

**THE TRAVAILS OF WOMEN IN POST-CONFLICT PEACE BUILDING IN WEST AFRICA:  
MISSING THE PIECE OF THE PUZZLE?**

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**Abstract**

*The experience of female returnees shows that they have specific protection concern in the post-war period. They suffer the consequences of armed conflict and are victims of sexual violence, war kidnappings and imprisonment. Even in refugee camps, women are victims of, hunger, and diseases. Worse still they suffer discrimination and exploitation even at the post-conflict peace building process. This paper examines the travails of gender (female returnee and displaced women) in post-conflict peace building and development in West Africa. The paper argues that unless women specific concerns such as violence experience, social and legal support as well as their empowerment which conflate with gender dimension of conflicts are addressed through effective incorporation of women into the peace building and development process, conflict and refugee problems are unlikely to abate and its implication for the fragile peace and development in West Africa region. It is suggested that the post conflict peace building and development initiatives must be reconstructed within gender lens which take into consideration their specific concerns, viewing them as an important actor and recipient of the post conflict peace building process.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Conflicts, peacebuilding, development and

**Introduction**

*“In war torn societies, women often keep societies going... We must ensure that women are enabled to play a full part in peace negotiations, in peace processes, in peace missions”. (Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary General, 24<sup>th</sup> October 2000.*  
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The interrogation of peace building processes in relation to women and gender perspective in West Africa depicts a “missing puzzle”. The missing puzzle is in terms of the marginalization of women; the most important segment of the peace building process. Considering that women are the most affected segment of the society during the outbreak of war, they are supposed to be effectively protected and fully re-integrated in the peace building processes. Women protections and involvement in the peace process constitute key components of the peace building, their full involvement as an integral part in the design, implementation and evaluation of the peace building and the reconstruction process create opportunities for them to air their experience, needs and protections concern. However, women have most unfortunately been sidelined; explaining why their specific needs and protection issues such as health, rape, violence, and economic empowerment have been undermined. Indeed, available reports and empirical evidence clearly demonstrate that women are not effectively incorporated in the peace building process. For example, an analysis of 313 peace building reports of the Secretary General to the Security Council between 2004-2008, including 286 countries specific and 27 thematic reports, revealed that 61 percent of reports made no mention of gender equality, 23 per cent contained minimal gender references, and only 16 per cent made multiple references to gender equality. This shows that women are either been marginalized or have been deliberately excluded in the post-conflict peace building activities. A gender focus would require that different needs of women and men would inform and shape the assistance provided them in relation to their situation and needs during the post-conflict peace building period. The case of women is that they have no voice and their circumstances compel them to accept the little assistance offered them,

while being denied the opportunity to actively participate in peace building process

A comprehensive examination of the extant literature on the internally displaced persons and returnees in peace building processes reveals few references pertaining to women (Shain, 2010; ). This suggests the absence of a gender framework which truly focuses on the concern of women in the literature, meaning that gender is either being ignored or is not properly understood (Benjamin and Fancy, 1998). While there have been several international humanitarian and legal regimes which constitute normative instruments in peace and security architecture, reaffirming the responsibility of parties to armed conflict to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, less effort has been made in addressing the concern of women.

In view of this, this paper does not advocate gender competition, rather it advocates a gender perspectives and mainstreaming that aims to broaden the understanding of the interface between gender and peace building in a manner that addresses forms of gender-specific disadvantage particularly as they relate with women. In other words, a gendered analysis attempt to understand not only the difference between gender but also the constant construction and contestation of gender roles in post-conflict peace building societies and the need to address them through an inclusive gender equality framework. The paper is divided into five main sections. The first section provides the general introduction, followed by the conceptual understanding of gender analysis which is the second section. The third section examines conflicts and violence in West Africa. The fourth section interrogate gender dimension of conflict, highlighting travails of women in the peace building and development process. The final section calls for gender mainstreaming which seeks to address women travails in peace building and reconstruction process in West Africa. The paper concludes.

