Chapter 51

Women, Peace and Security in the SADC Region:
Progress, Prospects and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda is a key part of the international, continental and regional programme for attaining sustainable and durable peace. Conflict and post-conflict situations have a different impact on women, men, boys and girls. During conflicts, women and children are more vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation, displacement, a change to household relations and poverty. There have been concerted efforts to identify and address the impact of conflict on women and children and to provide for more responsive, representative and inclusive peace and security structures and processes. SADC countries have made great strides in enacting gender sensitive legislations, representation of women in cabinet, parliament, local government, and security sector institutions. Women have not adequately been represented in mediation and peace-building efforts and most peace agreements lack gender sensitivity. Peace agreements do not include reference to specific needs or interests of women.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda has been evolving over the last four decades. Feminist scholars and gender activists studying and/or working in conflict areas had long highlighted the need to focus on the roles played by men and women during conflict, the gender differential impact of violent conflicts, the need to address the challenges of women and to increase their participation in peace and security structures and processes. Although violence against women is a world-wide phenomenon, occurring in both times of peace and war, it is particularly pronounced in conflict situations where women are more vulnerable. The UN Department of Information Report (2000) indicated that nearly 90 percent of the current war casualties were civilians. Women and children constituted the vast majority of these civilian casualties.

These concerns found expression in policy documents such as The Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action for Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (2000). Momentum around these issues increased substantially with the adoption of UNSCR 1325, in October 2000, for this resolution placed gender concerns squarely onto the international and regional peace and security agendas, drawing attention to both the role of women as victims of conflict and the need to include them as actors in peace processes (peace-making, peacekeeping, post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding).

The mandate of the UN peacekeeping mission has, therefore, shifted from exclusively military operations to integrated peace support operations. The main priorities within this approach include restructuring state institutions, demobilizing and reintegrating former combatants, organizing and monitoring electoral processes, and helping women and children who are the most affected during conflicts. The UN has therefore sought to adopt a gendered approach to adequately respond to the needs of women, men, boys and girls who have been affected by armed conflicts. War has always impacted men and women in different ways. Although men and boys are victims of war, women and girls are the primary targets. In contemporary conflicts, as much as 90% of casualties are among civilians, most of whom are women and children. Women are the first to be affected by infrastructure breakdown, as they struggle to keep families together and care for the wounded (Affrim-Narh, 2006) Women may also be forced to turn to sexual exploitation in order to survive and support their families (Fredman-Rudorsky, 2013). The integration of women into peacekeeping missions has, therefore, taken the approaches of mainstreaming gender into the mandates, policies, and practices of peacekeeping missions and increasing the number of women (Gerycz, 2001).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Current conflicts are characterised by upsurges of violence in which human rights and humanitarian law are violated – often at the hands of a growing number of non-state armed actors as well as illicit groups operating on the periphery of armed conflicts without qualifying as parties to them (Hellesveit, 2015). Conflicts often have multiple complex drivers and are influenced by cross-border and transnational developments. Among other factors, geopolitical complexity, extreme violence and the use and reach of new technologies have triggered a need for new approaches to conflict resolution. Several reviews and studies conducted in 2015 highlight the need for more attention to prevention and peace maintenance and a focus on the root causes of conflict in order to avoid relapse, escalation and protracted crises. This means understanding root causes like societal and cultural inequalities and gender norms and altering the dynamics of conflict-prone societies (Global Study, 2015).

2.1. Feminist Approaches to (In) Security, Militarisation and Conflict

UNSCR 1325 "appears to build on a significant body of feminist scholarship highlighting men's and women's differential experiences of war, conflict, and post-conflict, redefining sexual violence as a weapon of war, rather than a 'unfortunate by-product', and recognizing the significant role played by women at the grassroots level in rebuilding the lives of their communities after conflict" (Pratt & Richter, 2011, p. 490). The UNSCR 1325 had groundbreaking effects on the 'peace and security agenda' by adding

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