with their associations. The attachment can be political, religious or economical owing to the condition of nation. (Jackson, 2014 in Obonyo, 2014:88)

Jackson (2014) stressed further that the intra state conflicts of Burundi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and other few countries, women were forced to take part in hostilities. Also, in the civil war in Congo, thousands of child militias were handed guns and instructed to fight their opponents. Notably, of the about 30000 child soldiers, between 30%-40% were girl children. Besides fighting together with the male counterparts, these young girls were involved in sex slavery. Furthermore, the United Nations was of the strong view that in the Sierra Leone conflict; about 12% of the militias were women while the rest were men (Jackson, 2014 in Obonyo 2014:89).

1.1.1 Patriarchy

Patriarchy as a socially dominant principle has imparted the nature of most African societies, for men have dominance over public issues, and relegated women to just private issues- households, family etcetera, not major decision making processes in the public sphere , and where those decisions are made they are usually forgotten, unlike the men.(Jackson, 2014). Mutunga (2014) corroborates this perspective, for during brutal clashes, women are artificially conditioned to take up the roles they have not been familiar with. Therefore, when men engage in war, and are slaughtered in war, necessity for continued existence makes the woman to take up the responsibility that by tradition fit in to men have become marginal in the matters of governance, and peace building, may not usually be taken seriously as organized groups.

A study made by an institute of international affairs reveals that,
"This is true, for women, like men are sufferers and participants in wars, and armed conflicts, but often times in diverse ways, and diverse areas. In war climes, women are involved in fresh actions, and take up new roles, and functions. Nonetheless, women are sidelined in post conflict peace building, in the societies rising from conflict, and in the making, and execution of reconstruction schemes by global peace agents. (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2001)."

From this, one could ask if local initiatives at peace building, and/or rebuilding efforts become a valuable approach to resolve intra-state armed conflicts, in the face of growing challenges by women's groups despite resolution 1325. Should it not be localized first?

1.1.2 Statement of Problem

Studies made by scholars like (Jackson, 2014; Oluyemi Kusa, 2003; Mazurana & Carlson 2004; Agbalajobi, 2009 have advanced knowledge that, for most conflict contemporarily, which is of intra-state nature; women are the most vulnerable, (worse) affected- victims. Usually they cannot themselves. In other words, they are helpless, and cannot themselves. However, much studies have not shown that organised network of women's groups, women in some particular countries in Africa have actually organised themselves from the grassroots in local communities to help themselves during, and after epochal intra-state conflicts in unusual manners, significant, through the well defined roles they played/ play in peace building, and or rebuilding society in certain african countries, and Colombia. There is the dearth of scholarly works on the positive effects of the conflicts on Women's groups. More scholarly works have stressed that they are mostly negatively affected, in today's conflict in most of Africa, and Columbia.

Furthermore, a few other scholarly works apart from (Adebajo, 2002), revealed that galvanised women's groups and women through their formal, informal unusual activities, have been instrumental to the successes of , rebuilding society, post war reconstruction efforts in some african countries, usually emanating from the local to the international outlook.

1.1.3 Research Objective

This paper seeks to expose the challenges inherent in involving women groups in peace building using certain conflict ridden countries as case studies, and proffering some solutions.
The objectives of the study are:

(1) To find the out whether women face growing challenges in local communities when involved in Peace Building in Liberia, South Africa, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Sierra Leone, and Colombia.

(2) To determine which women's groups, women have played, or are at the moment playing a huge role in peace building, and or rebuilding society locally, and globally.

(3) To find out whether women's groups and women have played, in Peace building locally, or with local initiatives particularly with some African countries, as selected case studies.

(4) To find out that the dimensions through which Women's groups, and women have played or are playing significant roles in rebuilding society in some african countries, and Colombia.

(5) To determine whether the achievements, and growing importance of Women's groups and women in rebuilding society locally, and nationally, in some selected African countries, and Colombia can be recognised.

(6) To find out whether women experiences suggests that in spite of their successes, they are still not adequately represented, and over looked, if they get a place on the bargaining table in different african countries under study, and in Colombia.