### **Gender Analysis: Conceptual Understanding**

The body of research on gender relations has been particularly influential in the field of development studies. Several scholars that have contributed to the debate have their focus on two main areas (Filipov 2006; Benjamin and Fancy, 1998; Iwilade, 2011). The first looks at gender from a broadly economic perspective, seeing the issue of differential access to and control over resources as the critical factor in social processes. When looking at conflict from this approach, it tends to extend our understanding of poverty and women vulnerability by emphasizing the different impact conflict has on the economic stability and survival strategies of women and men (Iwilade, 2011). On the other hand, the second approach tends to center on issues of women's needs and status (condition and position), and reinforces debates about poverty and disempowerment (Hizkia, 2003). This study agrees with this position particularly on the ground that women specific concerns must be given adequate concern in the post peace building process being the segment most affected by conflict.

Notwithstanding, one cannot study gender by concentrating on females or males to the exclusion of the other sex; gender involves dynamic interactions between the women and men. As defined by Lammers (1999:12) 'gender is the social construction of femininity and masculinity as culturally and historical specifics' and usually refers to the inequality in power relations between men and women. As Davis, Evans and Lober, (2006:12) posits, it relates to 'the qualities of what it is to be a man or a woman, socially and culturally rather than biologically determined'. Since the construction of gender is culturally and historically defined, it suggests the contextual basis for which society conceptualized appropriate behavior and access of men and women to power. In practice, it also indicates the way women are generally discriminated against and have less access to positions of power than men (Ferguson, 2010). This inequality is more pronounced in the conflict situation, displacement and peace building processes. Undoubtedly, empirical evidence shows that women and men experience conflict differently as refugees, internally displaced persons, and returnees (Oyinloye, 2004; Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). Women unlike men seemingly are the worse casualty of war and conflict situations. Even within the same gender situation, women experience tends to vary according to other factors. These factors to Sorenson (1998) may be partly determined by their former positions in the landscapes of conflict as internally displaced persons, widows, single breadwinners, victim of rape or torture, ex-combatant or refugees. In most cases during post conflict peacebuilding, factors such as nationality, ethnicity, age, marital status, family situation and her place of residence are far more likely determinants than need which determines a woman access to assistance, protection and social support (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002).

This why feminist social theorists, contends that "how gender is constructed explains the position of women in society". Women in developing countries negotiate their lives within a construction of gender,

framed by their particular cultural groups. The changes in the social position of women, however explains their vulnerability to violence, abuse and dehumanization which are often an extension of the gender discrimination that already exists in peacetime. Since women lack the status for engaging and involving in the process of peace building, they are thus systematically excluded from decision-making opportunities, they are often stereotyped as victims and their experiences and contributions are virtually ignored in post-conflict peace time. Indeed, Anderson (2002) stressed this view when he claimed that woman's contributions and experience are undervalued in response to armed conflict and on the question of gender differences. In the aftermath of conflict, women are relegated to their 'traditional roles,' and are often expected to go back to do 'women's chores, rather been involved in the process of rebuilding the society.

There has been an increased awareness of gender analysis and perspectives in many policy framework aimed at addressing human rights protections and humanitarian challenges. One of such is the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000 institutionalised to ensure women are given more attention in the post conflict period. This framework represents a critical component of international law that addresses how women are affected by war and the importance of their participation in the search for sustainable peace. In addition international governmental organizations (IGOs) like the UN and the European Union (EU, 2000) have also produced wide-ranging policy recommendations on the position of women in violent conflicts and on the mainstreaming of gender policies related to post-conflict rehabilitation, development and peace-building. More fundamentally, at the continental level, the African Union has adopted women protection concern and their involvement in peace building as the central component of its peace and security architecture has been remarkable.

Most peace building and reconstruction process in Africa has failed to explicitly address questions of social justice and human rights, which perhaps is at the heart of the protection concerns of women as a gendered species of war and conflict. Post conflict reconstruction programs often flounder because they fail to address unequal gender relations and power dynamics (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). Financiers like the World Bank may produce excellent gender studies, and use powerful gender rhetoric, but fail to incorporate them into their investments on peace building (Zuckerman and Wu, 2003). There is little recognition in international agreements on the impacts of conflict on women's lives and their specific needs as a victim of war (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003).

