

FEMINIST PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

The African continent has continued to be a site for conflict in the 21st century, hosting some of the longest wars in recent history that have had devastating impact on the population, particularly women, young women and girls. Most of the conflicts could be attributed to the nature of transitions from colonialism, a lack of transparent democratic processes, corruption leading to lack of delivery of social services, and huge spending on military. These combined factors have impacted grossly on development in Africa. With regards to peace and security norms and their impact on women and girls, the African continent has taken a leaf from the international community by adopting most of the international women's rights and women, peace and security frameworks to ensure the protection of women during and after conflicts as well as ensure their participation in peacebuilding processes.

One of the basic principles of these efforts is the recognition that peace and security cannot be achieved without the meaningful participation and leadership of women. However, while the Africa Union (AU) recognizes that any efforts to build good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, the rule of law and a peaceful and secure Africa must integrate the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda,¹ the adoption of these frameworks has not necessarily led to action in reality beyond the rhetoric. While the AU has been keen on advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, there remains lack of commitment on the part of its member states to translate these principles into opportunities for women's empowerment and gender equality at country level. The AU's latest campaign on 'Silencing the Gun' is a case in point, as will be discussed later.

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Diane Perpetire ADOUM, conducting a training class against GBV at Bimbo 5, in the Canaan community Bangui, Central African Republic. Photo: Susan Schulman/Oxfam

This paper explores a transformative feminist vision for peace and security and analyses its intersection with existing frameworks on women, peace and security (WPS) in Africa and globally. An approach to feminist peace recognizes that peace and security are active and intersectional issues, the responses to which need to be built by the people they are meant to serve. This response must span the public and the personal, the home and the community.

The paper begins by providing an overview of regional and global women's rights and WPS frameworks; highlighting their scope and deficiencies at national, continental and global levels. It further discusses the challenges of the implementation of the WPS agenda at these different levels, critiquing the limitations of the WPS frameworks to deliver sustainable peace due to the failure to address the role of patriarchy in conflict, structural violence, and the disconnect between the feminist vision for peace and the articulation of the UNSCR1325. The paper ends with reflections on what feminist peacebuilding in Africa could look like and shares case studies of what has worked for women in peacebuilding.

BACKGROUND

Following the liberation movements that saw many countries in Africa gain independence, most countries have never really detached themselves from their colonial legacy. The continuing relationship with Western powers has resulted in the persistence of neo-colonial conditions² that still linger on the continent. In addition, the assumption of Western cultural superiority continues to be expressed in what and who defines development and the standard of measurement of development. The same applies to promoting democratic governance and peacebuilding. This state of affairs continues to perpetuate injustice in Africa, including marginalization of ethnic minorities, women and people living in poverty, electoral processes that are not transparent, unequal access to resources, lack of job opportunities for young people, and governments staying in power through constitutional changes against the wishes of the majority. This has given rise to uprisings and many armed groups, which are often supported by external powers in order to remove the sitting governments from power, while in other contexts, ongoing conflicts between groups are fueled and instrumentalized to contest political power and access to resources.

Significant numbers of countries in Africa are currently either in conflict, experiencing post-war tensions, or are in post-conflict reconstruction processes.³ Conflicts emerging since the end of the cold war have often been referred to as ethnic conflict, social conflict and international social conflicts.⁴ Some of the conflicts are due to a crisis of governance and the failure of African Institutions to mediate conflict effectively. In Africa, regional and sub-regional institutions have taken up the role of mediating conflicts, such as the African Union and the regional economic communities (the East African Community and The Economic Community for West Africa, among others) respectively. Most of these institutions have peacebuilding mandates. However, the increasing number and changing nature of conflicts in Africa that involve non-state actors (that are only vaguely understood as their main agenda is not clearly defined), has made interventions difficult. Most of the conflicts which are identity based, reflecting tribal, religious and ethnic cleavages are

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deeply enshrined in societies and would require conflict management at the community, social institutions, national and political levels⁵ and not necessarily by regional institutions. Further, the majority of the frameworks developed for peacebuilding by these institutions have been developed from the perspectives of men, who dominate leadership of these institutions.