1.1.4 Conceptualizing Gender and Peace Building in Local Communities

There have been varying conceptualizations about the term 'Gender' and 'Peace building' among scholars. For some, from socio-cultural stand point, "gender is a system of power relations" (Martinez et.al, 2010:1) with symbols of power evident in how women are downgraded to inferior status in societies. Gender is seen as tantamount to sex, and slackly the same with women (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003 in Best Gaya 2014:207). Scott (1986), described gender as "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" but also as "a primary way of signifying relationships of power".

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sees gender as,

The term gender denotes the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for some women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strongly influenced by ideology. (United Nations Development Report, 1986:258).

There is no single definition for the term peace building, only perspectives. Nonetheless, Miller and King (2003), stressed that Peace is justice and stability stemmed by political atmosphere, entrenched by formal and informal institutions, practices, and norms. (Miller &King, 2003 in Osimen, 2012:44). Thus, International Alert conceive peace-building as "employment of measures to consolidate peaceful relations and create an environment, which deters the emergence or escalation of tensions which may lead to conflict" (International Alert, 1995). In that light, it is imperative to also attach great importance to how women in local communities make things happen in peace building.

It is therefore necessary to adopt a robust definition of the two terms critical for our understanding of this academic piece.

1.1.5 Women Groups and Peace Building in Africa: The Foundation.

Historically, from Nigeria, to Kenya, Rwanda to Liberia, Uganda to South Sudan, Sierraleone to Burundi to Mali, to DRCongo, and Colombia etcetera, Africa has suffered, and been battered by the scourges of violent conflict. For instance, clashes in Sudan had been since mid last century resulting to the end of about two million people. Also, the Somalia civil war that is over a decade has claimed thousands of lives and made many homeless. Almost one million people are now refugees in the nearby countries, while million others fled from their homes. Rwanda's conflict between two ethnic groups led to genocide never witnessed in the history of the country (Hunt & Posa, 2001). Over 500000 civilians, mainly from one community in Rwanda, died because of the genocide. The internal conflict that happened in Burundi led to the deaths of thousands of lives and the displacement of over 500000 people.

Despite all these, Studies revealed that women are mostly at the receiving end of hostilities, and it has effects on them in an unlike manner different from men. Therefore, it is now visibly attractive, and clear that women possess special occasions for bringing an end to clashes and sustain peace given that they perform unusual roles in the public sphere (Agbalajobi, 2009). Significantly, but critically, one could argue that this marked a watershed in the history of women participation in peace building in Africa, locally, and internationally, for there is a level playing ground that seemed not to exist before.

Between 2003 and 2004, African leaders agreed to the "Women's Protocol" and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (AU, 2013). The leaders also agreed to the Security Council's Resolution 1325 of 2000 on Women, Peace and Security (AU, 2013). The documents support the involvement of women in averting violent clashes and sustaining peace to turn around the culture of trivialization and regarding human rights. Remarkably, the "Women's Protocol" has been very helpful to women; the protocol has helped many African countries to realize gender parity.

Similarly, in so far as the agreements, principles, and institutions for women involvement and support had been established, Women, like men have decided ventured into the foray of post-conflict peace building arena in contemporary times, making substantive decisions, at the local level, and their activities have become recognizable, and critical in Peace building, social reconstruction, development and upturn of violent conflicts, and its aftermath across Africa. They have continually sought to organize themselves into community groups, not as victims, of cycle of vicious conflicts, but voices of hope, stability, and peace. (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003in Best Gaya, 2014: 219).Nevertheless, their decisions have been critical to aiding and implementing the peace building process inspire of gender inequality in some social circles. For they do it their own way.

Obonyo (2014) advanced that, these obligation are sustained by some guiding principles of the African Union. It includes, but not limited to the promotion of gender equality (AU has mandated a 50% representation of women in its bodies). Agreeing to Security Council Resolution 1325, AU's Gender Policy (2009) stresses effective participation of women in peace practices, De-escalation of violent clashes, assisting in post-conflict development efforts and participation of women in the safeguarding of peace and security (AU, 2013).

Interestingly, Aniagolu emphasized that women are now in a position to spur themselves, from the grassroots to the tree tops, so they can make desirable change that is not fictional. (Aniagolu, 2012).