Following from this, Greenberg and Zukerman (2009: 6), usefully proposed three dimensions of the gender framework which is rights based and founded on women's rights to participate meaningfully in policymaking and resource allocation. The first proposition hinged on 'calling attention to what is needed when gender analyses reveals gender-related disparities in basic needs such as education physical security and power' (2009: 6). The second dimension focuses on 'mainstreaming policies and programme, emphasizing the importance of understanding gender based roles and relations, and admonishing that failure to understand them may diminish the effectiveness of economic and governance programmes' (2009: 6). This proposition recognizes the horizontal inequalities as factors generating conflicts and to remedy inequalities where they pose a danger or renewed conflicts, but also to take care of the prevalent concern of the major actors involve in conflict and not exacerbate it. The third is the strategic transformation, which address the issue of healing, rebuilding social capital and the non-violent institutions (2009: 6). These propositions are central to this work, as it construct a framework which addresses the challenge of women and ensured that women protection concern is central to peace building.

Thus a purposeful effort to build positive respectful relations between men and women tend to offers some semblance of equality and cooperation which enhance the prospect of the peace building agenda. As noted by Iwilade, (2010), taking gender more seriously as an analytical category within the peace building and development agenda enhances inclusion and potential optimism which successfully drive the peace process to fruitions.

In an empirical study carried out between 2002 and 2004, in eight countries: (Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom). It was observed that progress and the impact of gender perspective and mainstreaming in a range of national settings was responsible for effective policy making in these countries (Klot, 2007). This is to say that gender perspectives is a useful tools that not only help in understanding, resolving and building peace, it is also a vital tool in formulating effective public policy. Daley (2002) therefore, contends that the distinctiveness of gender mainstreaming is to seek to institutionalize equality by embedding gender-sensitive practices and norms in the structures, processes and the environment of peace building which also reflect on the efficiency of institutional and policy framework. Thus, Reimann (2001) summarize gender framework and approach in two broad contexts. The

first encompass interventions on the micro (the individual), meso (cultural norms and values) and macro (social institutions and organizations) levels which are necessary to overcome the structural causes of gender-specific discrimination and to achieve gender equality. These two contexts are central to addressing women specific interest, needs and the challenge of the post conflict peace building.

As a consequence, peace building process must therefore be deeply institutionalized, in such a way that it constructs a new structural and institutional agenda and deconstruct cultural norms and political institutions which hitherto had engender marginalization, unequal distribution of resources, governance crisis and gender discriminatory actions whether in war or peace time. The new structural and institutional framework must have in itself potential elements which supports and address deficiency in the legal, political, economic cultural and security frameworks for bringing about sustainable peace and development. Such framework is capable of addressing the gender vacuum and the involvement of women in the peace building and development in the society. As Benjamin and Fancy (1998:22), argued gender analysis allowed a more 'nuanced understanding of how fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously affects gender relations by removing the stereotypical interpretations of what women and men should do and what they should need, to accepting and supporting what women and men are doing and what they do need'. Thus the inclusion and engagement of women in the peace building agenda is a necessary normative condition for sustainable peace and security in war torn countries.

### **Conflicts and Violence in West Africa**

Although stability is gradually returned to West Africa, the region has had to grapple with myriads of conflicts and violent contestations between 1980 and 1990s which destabilize its economies and regional development (UNSC Report, 2011). Countries such as Liberia, Sierra- Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau were in the peak of violent conflicts that not only disorganized their society but also affected the entire Mano River Union<sup>1</sup> in the West African region. According to (Obi, 2012:) most of these conflicts hinges on 'much deeper and complex, and are embedded in the interplay of historical factors, social-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces and local struggles'. Much as the above could be seen to constitute broader factors to violent conflicts, they are also intertwined with issues of bad governance, corruptions poverty and employment, ethnic seclusion and electoral instability among other triggers of conflicts in the region.