The changing nature of conflicts where war has moved from the battlefield to the communities has also led to increased impact on civilian populations, with women and children bearing the brunt. While men are generally understood to be impacted by war, women, who undertake the triple roles of production, reproduction and community work are also significantly impacted in these various roles.⁶ These changing dynamics require new approaches to responding to conflicts in order to build sustainable peace. Conflict management approaches have failed to lead to sustainable peace in Africa due to the patriarchal nature and conceptualization of peacebuilding.⁷ This is mainly because many of the root causes of conflict are embedded in patriarchal practices that focus on mediating power struggles among political male elites. Unfortunately, most institutions for peacebuilding replicate patriarchal structures themselves so that even when women do participate in them they are hindered in their ability to create change.

Within the context of Africa, the WPS movement has made significant effort to dismantle these patriarchal tendencies. The numerous examples include the Liberian women's peace movement forcing warring parties into a resolution, they blocked the doors and windows and prevented anyone from leaving the peace talks;⁸ the Burundi women insisting on their place at the peace table and influencing the outcome; more recently the extraordinary performance of South Sudanese women in ensuring the inclusion of a 35% quota in the Revitalized Agreement to enable women's representation in the transitional government structures⁹; and finally the role of Sudanese women in leading the revolution that ended a three decade long dictatorship.

Despite this progress, the civic and political space for women peace activists continues to shrink,¹⁰ as has been observed in their struggle to engage with these structures while being continuously met with resistance. For example, despite the role of Sudanese women in the liberation, their participation in the ongoing peace talks in Juba remains minimal. This exemplifies that approaches to peacebuilding in Africa have adopted wholesale imported Western ideologies of who should be at the table and the content of what should be discussed. In most cases, men with military inclinations are usually prioritized, excluding women and community/religious leaders who also have influence and a deep understanding of conflict dynamics. The dominance of Western approaches is inevitable as Western actors are usually the first responders in the largest humanitarian crises, fund majority of the peace processes, and hold many of the senior positions in peace and security institutions, and so replicate their own patriarchal structures and norms.

Although the majority of these processes rhetorically adopt the WPS agenda as a guiding principle, its translation in practice is mostly militaristic in nature.¹¹ In a patriarchal world there is no such thing as peace times, since patriarchy itself is violent and ultimately produces behaviours that are termed armed conflict or war. The feminist agenda for peace is to dismantle these forms of patriarchy and its militaristic manifestation in everyday practice of war and conflict. These perspectives are not taken into account in peacebuilding processes, even

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though these were some of the fundamental foundations of the WPS agenda. A transformative agenda is one which ensures all forms of social, political and economic inequality and exclusion are eliminated.¹²

There is also limited understanding of the WPS agenda on the part of foreign diplomats who are commissioned to lead peace processes in Africa, through and within the regional and sub-regional institutions for peacebuilding. These multilateral institutions are patriarchal in their own right, having been created by a majority of men, ensuring their perspective of the world and conflict resolution is the lens through which interventions are built. From the United Nations Security Council to the African Union and Regional Economic Communities and States, their understanding of the WPS agenda is far from the transformative agenda that feminists conceived or hoped it to be. The fundamental objective of the WPS is to ensure peace processes deliver transformative change in the lives of women and girls in conflict and post-war situations. However, women representatives and women's organizations from conflict-affected contexts are continuously overlooked in these processes, despite the recognition that their meaningful participation is essential to realizing peace.¹³ The Revitalized Agreement for the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan is a good example of the suggestion that when women participate in peace processes, agreements are more likely to focus on women's and girls' needs and concerns. Women at the negotiations pushed for 35% women's representation in the Executive,¹⁴ called for refrain from acts of sexual violence, gender-based violence including sexual exploitation and harassment,¹⁵ and protection of the needs of women, girls and those of other groups with special needs.¹⁶ Such provisions are only possible when women are at the table, so the importance of the representation and contributions of women cannot be overemphasized.



Chega Village, where women engage in making baked goods, stoves and more. Photo: Susan Schulman/Oxfam

The majority of the National Action Plans for the implementation of the WPS agenda in Africa have focused on participation in political decision making and sexual and gender-based violence, both addressing the participation and protection pillars of UNSCR 1325 (2000). However, the most transformative aspects of the resolution that relate to prevention of conflict and recovery in terms of humanitarian response have been missed. Weak or non-existent monitoring and evaluation frameworks have contributed to a lack of accountability for implementation. Furthermore, many of the indicators developed for monitoring the WPS frameworks at different levels use a quantitative approach and count numbers involved but do not allow for qualitative measuring of transformative changes; further, they do not take into account the limitations of peacebuilding approaches used by international organizations in Africa, with too many frameworks and a limited focus on prevention. The debate on what is needed to achieve transformative peace for women and girls in Africa has prompted the increased recognition that a feminist approach to peacebuilding may hold the keys to unlocking the potentials of the WPS agenda to achieve transformative peace.