2.0 Women Groups and Their Roles in Rebuilding African Societies: Gender Approach.

Women groups and their unique roles, traits described by some scholars, have made them better prepared for conflict de-escalation, and post conflict social reconstruction, and rehabilitation. Besides, the way they are wired differently from men make them now better suited for positive negotiation roles in conflict situations. Why?A scholarly argument advances that,

Men told to go into negotiations expecting one side to win and another to loose (whereas) women look for points of commonality and are less afraid to compromise. This admirable trait of talk-to-finish rather than fight-to-fight distinguishes the female gender. (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003).

According to Arch Bishop Emmanuel Kolini of the Anglican Church:
"A woman is the epitome of peace. It is from her that Peace flows and radiates to other members of the family."(Mutamba and Izabiliza , 2005:24).

In the same vein, Oluyemi- Kusa (2003) argues that it is specifically their lowly place, and responsibility as care providers and caregivers in the society that makes women so strong-minded and steadfast to fight for peace and social justice. It may be through grassroots activism or at high level talks, women bring a reasonable tone, a less hostile manner and easier contact and collaboration amid interest groups at odds, which neither the government nor some other influential establishments can and desire to see. Some notable women groups as regards women in rebuilding society are Mano River Women's Peace Network (MRWPN), the Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamme Collective in Rwanda, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI), the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFLL), Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP).

A brief chronology of the event of the Rwanda genocide reveals that the definite sign of the genocide happened after the airplane crash that killed Hutu president, Juvenal Habyarimana in April 1994. Hutus were annoyed and proceeded on mass execution, slaughtering not less than 900,000 Tutsis as well as moderate Hutus (who did not align with the extreme Hutus) over a hundred day event (Graybill, 2004). The concealed plan was to frustrate the power-sharing arrangement which Tutsi president had decided as part of the Arusha Peace Accords in 1993. The hundred day genocide ended when the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front defeated the interim government. Consequently deaths of most men, and some others, who had escaped, left no option for the women, and children who are left to try, and solve their own shared problems.

The various women groups have been instrumental to address the plethora of problems associated with building war ravaged communities, and establishing meaningful relationships between hostile parties again for good. In Rwanda for example, Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe, made significant inputs to re-engineering talks between Tutsis and Hutus, following the devastation of the Rwanda genocide. Historically, the conflict and genocide in Rwanda early 1990s crushed the impenetrable shared ties to which women, in countryside and city, had depended on in the past. In reality, these conflicts had a distressing outcome on women's groups, demolishing their physical infrastructure and ruining their person assets. A lot of associates and influential persons were killed, while others escaped, by being expelled. Those who stayed alive became poor, terrified, and without help. However, in the after effects of the conflict, women's groups, both novel and older, took a principal task in efforts to rebuild the nation state.

What dimension, did this take? The first is by contributing a series of services, these assemblage assisted women rebuild their lives by emergency substance support, psychotherapy, occupational training, and help with income-receiving actions. Also, lots of groups offered a room where women could bring back shared ties, seek comfort, and find support. (Newbury& Baldwin, 2000:4). Owing to this grave situation, and the state of economic crippleness in the state not being able to meet societal needs, women sought several ways to work together, to deal with shared problems. This was enabled by a few factors like; the practice and official policy of the early post colonial period after the 1994 conflict that focused on establishment of social centres (Foyers sociaux) for women bonding. The purpose is to enable rural women chat about common problems. (Newbury& Baldwin, 2000:5). Another is, the critical support of the international community through bilateral, and multilateral donors that understood gender, the need to cater for the needs of women, and the new roles they took upon themselves post 1994. It was remarkable for women groups through some of their principal officers lobbied for this emergency aid. Yet, times it has been found to be inadequate, still, these donors strengthened initiatives for the development of women's groups at the local level.

Pro- Femmes Twese Hamwe as a major, women group housing others was borne out of a need by Women to unite all divided women associations, promote peace among those returning from the outside Rwanda, and those already living in the Rwanda before the 1994 genocide. Upon agreed deliberations by all other member organizations, the name was adopted, and the creed was peace, peace became the modus operandi. Therefore, action campaign for peace (CAP) was initiated as an instrument for rebuilding society. It has helped to build peaceful co-existence among various women groups particularly after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. This was achieved majorly through the enlistment of several of its constituent associations in the nation-state to advance peace and understanding.(Mutumba& Izabiliza, 2005).

