

GSP 2206 - PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION : The Role of Women and Youth in Peacebuilding in Africa

- **Introduction**
- Conflicts are the most salient features of the human societies across ages, and their root causes are multiple and diverse. The most tragic feature in conflict and violent situation is that women and girls suffer their impact disproportionately. While they endure the same trauma as the rest of the population they are also targets of specific forms of violence and abuse, including sexual violence and exploitation. Even during peacetime Women, girls and children as well as youth are the victims of other forms of violence popularly known as domestic violence.

Peacebuilding

Definition: According to Albert (2001:130) Peace building is an art of “Repairing” relationships, institutions and social facilities and putting in place schemes that can help the disputing communities to be united once again.

Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1994) defined it as an “action to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict.”

Elements of Peace Building

Apology and Forgiveness: Apology and forgiveness enable former disputants to appreciate the pains and agonies that each of them suffered in the course of the conflict, which disrupted their communication, harmony and friendship. Offenders are supposed to know that they should admit responsibility for their actions, which might have caused injury or harm to their victims. In the same vein, the other party considered as victim should demonstrate a large heartedness by forgiving the offender.

Reconciliation: this creates an avenue for the victim to express their pains and agony, in order to address the root causes of the conflict and the promotion of mutual cooperation and understanding through justice, truth, friendship, mercy and forgiveness.

Reconstruction: This enables the post conflict society or friends to have ‘another opportunity’ through rebuilding of social infrastructures that were destroyed as a result of the bloody conflict. Lack of essential social amenities can regenerate a conflict situation and a lot of efforts should be geared towards creating a lively post conflict society.

Rehabilitation: This process affords the ex-combatants, the displaced population and refugees opportunities of demobilization and reintegration through provision of some strategic peace building measures like employment opportunities, creativity and vocational skill development, trauma-healing advice and support among others.

Peace Building Model

- This associates with of work **John Paul Lederach (1999)**. In this he advocates for the model that comprises of three levels of decision making in a pyramid stage.
- **The top level** comprises of political, military, economic and diplomatic leaders who are concern with decision making process on mediation, arbitration and reconciliation with aim of monitoring and ensuring cease fire between the rebel factions in a war torn or conflict ridden society.
- **The middle level** comprises of academicians, intellectuals, religious figures, ethnic leaders, NGO's. They are concern with trust and confidence building and organization of problem solving techniques through training, working in peace commission, seminars, campaign, and workshop among others.
- **The grass root level** this is the last stage that comprises of local leaders, youth movements, health officials, refugee camp leaders among others they are concern with leadership training and capacity building, rehabilitation and reconstruction of the new society.

Impact of Conflict on Women and Youth

- Women and children are and continue to be subjected to massive human rights violations and horrendous atrocities, including rape, murder and torture. Millions have been displaced from their homes and thousands of children have been forcibly conscripted or abducted to serve in armies and militias. These armed conflicts have also created large numbers of households headed by women and/or children, who were subjected to the crimes of sexual violence that prevailed throughout the brutal national wars such as Liberia, Sierra Leone among others (Rehn and Johnson-Sirleaf, 2002). Women of all ages are vulnerable to violence and violation of their human rights such as murder, terrorism, torture, involuntary disappearance, sexual slavery, rape, sexual abuse and forced pregnancy, especially as a result of policies of ethnic cleansing (Rehn and Johnson-Sirleaf, 2002).
- They are the “violated during the violation, the victims of the victimisation, and the captured of the captives.

Role of Women and Youth in Peacebuilding Process

There are some widely accepted reasons why women are important to all the Peace building processes as listed below.

- Because women are half of every community and the tasks of peace building are so great, women and men must be partners in the process of peace building.
- Because women are the central caretakers of families in many cultures, everyone suffers when women are oppressed, victimized, and excluded from Peace building. Their centrality to communal life makes their inclusion in Peace building essential.
- Because women have the capacity for both violence and peace, women must be encouraged to use their gifts (pacifism) in building peace.
- Because women and men have different experiences of violence and peace, women must be allowed and encouraged to bring their unique insights and gifts to the process of Peace building.

Role of Women and Youth in Peace Building Process

- Women can also act in the demobilization of armed groups and individuals as mothers, wives, friends, sisters, mentors and guardians. In various instances they have used their proximity as mothers, wives, sisters, etc., to members of the rebel forces to obtain information which they have used to protect their communities, for example, in the Senegalese. In order to end the hostilities.
- Women and youth raise awareness among their various groups and organisation on non-violent conflict resolution, sustainable peace and human rights. Especially when the reconciliation committee is constituted.
- As a major active segment of the population youth in particular engage in reconstruction of structures and buildings ravaged and destroyed during the period of crises, such as bridge, schools, roads, hospitals, markets among others.
- Serve as field personnel both military, police and humanitarian workers because rehabilitating victims of war crimes such as rape can only be healed by fellow woman, looking after the abandon children and babes is an issue which can only be handle by women. for example in Darfur “A significant number of GoS [Government of Sudan] Police, Movements’ Police Liaison Officers and AMIS[African Union Mission in Sudan] Civilian Police officers are women; and they also have specialist gender units that work with women and children; and all their investigations and monitoring include at least one woman. Women serve in psychological counselling and they have higher chance of being accepted by the local populace than their male counterpart.
- Youth had the ability to bring about social and political changes, but they were not able to institutionalise these changes, as they were still often left out of the decision-making process. The youth had yet to realise that they were victims of political strife and often manipulated by the political parties to indulge in acts of violence.
- Youth especially engage in intelligence-gathering activities covering individuals, including “overzealous demagogues,” and tribal, religious, cultural and social organizations posing a potential threat to peace and order, and report the same to the relevant security agencies for quick action.

UNSC Resolution 1325

- United Nations Security Council (UN) Resolution 1325 is a major instrument that recognises and strength the role of women in peace building. It was passed unanimously on October 31, 2000. It defines the legal and political framework for considering and involving women and girls in peace and security measures, through the following key points:
 - Involvement of women in peace and security decision-making processes by atleast 35%
 - Incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and field missions together with gender-sensitive training for mission personnel.
 - Incorporation of a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements.
 - Protection of women and their rights during and after armed conflicts.
 - Incorporation of a gender perspective in United Nations measures, reports and processes.

Significance of Peacebuilding

- Peace building goes beyond separating the disputants or settle their dispute, but also heals the wounds and promotes more friendly relationship among old disputants, by preventing hatred and revenges as well as restore confidence among disputing parties.
- It also creates institutions and social facilities aimed at assisting the former disputants to respect their mutual needs and interests for peaceful society where meaningful development can take place.
- It creates an environment through which the peace agreement can be implemented.
- It also builds opportunity networks in the reconstruction of social, economic, and political structures to allow for creation of sustainable capacity for peace and long term conflict transformation between the parties.