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Transformative approaches to peacebuilding entail actions and programmes geared towards addressing the gendered power structures which are at the heart of unequal relations between women and men that lead to the exclusion of women from peace processes. Transformative approaches address the root causes of conflict including marginalization, discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and sex, and addressing inequalities at social, economic and political levels. Although feminist peace activists and local women's peace groups have continuously highlighted this approach, there is a disconnect between this understanding and the interpretation and application of the WPS agenda by the mainstream institutions. A critical analysis of the WPS agenda from a feminist perspective allows us to deepen our understanding of the transformative vision of peace and security, critique current practices that are situated within power structures and institutions that fail to address the root causes of conflict, and articulate approaches that will safeguard against future conflicts – with women at the heart of peacebuilding.

WHY EXISTING FRAMEWORKS FOR PROMOTING THE WPS AGENDA LACK IMPACT

From the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) (CEDAW)¹⁷, to the Beijing Platform for Action (1995)¹⁸ and the landmark UNSCR 1325 (2000),^{19,20,21} African institutions and states have focused on developing frameworks and plans/ policies and implemented them from their mainstream understanding of peace and security, with little or no attention to the role of women or its impact on the lives of women and girls in Africa. The lack of implementation of these (and previous) resolutions remain a cause of concern for women peace activists. These shortcomings might be attributed to the fact that the implementation has typically been through military means – for example, it is believed that to stop wars, peacekeepers – who are in fact, soldiers – must be deployed to conflict zones. However, the sending of troops to war areas has not ended wars or conflict-related sexual violence; conversely, those peacekeepers have often been perpetrators of violence. In Sudan,

UNAMID²² has been present for 13 years, yet the conflict has continued; and in fact, new conflict has emerged from their presence as in 2014 peacekeepers were accused of raping approximately 200 women and girls.²³

The African Union has made progress in promoting the recognition of the WPS agenda, and have called for its implementation by building on the landmark UNSCR 1325 (2000) and related resolutions, to ensure its policies and programmes adopt the provisions of the WPS agenda.²⁴ However, this progress has primarily related to policy development rather than to accountability of itself or states. In 2014 the AU Department of Peace and Security launched the Gender, Peace and Security programme (2015-2020), a continental framework for the AU, Regional Economic Communities, member States and CSOs to work collaboratively towards the effective implementation of Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. Subsequently in 2016 the department rolled out the African Peace and Security Architecture Road map for 2016-2020 that specifically calls for gender mainstreaming in its implementation, and also includes aspects of humanitarian response.²⁵ Most significant at the beginning of the decade was the campaign ‘Silencing the Guns 2020: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development,’ which was launched by the African Union Heads of States and Assembly during the OAU/AU 50th anniversary Solemn Declaration of African Heads of State in 2013 to promote peace and stability across the continent. Since we are now in 2020 the initiative has been renamed, ‘Silencing the Guns Beyond 2020,’ with the same objectives as the original campaign which aimed to eradicate all wars, including civil and ethnic conflicts, sexual and gender-based violence and preventing genocide in Africa. The campaign has been unsuccessful as the Heads of State failed to publicly criticize member states found to violate the principles set for the implementation of ‘Silencing the Gun’ campaign because it was not in their own geopolitical interests.

AU commitments have also been adopted in regional instruments and policy frameworks. The Southern African Development Community have placed emphasis on women’s participation in decision making.²⁶ Article 28 of the SADC Gender Protocol focuses on peacebuilding and conflict resolution including the prevention and elimination of human rights abuse against women and children during armed and other conflicts.²⁷ The East African Community, the Economic Community for West African States and the Intergovernmental Agency on Development have all developed regional action plans for the implementation of UNSCR1325. Another regional body that has made great strides in promoting the WPS Agenda is the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) which has two protocols that address sexual violence in conflict; the Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children in 2007, and the Sexual and Gender Based Violence Declaration in 2011.