Mutamba and Izabiliza (2005), advanced through their studies that mostly peace intiatives had been successful because there exists a leader behind it in a district, and the closer, and committed the leader in a district was, the more effective, and impactful the initiative. What's more, for example, in a successful widowhood association referred to as Duhozanye, Save District in Butare Province, member of the association attributed the success to their leader Daphrose, and the then burgomaster of the commune. Also, women were able to break free from the trauma of Gender based violence especially rape through another women group called SEVOTA commenced 'Samedi Conseil (Saturday Council) - a forum for the exchange of shared experiences of rape. It was a cultural misnomer for a woman to publicly declare that, and a major problem. Constructively, this meeting empowered them as a group to achieve that, and discuss their problems together. (Mutamba and Izabiliza, 2005:33).

In the Same vein, there is the NDAGABA association or women group, Rwanda based that ensured women pursue peace during, and after the conflict is achieved. This they did by bringing together ex-combatants in the former army of RPA (Rwandese Patriotic Army), and some members of the ex-FAR (Forces Armees Rwandaises). Furthermore, women who were demobilized from the RPA chose to be members of the women group with aim of consolidate the roles of ensuring peace and reconciliation efforts by other women, by being good role models in the country. Subsequently, this did not only help restore, and maintain security, but marked a watershed in the search for enduring peace and reconciliation in Rwanda. (Mutamba&Izabiliza, 2005: 30).

Another women group is the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MRWPN, with branches in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierraleone) which sought to support and pursue rebuilding and monetary empowerment programmes for vulnerable groups hurt and displaced by violent clashes in Liberia, Guinea, and Sierraleone. Also, by mobilizing for peace, the support of protection by helping to supervise the movement of small arms and other actions under the ECOWAS Moratorium on Small Arms and the UN programme for Coordination and Assistance for Security and Development (PCASED) is another important role .(Hutchful & Anning, 2001).

Furthermore, women 's groups like the Liberian Women's Initiative(LWI) played a critical role in the aftermath of the Liberian Civil War, as democracy was still young, potentially brittle, and oppression of opposition groups was been perpetuated. In all, these had been a bold step by women, but it has come with several challenges. The Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) and the association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFFLL), played important roles the period after the great upheaval of 1989-2003. Liberian Women's initiative in the Liberian peace process started in 1994 with the birth of a movement for peace, made up of women from all works of life, regardless of their ethnic affiliations, religion, education, socio-economic foundation. It is important to note that through similar compromise and negotiation strategies the women tried to influence the design of the peace negotiations. (United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2009). The question is how? A few Scholars stressed that the women of Liberia were unhappy with the deadlock in the peace process and thought that by adding their voices, they could stir the process forward and bring peace to Liberia. They believed that women are natural peacemakers, being good listeners and skilled negotiators. (Popovic, 2009; Press, 2010). Some of the initiatives carried out on Women, Peace, and Security matters before the civil war ended included:

The establishment of more women's organizations involved in advocacy, educational and livelihood activities, including Muslim women. Also, the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf Market Women's Fund- Building and renovating markets; campaigns to send the girl child to school, provision of scholarships for women and girls; networking among women groups; advocating for the amendment of the penal code laws- rape law, domestic relations, involvement of women in security sector reform is increasing (such as community watch teams); the establishment of the Women's Legislative Caucus and Women's Chambers of Commerce.(United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2009:8).

In the same way, this gave rise to civil society women groups expanded into associations. The Women in Peace building Program (WIPNET) among others were created through the peace programs led by women, which have crucial effort in the advancement of gender policies in Post conflict Liberia. Another peace effort is the creation of the Mano River Women of Peace Network (MARWOPNET) that combined to create the women of the Mano River region (Liberia, Guinea, and Sierra Leone) at the crucial point of the calamity in Liberia. The tone of voice of the MARWOPNET was so significant that the association was invited to peace talks on Liberia supported by the West African States (ECOWAS), which were held in Akosombo, Ghana. Remarkably, it was MARWOPNET that was made to sign the peace pact.

2.1.1 Women And Peace Building Specific To Countries in Africa

A Detailed Examination. Women are at the moment playing a huge role in peace building globally, even in including Africa. Actually, it is now globally accepted that they are now increasingly, actively doing peace works, not only in Africa, but other continents. Locally, activities such as humanitarian assistance, disarmament, children care, and exchange of hostage are very vital in the course of upholding peace and mitigating conflicts (Porter, 2003). Women have tried to make bigger impacts in the political realm, and their local efforts have become mediums that inspire individuals to get drawn in, in the fight for peace.