A major regionalized war in post-colonial West Africa was orchestrated by Charles Taylor led National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in 1989; overthrow the autocratic regime of elsewhere President Samuel Doe. The aftermath of this overthrow, resulted into seven years civil war (Vinck et al, 2011). After ECOMOG restored peace in 1996, the age long boiling ethnic frictions, corruption repression and abject poverty which affected social formations in the country thrust the country back into another round of civil war in 1999 until 2003 when the comprehensive peace accord was signed among the warring parties (Vinck et al, 2011). In the same way, Foday Sankoh's revolutionary Front (RUF), a rebel group also engaged President Momoh regime arising from issue of corruption, bad governance, social injustice and breakdown of democratic institutions (Richards, 2003). This conflict lasted for another 12 years. Both Guinea-Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire also experienced violent conflicts in 1998 and 2002. The case of Cote d'Ivoire was particularly disturbing, the one-time economic hegemony and beacon of stability in West Africa. Ingrained in ethnic-religious, identity contestation and politics of exclusion the country was plunged into years of conflicts with several peace initiatives failing until the successful signing of the Ouagadougou peace accord of 2007. The return of conflicts in 2010 consequently due to electoral dispute and violence culminate the country into another months of conflicts which was later resolved by African Union and other multilateral countries including France and United State under the United Nation Security Council (Ogwang, 2011).

By the end of these wars, there were reported cases of destruction of infrastructures and properties, rape, torture and death. According to the report of the Liberia truth commission of 2009, about 250,000 people were killed and over a million of people were displaced in the 14 years civil war. In all of these wars, women and children were the highest casualties' interms of death and displacement (LTRC, 2009). For example it was estimated that out of 500 000 displaced people in the Sierra Leone conflicts, women were about 300,000 of the estimated figure (Alaga, 2010:23) whereas the number of displacement in the case of

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<sup>1</sup> The Mano River Union are the microstates in terms of size and economy performance which comprises of countries such as Liberia Sierra-Leone and Guinea.

Cote D'Ivoire was put at 3000 people with women taking a larger share in this numbers (Aleke, 2012). Despite the end of these wars in the 2000s, emerging reality in West Africa shows that conflicts is yet to abate. This is evinced by the recent manifestation of pockets of insurgency, tensions and military coup in some countries in West African countries. The emergence of military coup in Guinea-Bissau and Mali, low-intensity conflicts in countries like Mali, Niger and Mauritania as well as the violent-conflicts, with terroristic colouration in countries like Nigeria and Niger further suggests the precariousness of the region to new conflicts (Olonisakin, 2011). The most devastating of these new conflicts is the Boko Haram insurgency, though rooted to religion and economic deprivation, it has heightened security tension in the entire region with several of its bombing of government properties and killing of innocent Nigerians. At the heart of the Boko Haram violent activities women and their children have suffered the most, not only as war prisoners and victims of rape, but also as displaced persons (Olonisakin, 2011).

### **The Travails of Women in Post Conflict Peacebuilding and Development**

Although, armed conflict involves everyone, not just armed protagonists, but also the innocent in the risk of increased violence, while the risk of direct or accidental attack affects everybody in a place of conflict, women seem to be most affected because of their vulnerability. Although the entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and wars, women and girls are particularly affected because they are most at the receiving end of wars, in most cases victims of sexual exploitation, war servants and war prisoners. Women are also particularly vulnerable to marginalization, poverty and other sufferings engendered by armed conflict. They may be particularly vulnerable if they are held up as "symbolic" bearers of cultural and ethnic identity and the producers of the present generation of communities" (El. Jack, 2003: 12). The impact of conflicts in the present day shows that women are increasingly becoming the target of fighting; they are often the targets of sexual violence during armed conflict especially when rape and other forms of sexual assaults are seen as deliberate strategies of war (UNESCWA, 2006). In specific terms, women travails during conflicts and peacebuilding period can best be contextualized under economic, social and political challenge.