At the core of these efforts is the recognition that peace and security cannot be achieved without the meaningful participation and leadership of women. From all indications within the African Union there is a recognition that efforts towards silencing the guns, enhancing good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, the rule of law and a peaceful and secure Africa must integrate the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda for them to be successful (AU, 2019).²⁸ However, women’s participation in these processes remains limited, particularly in formal peace processes, and the impact of these processes on events unfolding beyond policy circles remains in

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question.²⁹ While the African Union has been keen on advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, there remains lack of commitment on the part of its member states to translate these principles into opportunities for women's empowerment and gender equality at country level.

At the country level, 25 states in Africa have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) for the implementation of the WPS Agenda, and most countries have included provisions of UNSCR1325 in their national legislations and policies, including national development plans where they do not have NAPs. For example, Sudan has a National Gender Policy and Action Plan with a specific chapter on peace and security.³⁰ The AU recognizes that most countries have focused mainly on participation and sexual and gender-based violence³¹ when it comes to the implementation of Resolution 1325. The challenge with the implementation of the NAPs is the lack of political will on the part of governments to ensure adequate resources to guarantee their implementation. Of late there have been calls to ensure that Ministries who contribute to the different aspects of the 1325 are involved in the implementation of NAPs are involved right from the development stages of the NAP to ensure they budget for aspects that fall within their portfolios. With many countries developing their second and third NAPs, the extent to which these international frameworks for peacebuilding have led to transformative peace for women in Africa remains questionable, as does the manner in which governments have implemented these strategies within a militarized context with shrinking civic spaces. This also raises the question of who 'owns' the implementation of NAPs, and the extent to which delivering on the WPS agenda through such mechanisms is meaningful without being steered by civil society.

Continuously, many African leaders are focused on changing constitutions to remain in power, conducting violent elections that discriminate and marginalize women, and using state military machinery to attack opposition and dissenting voices mostly from civil society organizations. In countries that lack strong and coordinated opposition political parties such as Uganda and South Sudan, civil society organizations become the alternative that then become victims of state repression. The militarized nature of states has led to more attacks on civil society organizations including women's organizations, and increased abduction and killing of women. For example, the recent violence in Uganda where several women were killed,³² the attacks on women and girls during the Sudan revolution, and attacks on female politicians as seen in Rwanda.³³

With regards to humanitarian action, most of the frameworks follow the guiding principle of Resolution 1325 that calls for the incorporation of women's and girls' needs in all humanitarian interventions. However, the often fast-paced nature of humanitarian action means that interventions often fall short of adequately taking into account the needs and concerns of women and girls. This is important because during conflicts and in emergencies, pre-existing gender inequality and discrimination can worsen, as a result of changes in gender roles and relations. Research by UN Women (2015)³⁴ indicates that when women are involved in prevention and crisis response, it produces better outcomes such as gender responsive actions, lower risks of sexual violence, and increased protection of women and girls in humanitarian settings.

In the following section, I look at the challenges of the implementation of these frameworks for the achievement of the WSP agenda.

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Rosalie Kobo-Beth, from Bangui, Central African Republic. Women have a very important role to play in the building of peace. It is important that women know they have a role to play and they have to stand firm and play that role. Photo: Susan Schulman/Oxfam



CHALLENGES OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FRAMEWORKS FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE WSP AGENDA

One of the achievements of the African Union and its member states is the development of frameworks and policies to ensure the WPS agenda is achieved. A major challenge is that the majority adopt a vision of what peace looks like for women from the perspective a state-centric approach, that focuses on combatants 'silencing the guns' and sending peacekeepers to war zones. Even though the African Union itself has been promoting a new paradigm of African solutions to African problems, this has not sufficiently been translated into the WPS agenda in Africa.