2.1.2 Liberian Women

In the Liberian civil war, for example, women's groups played a big role in providing an atmosphere for belligerent groups to bargain in order to allow the country to enjoy peace. Women's attempts paved way for Liberia to return to stability, and it has even elected a female president. Remarkably, women turned out en masse in the 2005 election, and they elected many leaders (Adebajo, 2002). Furthermore, Women's hard work reveal how well-structured local, grassroots groups can initiate comprehensive peace building projects. Nevertheless, the civil societies of this country are confronted with the uphill task of progressing from local grassroots groups to nationally recognized groups, and internationally recognized ones as well.

The Women bothered with the upholding of peace assembled other women to be united in the beginning. These groups awakened public consciousness in early 1990's to promote peace in that country. By 1993, they began to partake in peace negotiations. Still, the tranquillity after the first peace-agreement and the 1999 election was short-lived. For this reason, the civil war began again in 2000, and women's groups deepened their efforts to unite women to insist on peace. After all, there was a positive result in the country's peace process when the former President, Charles Taylor, ask for them to locate the rebel leaders and call them to the bargaining table (Adebajo, 2002).

Besides, the women planned a trip to Sierra Leone where they met some of the conflicting camp's leaders who had sought shelter there. The women helped to arrange talks between the then Liberian president and the opposition. Noteworthy, the Liberian women were seen to be objective in the peace process (Jones, 2013). Later on, because of the developments of the war, women's groups initiated a group action to face and engage the rebels directly. The women travelled in from everywhere in the country; their appeasement of the rebel leaders was significant in allowing for the disarmament.

2.1.3 South African Women.

In 1976, 'Women for Peace' came to being in association to the Soweto unrest to denounce apartheid and improve inter-racial relations at all levels. Immediately after the apartheid, women united to lobby for a charter that supports women. These women promoted the execution of a range of socio-economic ceasefire programs. Prior to the 1994 South Africa elections, women formed National Women's Coalition that included numerous lines that were helpful in sustaining the peace accord (Gobodo-Madikizela et. al, 2011). Furthermore, the women also contributed in the reassessment of the South Africa's Constitution that had the Bill of Rights. Likewise, National Women's alliance helped in the agreement of setting the one-third quota for women in congress. Opportunities for women assisted Patience Pashe, a South African woman, to be the head of the Alexandra Peace Accord Committee (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2011).

2.1.4 Eritrean and Ethiopian Women

Eritrea and Ethiopia conflict were engaged in warfare over boundary. Additionally, Eritrean women rallied each other and planned mass demonstrations to call for an end to conflict with their neighbour. Also, in Sierra Leone, a group of women's groups educated the public about the Lomé Peace Accord. They also called for greater participation in the role of the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration. Besides, Mali women assisted to take the peace process to the local level. Women were included in building agreements across every culture and persuading parties at odds to be included in talks in order to implement the National Pact of 1992 (Agbalajobi, 2009).

2.1.5 Somali Women

Somalia women played a huge part to make sure the civil war in their country come to an end. For the women were actively involved in facilitating an atmosphere for talks among Somalia warlords. The Somalia Peace and Reconciliation Conference (SPRC) held in 2000 in Djibouti witnessed women participation in the talks (Daley, 2006). Early in the century, the women from Burundi coming from disparate sides of the disagreement called for gender parity in the peace process. The late Nelson Mandela, who played a very important role, facilitated the peace process. Worthy of note is that a lot of suggestions from Somali women were incorporated in the concluding agreement of the peace-building process.

2.1.6 Congolese Women

Congo has constantly been faced with civil wars. Congolese women enlisted in large numbers as voters and took part in elections for them to have a voice in the rulership of their country. Even though many Congolese women have enlisted as voters, they are not well drawn in, in the National offices. Also, these women still face sexual attacks such as rape, and they are being perpetuated with impunity (Whitman, 2007). For them to fight for their human rights and ensure there is peace in their country, Congolese women organize themselves into groups. These groups are used as avenues to sensitize women on the need for peace and how to influence the public to make sure that there is a peaceful co-existence. In contemporary times, some Congolese women have found their way into the corridors of power.