### **Economic Travails**

In postwar societies, women's economic situations and interests vary greatly, as do the economic strategies they employ in order to restore economic livelihoods. Nzomo (2002) argues that the traditional socioeconomic rights and obligations of women, their changing role due to the consequence of war and the present conditions under which they live determine women's economic prospects and the role they play in revitalizing the economy and the development process. The emerging post conflict economic environments are usually not conducive for women's empowerment, and or further reinforce their economic marginalization and increase their vulnerability. The agricultural sector in many African countries is the primary form of livelihood and the major source of income for a majority of the women. Consequently, agriculture is often also expected to be the main sector for labour absorption in the postwar period. In such a situation, where production has been curtailed by armed conflict, compounded by extensive destruction of physical infrastructure, environmental degradation, landmines, displacement, lack of farming implements, inefficient administration, women continue to lack access to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs and credit facilities, all impose serious constraints on the capacity of the women in meeting up with the challenge of their new assumed role of head of household as a result of loss of their husband during the war and on the need to consolidate their status in the post conflict reconstruction process.

According to Aleke (2012) some of the challenges of the Sierra Leonean and Liberian women in the post-conflict peace building processes are the lack of lack of agricultural resources which women can capitalize to earn their livelihood. More so, that the lack of economic opportunities and empowerment due in part to the impact of the war has forced the women into farming activities and other less dignifying occupation. At the same time, women economic rights and opportunity tends to be limited compared to their male counterparts, where cultural issues debar women on issues such as land or property ownership, the implication is that widows or female elders suffers economic backdrop, especially in a state of dependence where the belonging of their husband might likely go to their family. Such socio-economic consequences of conflict often subject women into prostitutions, crime or trafficking and or other forms of illegal activities in the name of survival.

### **Social Travails**

Social reintegration of refugee women also poses a major challenge. One is the rehabilitation of a partially damaged or totally collapsed social sector, the other is the facilitation of a long-term process of social integration (Nzomo 2002). With regard to the place of women, a major concern is whether the social sector addresses women's particular needs and concerns in an appropriate and adequate manner and recognizes and incorporates women's capacities and skills into the provision of social services and developmental needs of the society. The destruction of basic infrastructures during the war, occasioning the absence of school, portable waters, health facilities and institutions of the state is usually felt more by the women and children. For instance, Sierra Leonean women still register high level of infant mortality, due in part to the low rates of birth attendance by skilled medical workers resulting in higher number of death in the country (Filipov, 2006). According to the World Bank Report 2006, 'about 28 percent of the children who survive during birth die before they have turned five years. Apart from the low rates of birth attendance, the report identified high risk of epidemics, undernourishment and low quality of medical services as responsible for the increasing level of infant mortality and death rate' (World Bank, 2006). Invariably this depicts the extent to which repatriation women requires assistance and support in the peace building period.

Even at that, returnee women face further challenges in the facilitation of long term social reintegration. This is because women that were not displaced, usually display hostility and even jealousy, especially if returnees continue to receive humanitarian assistance, where resources are by far scarce (Lambo, 2003), or where refugees return with improved skills. It is also a fact that during displacement traditional gender roles is often reversed, making the women the primary provider for the family. However, in early transition and return stage, studies have shown that domestic violence becomes more prevalent as both women and men attempt to assume their perceived ideal role and authority in the family (Roe, 1992,). For women, fear may still be a continuous reality as they may still meet some of the people they fled from still living in the same communities (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). For instance, Sierra Leonean women have reported fears of returning on the basis of persecution for not participating in female genital mutilation (Refugee International, 2004). Gender based prosecution of this kind is usually not taken into account in the reintegration and development programmes. The protection and assistance issues facing women such as access to food, security of lives, legal documentation and equal access to services and other assistance continue to persist. Many Sierra Leonean and Liberian women lack support and assistance especially as most of them is uneducated, explaining why they were left out of the system. The case of the Sierra Leone was very instructive, while more males receive education; women were significantly relegated to the home (Filipov, 2006). This therefore exposes women returnees to potentially more devastating and significantly poorer condition at their return.