Participation: Counting numbers is not enough

What all these frameworks have in common is the focus on measuring women's participation by counting the number of women in decision making. It is significant to note that most countries with increased numbers of women in decision making, particularly in parliament, have been those recovering from conflict e.g. Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda. This has been achieved mostly due to changes in constitutional provisions that require affirmative action for women. However, this increased participation has not translated to a reduction in gender-based violence in these countries and

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neither has it led to improved socioeconomic status of women and girls. For example, in Uganda, despite having 33% women in parliament, a 2011 survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics shows that 62.2% of women aged 15-49 reported experience of physical or sexual violence (by any perpetrator) at least once since the age of 15, and 58% of the same age group believe that 'wife beating' is justified.³⁵ The concentration on numbers alone limits the transformative potential of the WPS. The idea of increasing women's participation in decision making is aimed at ensuring that women's needs, and perspectives are adequately addressed in decision making processes. However, in most countries in Africa, to be appointed into any decision-making position you must be a member of a political party. Political parties are rarely rooted in the communities, and so their candidate reflects the views of the party in decision making and not those of the community or women they represent. The women's movement has been pushing for a deeper understanding of what counts as participation, but these advocacy efforts have not been addressed by researchers. Meanwhile, some women politicians view women activists as potential competition and so will often tow the party line to secure their positions. The inclusion of higher numbers of women does not necessarily mean that women are better represented, unless women who understand the needs and concerns of women and are able to position these issues in policy making processes are included in decision making at all levels.

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In conclusion, a quantitative approach is not a feminist approach; a feminist approach usually draws on the lived experience of women and their communities; and further, a focus on numbers usually does not translate into transformative change, which is the core principle of feminist peace.

Limitations of peacebuilding approaches by multi-lateral institutions and INGOS

The approaches used by multi-lateral institutions and donor governments to build peace in Africa has limitations; the go-to approach has been to send peacekeepers to war zones. That this has not been successful is evident from the many unresolved conflicts in Africa including in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The UNAMID-UN-AU Mission in Darfur and the MONUSCO-UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo are the two oldest and most expensive UN peacekeeping missions in the world, but both missions are far from achieving their objectives.³⁶ The approach of sending peacekeepers to stop conflicts has never led to sustained peace, yet so much resource has been spent on these missions. In 2017, the DRC was the target of the most expensive peacekeeping mission in Africa with more than 16,000 troops and police and more than 3,000 civilian staff deployed, with a budget of about \$7.3 billion (since 1960). This is followed by South Sudan with about 13,000 troops and a budget of about \$1 billion (since 2011). South Sudan is closely followed by the Central African Republic with 12,000 troops and a budget of \$920 million (since 2014), while 12,000 troops have been sent to Mali. In these same countries the level of conflict-related sexual violence remains high. In 2018, in South Sudan, allied militias raped women and girls as part of a campaign to drive opponents out of Southern Unity State. In Tanganyika Province of DRC, warring Twa and Luba militias violated women, girls and boys in their communities.³⁷

In such situations women's organizations become the first responders to support women survivors – not peacekeepers. The majority of the organizations working at the local level to point light on these violations and respond to addressing the needs of victims of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) are women's organizations, yet this crucial work is not seen as peacebuilding or articulated by Resolution 1325, and neither are adequate resources made available for such organizations to carry out the important work they do. While the frameworks articulate that protection and prevention of sexual violence is achievable by deploying peacekeepers and putting in place laws and policies, a feminist perspective requires that the social norms, practices and gender power relations – which are the root causes of the violence women experience – should be eliminated both during conflict and in so called 'peace time'. Until impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence is ended and women are adequately compensated for crimes committed against them, peace will not be achieved. The 'protection of civilians' framework focuses on creating order through peacekeeping, yet what is required for sustainable change is a just society in which women's human rights are respected; what is referred to as gender justice.

Humanitarian responses by UN Agencies and INGOS have mainly involved responding to the needs of refugees and displaced persons as a form of giving support to helpless people; their perspectives are not given due consideration, and neither is planning for their return an option. This means that humanitarian response acts as a sticking plaster at best. The short-term nature of humanitarian action does not provide for adequate time to respond to the various needs and concerns of women and girls. International humanitarian interventions in Africa are usually unrealistic in their objectives since most of the conflicts are long term and protracted, and most do not focus on sustainable and transformative change in the lives of women – the short term nature of interventions makes it impossible to make impact or change the status of women and girls. Women's organizations that work with refugees have greater potential to work beyond the mandate of humanitarian organization but have limited access to humanitarian funds. Many donors would rather give funds to mainstream organizations who are usually the first responders when conflict happens, since they have better infrastructure and resources to respond than women's organizations who are on ground.