2.1.7 Rwandese Women

A variety of societal groups such as the Widows groups came to fore immediately after Rwanda's genocide to deal with the psychosocial and living needs of its group members. In the last few years, different women's groups came together (about 35 women's groups) to support compromise and peace. In 1997, Rwandese women group received an award from UNESCO in appreciation of its effort to sustain resolution and peace (Bop, 2002). These groups rely on advocacy and lobbying that made women to get opportunity to partake in supporting and financial arena. Again, the women fruitfully fought for property rights of women, and were opposed to violence against women. Besides, Women's groups try to sway warring parties to be united and build their country.

2.1.8 Sudanese Women

Women from South Sudan who were displaced from their countries started gathering in different groups in Nairobi, Kenya. The earlier group consisted of 600 and together with their children from a range of ethnic group and linguistic groups (Pankhurst, 2003). The majority of women were single heads of their families and majorly uneducated with just a few who had gone to school and received education. Therefore, the part of the women of Sudan to peace building differs owing to their province. Sudanese women partake in sustaining peace through civil society since they were barred from the major peace talks. Women activists are worried with the return of refugees and other escapees and to boost the ability of women to partake in democratic processes.

Nevertheless, considering both the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005) and the Darfur Peace Agreement (2006), they fail to give a declaration that women will play a vital role in executing those agreements (Wolf, 2014). Also, in Sudan, there is no enough representation of women in the realms of power and other public posts. At the grass roots, locally, women work diligently to make sure the society lives peaceably, and the privileges of women are preserved.

2.1.9 Ugandan women

Uganda has made immense efforts to make sure that women participate in decision-making and peace-building processes. Women's movements in Uganda are well-structured and well-financed by donors and other well-wishers unlike women's groups in other Africa countries. In addition, these groups rely on association to promote their vision of making sure that Uganda is a peaceful country (Daley, 2006). Moreover, with a lot of discussion, commitment to learning diverse things, budgetary might, and strong leadership, women's groups in Uganda have become strong supporters of peace in their country. Importantly, Women efforts have made sure that the country enjoys stability and peace for roughly two decades now.

2.1.10 Sierra Leone Women

Sierra Leone, a West African country, is still recovering from a terrible warfare that engulfed the country for about 11 years (Adebajo, 2002). Women felt the rage of the civil war and are still trying to get access to politics, education, and social-cultural resources. In spite of some restructuring, since the end of civil war, Sierra Leonean women go on to remain unrepresented in the national politics. Despite their little representation in the national politics, women's groups are playing a critical role in promoting peace and the need to increase women's representation in national offices.

Sierra Leone's women group, 'Women's Situation Room for peaceful elections' tried to organize women to partake in peace processes. The group used the skills of women in clashes and any danger that could surface before and after general elections. The group's goal was to create an occasion for discussion with responsible parties and encourage women to partake in elections, negotiation, coordination, and political analysis. Though there were a lot of barriers against the efforts of women, the group made a massive impact (Adebajo, 2002).

2.2. Challenges of Women Groups in Peace Building in Africa

Women's occurrences explain that in spite of their successes, they still maintain that they are not represented, and overlooked. Therefore, women pursue peace for their countries where freedom and social justice resides. In the same vein, women, are trying to fight for gender rights against several factors that enhance social and gender inequalities and hinder headship of women far from the private sphere(household), to the arena of the public sphere(political setting) where decision making is centered, and appreciated usually men hegemonized.

There are several obstacles that confront women, as they try to get a place on the bargaining table. Moreover, several African women are not well-represented at important levels of decision-making in their countries. In spite of about 150 leaders who were at the United States 2000 Millennium Summit in New York, only four leaders were women; none of the four leaders in the meeting was from Africa. The four countries represented by women were New Zealand, Finland, Bangladesh and Latvia (Tripp et. al, 2009). Also, measures relating to quotas and a certain percentage of women in positions can help women have benefit from, and change the programme of parliament. Besides, just having more women in national posts may not be acceptable. The involvement of women in a variety of arms of rulership is vital, and must to be a part of public life.