Furthermore, women exclusion from peace talk is further compounded by the absence or weakness of governance process and institutions which in the reintegration period can lead to impunity for violation of human rights, sexual gender based violence (SGBV) and other related obnoxious offences. Women in the re integration process are often vulnerable to sexual violence in two ways. First is the incidence of domestic violence and the second is the flashes of community's violence due to the reconstruction and ongoing peacemaking (UN, 2002). The impact of violence due to lack of institutional framework and governance structure has several consequence for women and girls; including sexual mutilation, sterility, chronic health problem and discrimination which may attract stigma from family members and members of the society. Though, for this reason country like Cote d'Ivoire have incorporated in their post-conflict peacebuilding process the four "priority axes"; protection of women and girls from sexual violence; gender mainstreaming in policies and development programme; reinforcement of women access to basic social infrastructures and participation in reconstruction and reintegration processes and strengthening the participation of women in political decision-making (Alaga, 2010). Yet, this initiative is yet to be properly institutionalised and its gains remain fragile. Virtually nowhere are women's rights given the priority they deserve. And, despite increased global awareness, in many countries the rights of women in socially defined roles and opportunities are still under threat (Alaga, 2010).

### **POLITICAL TRAVAILS**

Gender dimension of the political reconstruction must be placed in the context of formal peace negotiations between representatives of the warring parties and reaching an agreement regarding power sharing and political priorities. In addition, it requires the establishment and development of legitimate,

accountable and capable institutions which ensure a minimum degree of security and protection of all citizens' rights. For women, it is also a struggle for inclusion in decision-making and shaping of the post-war political dispensation (Sorenson, 1998). Many countries emerging from armed conflict have adopted new constitutions that grant women equal political, social and economic rights, and many governments have developed new quota systems to ensure women equal representation in decision-making institutions at all levels.

However, the implementation of these laws and good intentions often runs into major obstacles, as most of these laudable initiatives are yet to be implemented. This scenario is instructive in Liberia and Sierra Leone where about 14 peace talks between 1990 and 1998 have taken place, women groups were deliberately excluded with the outcome of such peace talk unsuccessful (Alaga, 2010). While the lack of involvement of women in peace talk have been blamed on the lack of gender awareness and the social construction of gender, the truth however is that government is yet to improve on the legal regimes and the human rights activities which ensure that women are given a voice and their interest protected in the post-conflict peace building agenda. Instead, the ruling regime in most war-torn countries, which is usually male dominated have displayed authoritarian character which further exclude women in the political process of the society. This factor was responsible for the step back and the outbreak of violence in Sierra Leone under the regime of Tejjah Kabbah in 1998 and in Liberia under the regime of Charles Taylor in 2003 (Iwilade, 2011). Although, there have been some positive improvement in the area of women's representation in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in civilian posts in the Professional and higher categories and in the Department of Field Support in Sierra Leone (Alaga, 2010), such involvement is only at a peripheral level and do not suggests a lot in cushioning the effect of war on women. In Liberia a more nuanced gender balance and improvement have been undertaken with 30% position retained for women in governance as a result of policy framework by Ellen Sir leaf who is the first female President of the country.

Consequently women's contribution has improved through initiative. The Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) and also the campaign for good governance in Sierra Leone has advocated for more women involvement at formal level. To show that are more important in peacebuilding project, the action demonstrated by Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) in 2000 when their members aligned to prevent outbreak of conflicts between the three Mano River Union by bringing their leadership to dialogue (Alaga, 2010). This not only suggests the imperative of women in peacebuilding, but also their relevance in peacemaking. As good as this initiative was, women were not given common platform to harmonize their struggles, resulting in loss of momentum along the line. This is consequent on the absence of legal processes and or legal support for women's fundamental rights and empowerment which is crucial to women reintegration. Given their changing role in the post conflict context makes women more susceptible to marginalization and manipulation. Where legal supports exist, they tend to be deemphasized. More importantly, despite their marginality women in various post conflict societies have found ways to contribute to peacebuilding, indicating that they are not just passively accepts the socially constructed gender roles and expectation, they have contributed to the success of many peace building project. Unfortunately, studies on women generally speaking had relatively little information available, regarding international protection concerns specific to women in reintegration programme in relation to durable solution (UNHCR, 1990), explaining why the little gain in the post conflict peace building is yet to translate to more equitable gender relationships. Advancement of women interest at superficial level is yet to offers a structural and institutional framework which challenges the paradigmatic focus on women as substance, rather than the major component of the peace building project and the potentials to foster equitable gender relations.