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Limited focus on prevention

Many have observed the limited focus of those working to implement the UNSC Resolution 1325 at regional and country levels on the prevention of conflict from happening. The vision of the women's peace movement when supporting the development of 1325 is that conflict should be prevented by all means, but the UN has shown a different vision of peacebuilding through prioritizing peacekeeping and security. The UN Security Council therefore integrated the pillars of Resolution 1325 into its own work in peacekeeping, which is the reason that indicators in measurement of success have focused on counting how many women go on peacekeeping missions, in security sector reforms, and in other security institutions. These numbers have never translated to more safety for women in conflict and post-conflict setting. The debate must shift from protection (peacekeeping) to prevention. Women and women's organizations have critical role to play in prevention as this happens at the local level. The African Union, RECs and some States have developed early warning and response mechanism as an approach to prevention of violence.



Ibaado Mohamed is chair of various committees within the IDP camp. She has three camps under her management. Photo: Petterik Wiggers/Oxfam

FEMINIST APPROACHES TO PEACEBUILDING

This section reviews what feminist approaches to peacebuilding would look like. It illustrates what the women’s peace movements in Africa have done using case studies to showcase women’s way of building peace that argues for the promotion of women’s organizing both at the formal and informal levels.

Militarism and violence against women

Feminists and particularly African feminists have highlighted the need to pay attention to militarism and the way this has continued to impact on the human rights and protection of women during violent conflict and so-called ‘peace times’ and how this impacts on their participation. Militarism as an ideology creates a culture of fear and supports the use of aggression, violence and military intervention for dispute resolution. Militarism privileges violent forms of masculinity, which has serious consequences for the safety and security of women and girls. The relationship between structural violence such as that resulting from patriarchy and the physical violence of war must be recognized; this awareness should be reflected in the way we seek to build peace.³⁸ To prevent conflict and promote gender equality and peace, failed modes of militarized conflict resolution must be rejected. What is required is valuing and investing in non-violent and gender equitable alternative forms of building peace.³⁹

What is required is valuing and investing in non-violent and gender equitable alternative forms of building peace.

At the moment the United Nations is the main body responsible for intervening in conflict situations and their approach is to send in peacekeepers. To address the critical issue of CRSV by peacekeepers training focused on behavioural change is needed. Such training is critical to addressing sexual violence against women by the military and peacekeepers, to raise their consciousness and increase their understanding of women's rights and gender inequality. Within this frame, a code of conduct can be set for peacekeepers, such as the one developed by MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This will help to deter peacekeepers from committing gender-based crimes as codes of conduct codify punishment and sanctions. It is also paramount to reduce government expenditure on military hardware; instead such funds should be channeled to improve social services, which could lead to more peaceful environment. The proliferation of arms provides a conducive environment for sexual violence against women in societies in Africa. Women's rights organizations could support gender training for the military and also run campaigns against increased military spending. In addition, all perpetrators should face the law and appropriate punishment in countries that contribute troops to deter others from committing sexual related crimes.

Redefining what constitutes a peace table

It is also important to pay attention and be guided by the perspectives of grassroots women who have, over time, built peace informally and kept communities intact when men have been away fighting. Grassroots women provide practical support to communities such as food, shelter, healthcare services, education, and economic empowerment, and ensure victims of sexual and gender-based violence receive psychosocial support and medical treatment.⁴⁰ These activities contribute to meaningful peace for women. In South Sudan, women worked across religious and tribal lines to hold prayers, conduct silent marches, and established peace committees in internally displaced people's camps to build peace.⁴¹ These perspectives are not reflected in the international frameworks that detect how peace is built. Further, the way that women's informal peacebuilding is accounted for is problematic because it does not fit the description of the formal peace tables and peacebuilding itself. If we must improve on the current low percentage of women at the peace tables, we need to redefine the peace table to take into account women's informal peacebuilding efforts. For example, we may want to count the number of conflict incidences that women peace committees mediate at community level, or the number of meetings held with conflicting groups and the outcomes of such meetings. In so doing we may be able to account for higher numbers of women in peacebuilding and mediation than is currently being recorded.