Furthermore, major challenge that is African women is gender violence. Gender-based violence is widespread not just in Africa, but several other countries of the world. Violence that faces women for the duration of clashes is still a rampant thing. Also, Civilian victims who are majorly women and children add to a larger proportion of war connected deaths (Lemarchand, 2007). In spite of International Criminal Court (ICC)'s inclusion of rape as a crime against human

race, it is still much on the high side. In practice, Authorities must include attempts to protect the rights of their people in all situations. Proactively, the world must not relax till there are adequate laws to deal with crimes of sexual violence.

Furthermore, as seen in the Burundi peace process, peace accords resolutions did little to allow for women participation in the peace process. The Burundi peace agreement language was not strong enough as it denied women the chance to add another dimension in the process of making peace (Lemarchand, 2007). Also, several communities refer to women, elderly, and crippled persons as helpless groups. Unfortunately, women are regarded as hopeless victims, victims who cannot take charge of their lives.

Also, Cultural, and Social factors, economic problems, absence of effective administrative and management skills, and lack of communication and cooperation across networks are some constraints. (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003, in Best Gaya, 2014: 222). Culturally, family roles dictate that women primary roles are to take care of families during times of conflicts, and not peace building. (Obonyo, 2014:90). Gender categorization is well expressed in patriarchal societies in which classes of persons labeled have been prepared to be the resolution makers for another set believed to be lesser, feeble and inferior(Gauley, 1987).

In addition, in a society in which the resolution makers are supported by customary values, label what a person can do, and cannot. Although it differs from society to society, it has been an age long affair. What's more, the bringing into play of customary ideas, standards, and the protection of the status quo maintain the resolution-making set at the apex. Regrettably, for many societies, women are measured as delicate, while the men are the verdict makers. (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003, in Best Gaya, 2014: 209). It will not be unbelievable to say that this is not common place in many African societies.

The following are additional challenges that women face in their quest of participating in the peace and conflict resolution processes (Mpangala, 2004):

Lack of enough skills in lobbying techniques: For many years, women have always faced seclusion from politics and other decision-making opportunities. It, therefore, implies that women lack a chance to play a part in politics. Without a political stage, women will not get a chance to participate in the process of making peace. However, at the end of the day, it is important for Women to be drawn in to politics, in decision making processes or peace and in leadership positions, eradicating the sequence of cruelty and violent behavior against women, and children, from within formal institutional structures when they possess the requisite skill, training, through local missions, Peace campaigns, local NGOs, organized groups with proactive actions.

Lack of political muscle: Many women lack ideological frameworks that could give them a strong say in matters concerning their issues. Conflict resolutions are a political activity that requires a proper strategy to be successful. The art of coordinating the overall process , and design for appraising the repercussion of frameworks for women and men of any planned action by some privileged women parliamentarians, including legislation, guiding principles or programmes, in all spheres and at all stages is seriously lacking. In spite of attempts to mainstream gender in many African countries, sectors, including the post conflict arena, the practical approach for making women's and men's experiences, and concerns an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of planned actions, and programmes in all political, economic, social sphere so that women, and men can benefit equally is usually absent.

In rare cases, where there has been attempts to localize international conventions such as (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 of October 2000, Articles 40(4) and 44(e) of the ECOWAS protocol relating to Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peace-keeping and Security) for increased women participation in conflict resolution, and a concrete plan; the political will to actualize these lofty ideals beautifully articulated in print is still not present.

Lack of resources: Many women lack enough resources that will allow them support their course. In some situations, they cannot access the media to boost their peace efforts because they lack resources to support their activities.

In many cases, women are not involved in fund-raising activities unlike their male counterparts who are actively involved. Many women work voluntarily on the ground and use their own resources to support peace-building processes. Women's organizations in position to provide assistance to women across sectors to help them rebuild their lives, families, and their communities are usually met with financial hardship, and the repercussion is heavy reliance on external funding. The reason is not implausible. In post- conflict times, usually in Africa, the former belligerents who form a provisional government are too occupied struggling among themselves for ascendancy in the corridors of power.

Apparently, they are mostly men. Therefore, when external funding is withdrawn or not sufficient, well designed plans and purpose becomes unachievable.