### **Towards Women Involvement in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding and Development Process**

Given the establishment of several human rights and humanitarian legal regimes which collectively condemned all forms of violence against women and the need for women involvements in post-conflict peace building, It is disturbing that many of these human rights and humanitarian legal instrument are yet to fully address the challenge of women in the post-conflict peace building and development programme. The truth is that many of those frameworks produce excellent gender regimes and use powerful gender rhetoric, there is little recognition in those international agreements on the impact of conflict on women's lives and the need to make them actor and recipients of the peace building processes (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). For example, the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 takes a

paradigmatic shift by articulating that all parties to conflict take cognizance of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and build effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process. At the same time the African Union and ECOWAS in its peace and security architecture also addressed gender discrimination and call for gender mainstreaming as a prerequisite for peace building. None of these humanitarian frameworks has yet to fully address in reality the specific concerns and travails of women in post-conflict peace building beyond women being feministic in peace talk rather than being an actor and the recipients of the peace building process. As argued by Benjamin and Fancy (1998), international commitments are difficult to enforce in practice given the limited interpretation of what constitutes human rights in gender specific violations. A number of factors such as cultural, historical and patriarchal have been adduced for the exclusion of women concerns in both human rights and human security approaches (Benjamin and Fancy, 1998).

Thus, the challenge of returnee women in the post-conflict phase and development is usually complicated, considering the condition and the changing role of women. In recent years, the great variety of active roles played by women during violent conflicts and after conflict was not very visible because of poor documentation and limited studies (UNHCR, 1990). No doubt the analytical focus on women as agent of peace and development has tended to be passive. It is documented and acknowledged that women play a multiplicity of roles during violent conflicts and peacebuilding process (Zukerman and Greenberg, 2004; El-Bushra, 2000; Moser 1989; Iwilade, 2010), despite the extraordinary attention given to the post war society by donor community, development policy institutions and relief organizations, have often been criticized given the fact that peace building measures have generally failed to view gender equality as a key element of social justice (Fischer, 2006).

In post- conflict peace building women involvement, empowerment and community-oriented initiatives are essential to make women a major actor and recipient of the peace building agenda. Vogt (2000: 85) had claimed in particular that 'programmes for reintegration and development should be developed and implemented with close involvement by local communities with women playing a prominent role in order to prevent gross injustice'. Women in most wars and conflict fight side by side with men in guerrilla wars, either as combatants or as back-ups for combatants, thus equating men status during the war with that of the women would significantly enhance the peacebuilding process (El. Jack, 2003). Nevertheless, women are forced back into their traditional and generally subordinate roles without special consideration for their social conditions and specific interests. Indeed, it is argued that the social reintegration of women combatants receives far less attention, especially from foreign donor organizations (Fischer, 2006).

There is need for procedural strategy by the United Nations for mandating the responsibility and the involvement of women in post-conflict peace building. As Cohen (1997), has suggested what is needed is an international system that assures that no major case of internal displacement goes neglected. Cohen further states that with a central coordinating mechanism in place, the appropriate agencies with the expertise to respond rapidly could do so without having to be asked in each instance (Cohen, 1997). The UN should establish a coordinating body to assist internally displaced persons and to ensure that gender and the protection issues are a priority in the reconstruction and development programmes of the post conflict countries. Women and children will continue to be subjected of human rights abuses until their protection is a priority at the highest UN level, their rights would continue to be violated. In the meantime, individual agencies can assume lead roles in certain internally displaced person's areas. The logistics of such arrangements can be worked out and coordinated appropriately among UN agencies and with NGOs and government agents. It is vital that these agencies understand gender concerns and implement gender-sensitive programming in their development assistance, especially with special concern to women protection needs.