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Invest in building a movement of women peace activists

Supporting movement building on WPS in Africa will enable the convergence of the different perspectives of women who can act collectively to profile the needs and concerns of women and girls affected by conflict. The example of the Liberian and South Sudanese women's movements shows what happens when women speak collectively. In both cases women worked across religious and tribal lines to develop a common agenda and mobilize support to ensure they influence the peace process. The women of Liberia Mass Action for peace engaged in nonviolent protest that included sit outs, prayers and a sex strike, and they forced the men to remain in the room until a peace deal was signed,

even when many attempted to escape through the window. At the end of the war the women's movement established the women peace huts at the community level to sustain advocacy and prevent violence against women under the leadership of women. The peace huts are safe spaces for women to address issues of violence against women and girls and to resolve conflict in the household and community. In the aftermath of the South Sudan failed peace agreement (2015) over forty women's organizations came together and established the South Sudan Women's Coalition, as a platform for women to effectively engage with the revitalized IGAD led peace process. Similar to the Liberian Women's Mass Action for Peace, the South Sudan Women's Coalition worked across ethnic, age and religious lines, that enabled them to be invited to the peace table. They created a technical working group that supported those at the table with analysing documents and writing the women's position at the different levels of the process as well as engaging in 'corridor advocacy' to push the women's agenda. Ultimately, the coalition was a signatory to the peace agreement. They continue to engage with implementation of the peace process, as many are members of the different implementation mechanisms including the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission of the revitalized peace agreement. Both approaches are nonviolent, involved large numbers of women's organizations – both formal and informal – and put the needs of women and girls at the forefront of their campaigns. Women organizations have shown that in organizing differently they can contribute to building peace. Many of such movements for peace had been established in Burundi, Ivory Coast and the West African Region.

Women and young women's participation in decision making at all levels and in all peacebuilding processes

The peace process consists of both informal and formal activities. Informal activities include protests, inter-group dialogue, the promotion of intercultural and interethnic tolerance, and the empowerment of citizens. Formal processes include early warning, preventive diplomacy, conflict prevention, peace-making, peacebuilding and disarmament involving activities like conflict resolution, peace negotiations, reconciliation, reconstruction of infrastructure and provision of humanitarian aid.⁴² Women and young women should be supported to participate in these processes. However, to achieve equal participation there is need to address gender power relations within households, the community and institutions, as well as interrogate the use of power and masculinities that perpetuate inequalities and normalize the abuse of women. All these different forms of inequalities make it impossible for women to participate equally.

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Build on indigenous methods of peacebuilding

African Feminist Peace must build on indigenous methods of peacebuilding. The African Indigenous knowledge is characterized by the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is collective and community oriented. In peacebuilding, various traditional methods have been advanced in traditional African societies including mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation. Indigenous methods of peacebuilding are largely informal. Among the Issa and Gurgura communities of Somalia, women play dual roles in times of conflict, as promoters of conflict and as stabilizers of conflict situations. Women capitalize on their nurturing roles using songs and proverbs to socialize their children to build peace. They also play significant roles in the formation of social capital

through marriages and kinship relations. Women are integral to sustaining peace through marriages that brought together and cemented two different and distant clans. However, their roles in decision making remains limited.⁴³

CONCLUSION

The WPS agenda has weaknesses that makes it difficult to translate its provisions to achieve transformative peace. Africa continues to contend with protracted conflicts and emerging forms of conflict both within its borders and those instigated by external actors, in spite of the large number of African countries with national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR1325. Progress has been made in the areas of participation in decision making, specifically in the number of women in national parliaments, however, women's participation in peace processes and protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence continue to lag behind. More attention must be paid to increasing women's participation in informal and formal peace processes, specifically in prevention through early warning and response mechanisms to ensure violence does not happen in the first instance.

What is required is to change the focus on frameworks and instead to adopt strategies used by grassroots women to build peace. Such approaches will contribute to feminist peace by addressing the root causes of conflict and inequalities at social, political and economic levels. To achieve a feminist vision for peace, the WPS agenda must take an intersectional approach to ensure that the needs and concerns of distinct and vulnerable groups are adequately taken into account at all levels. Furthermore, regional and member states of the AU must ensure increase financial support for women's rights organizations to take leadership and provide expertise and guidance at all stages of peacebuilding and humanitarian response. This includes ensuring the needs and concerns of women and girl survivors are reflected in programmes and planning to ensure they are effectively addressed.

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Below: Nadia Ibrahim Mohammed, at her market stall in Chega village Darfur. Photo: Susan Schulman/Oxfam



NOTES

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