Lack of visibility: Peace building activities connected to women are restricted to the sideline of official in peace talks. In addition, when women get involved in peace building, they do not get an opportunity to contribute in a formal way. Representation of women does not mean active involvement when making decisions in peace accords. Besides, once peace-building process has ended, many women revert to their normal activities, thus losing their public presence. The losses make it hard for them to return to the former state when resolution begins. Women are not visible on the political front, and the peace-building process, and this becomes a greater concern when they have no voice in decision-making, women's concerns are not prioritized, and no resources are allotted to them. It has a cataclysmic effect on efforts to rebuild society. One thing leads to another, they have little or no access to agents of political and social transformation in the society, required to shape thinking, attitudes, and behaviours. Thus, women continue to experience marginalization despite efforts to make their voices heard in the public domain, not to think of taking up opportunities that present leadership roles and responsibilities.

2.2.1 Possible Way Forward.

In a blacksmith's shop, there are several tools waiting to be employed for the forging of metals into sizes, shapes according to the structure of the problem, nature of the object. In like manner, if there are challenges facing women's groups in peace building in Africa, there are likely solutions to the problems faced. These are some of them. However, it is not limited to only these. Besides, just having more women in national posts may not be acceptable. The involvement of women in a variety of arms of rulership is vital, and must to be a part of public life. In practice, Authorities must include attempts to protect the rights of their people in all situations. Proactively, the world must not relax till there are adequate laws to deal with crimes of sexual violence. Resources in monetary terms should be made accessible to women groups just like men have in African countries. Women like men should have clear cut ideological frameworks, human capacity development programmes that could give them a strong say in matters concerning their issues, and conflict resolution circles, harmonized under a unifying strategy and systematically implemented since political activity that requires a proper strategy to be successful.

In most situations, especially in Africa, women like their male counterpart, should be given access to the media to boost their peace efforts, and support their activities. Women are to be encouraged, trained, and involved in the art of fund-raising activities like their male counterparts who are actively involved. Resource wise, there is little, voluntary resources can cater for in support of peace-building processes. Peace building activities associated with women may no longer restricted only to the sideline of official in peace talks (allow for merged periodic but well co-ordinated unofficial talks). In addition, when women get involved in peace building, they should get an opportunity to contribute in a formal way. Gender sensitivity should be prioritized more often to allow adequate representation of women, which allows active involvement when making decisions in peace accords at all levels of the society in Africa.

Also, women should be allowed to take active, lead roles in peace accords, agreements, and negotiating tables in the conflict resolution, post conflict arena if they are willing, for they have more prospects adding another dimension to increasing the chances of a workable solution to the toughest of conflicts. It is believed that just like women birth lives here on earth, they can bring life to stalled/dead locked peace agreements in conflict arena. Purposefully, in a situation where by peace-building process has ended, many women should be encouraged not to revert to their normal activities (primarily households), thus losing their public presence which is also important. There is need for sustainability of public presence, in the public sphere. But, this requires giving a listening ear to the voices of women, and women groups in the society- attention.

Lastly, the girl child like the boy should be encouraged, supported financially, and provided with the opportunity to go to school, and receive a good education both at the local level or grass root, national, and global levels of the society.

This is really important for the girl child, just like the boy becomes the man tomorrow, who takes important decisions at the public sphere(negotiation tables, formal decision making processes, and institutions); the girl child also becomes the woman who is empowered to assist with the requisite skills needed to take important decisions in the public sphere though accustomed to the private sphere- home front, and its roles as(care givers, nurturers, cooks) as well, bringing in a new dimension to peace building thereby increasing the chances of reaching meaningful agreements along with men, and rebuilding conflict ridden societies thereafter.

2.2.2 Conclusion

A Yoruba proverb sufficiently describes what gender relations should exists between both women, and men for rebuilding society to be an achievable enterprise, not a white elephant project. Bi okurin r'ejo ti obinrin paa, ki ejo ma saa ti lo(If a man sights a snake, and a woman kills it, all is well as long as the snake does not escape). (Oluyemi-Kusa, 2003, in Best Gaya, 2014: 207). In other words, Sustainable peace is achieved when women at the grassroots, locally and men agree to work together, and combine institutionally and skilfully at bargaining tables, which makes peace building effective. There has to be a sincere, deliberate project to make all sectors of national development gender sensitive across Africa; for if women and children are the most vulnerable in any conflict, then it is a necessary to involve them at every stage in the process. Similarly, Sustainable and Durable Peace necessitates the input of women, and girls as well as the addition of gender outlook in all rebuilding course of action. (Women, Peace and Security. United Nations, 2002).

2.2.3 References

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