There is the need to involve and support women in such a way that mainstreamed gender differences in peace time and at post conflict peace building. In many war-economies women are forced into oppression and prostitution or mafia-structures that gain from trafficking and enslavement of women. Reports on forced prostitution in Bosnia-Herzegovina have put this issue back on the agenda (Tshirgi, 2004). Consequently, international women's organizations argue that debates about security problems should involve women as well as men, in order to include gender perspectives into existing security agendas (Anderlini, 2001). The former United States ambassador, Swanee Hunt, calls for a "concept of inclusive security" a diverse, citizen-driven approach to global stability, which expands the array of tools available to police, military and diplomatic structures by adding collaboration with local efforts to achieve peace (Hunt and Posa, 2001). This concept emphasizes women's agency, as actor and recipient of peace

and security and not their vulnerability. Thus, it is therefore, of importance that women should be involved actively in the peace process as a measure of confidence building and gender equality. More importantly, the inclusion of women in peace process and in decision making is not a mere human rights imperatives which respond to the rights of women as human being to be involved in decision making processes, rather it is a necessary normative precondition necessary for the sustainable of peace and security (Alaga, 2010). Thus, gender must be recognized as a vital component of the peace process. Doing so requires that gender perspective is mainstreamed, to involve all stakeholders, especially women in the peace building and development programme, so as to enhance the institutionalization of peace and development and implication for consolidation of peace transition and development in West Africa.

To however institutionalize the involvement of women in peace building, through a gender analysis and mainstreaming, there should be awareness of gender perspective in peace support process, development of gender action work plans in disarmament and humanitarian affairs training in gender sensitivity and gender advisor, gender mainstreaming in policies and development programmes prevention and response to violence against women and support for greater participation of women in post-conflict peace building, post conflict elections and governance.

### **Conclusion**

The post conflict peace building agenda in many war torn societies is not consolidating. This is because the travails and challenges of women are yet to be effectively addressed despite that women are mostly affected by conflicts. As gendered species, they are at the receiving end of wars, in most cases victims of sexual exploitation, war servants and war prisoners. Women have been seen to constitute the greatest number of returnees. By implication, they require special attention during the peace building period and development process. The realities in most post conflict peace building societies shows that women have special protection requirement even when they faced the same general protection problems with their male counterparts, they still suffers from gendered-inspired discrimination and marginalization. Despite the global awareness as reflected in many humanitarian and human rights regimes, the protection of women and their involvement in peace building is still at risk. They have been deliberately denied a place in decision making process and their voice is yet to count in determining what kinds of attention they require. They lack access to legal process and social and political support on the violation of their fundamental human rights and on documentation for ownership of properties and the productive resources which are key to their reintegration and survival has often been at the heart of their travails. This is further compounded by the absence or weakness of governance process and institutions which ensure adequate and implementation of gender equality in the context of the peacebuilding project.

Thus, for the ongoing peace process in Africa to be consolidated, the reconstruction and development programme must evolved a gender mainstreaming, as a strategy for making women's as well as men's an integral factor in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes of the reconstruction, development and peace building process. Incorporating women voice therefore is a practical way of ensuring that gender and feminine perspectives get considered without necessarily alienating others. As Iwilade (2010) argues, accommodating women's voice rather than feminizing peace talks in the context that protects competing interest within society, represent the best chance of building viable peace architectures in Africa. The lesson learned from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire have shown that sustainable peace can only be achieved with full participation of all sectors of the society, of which the contribution of women is central. This no doubt promotes and helps reconstitute socio-economic structures that promote gender equality, democratic inclusiveness and durable socio-economic recovery and sustainable peace in West Africa.

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