



## AFRICA POLICY BRIEF

### It's Time to Build a Gender-Just Peace: Here is How

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Following the adoption of UN resolution 1325 in 2000, the past two decades have seen increased attention to women's roles in peace and conflict matters. Despite this, women continue to be marginalised in peacekeeping missions, peace negotiations and peace-building processes. This marginalisation clearly undermines the chances of building a sustainable and equitable peace. The following brief argues that it is time to include women and build gender-just peace by: 1) tackling security concerns both in the public and the private sphere; 2) empowering women socioeconomically; 3) improving the participation and representation of women in higher positions. The brief identifies concrete examples for each of these aspects and concludes that in spite of many dilemmas, there are still many practical steps for moving towards a more gender-just and sustainable peace.

#### INTRODUCTION

Despite increased attention to women's sidelining in matters related to peace and conflict following the adoption of UN resolution 1325, women continue to be marginalised in peacekeeping missions, peace negotiations and peace-building processes. Between 1990 and 2017, women constituted only 2% of mediators, 8% of negotiators and 5% of witnesses and signatories in all major peace processes.<sup>i</sup> In 2017, women made up just 10% of UN peacekeeping police personnel and 4% of military peacekeepers.

These are extremely low numbers given that firstly, women constitute half of the world's population and therefore should play an equally important role in peace and security matters, and secondly, that research has shown that including women in peace and security matters has several concrete benefits. The probability of a peace agreement lasting for 15 years increases by 35% if women are part of the peace process. Abuse allegations would be reduced by more than half if the proportion of women in military peacekeeping units increased from 0% to 5%.<sup>ii</sup> States with higher levels of gender equality exhibit lower levels of

violence during crises, and newer research has found a strong link between female political empowerment and civil peace.<sup>iii</sup>

Given these tangible benefits, it is no surprise that international institutions such as the UN and the EU argue for the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace processes with the goal of building more inclusive and durable peace, in line with what has been called a ‘gender-just peace’ characterised by gender equality, social welfare and security for all while recognising women’s agency. Such a peace also helps transform gender relations in society and redefine gendered hierarchies that often discriminate against women.<sup>iv</sup>

Achieving such a peace requires rethinking the role of the state and the understanding of the public/private divide. In particular, it demands that establishing security becomes a priority both in the public and in the private sphere, and that women’s informal responsibilities as care givers are relocated to the public sector to empower women socioeconomically.

Gender-just peace is far from a reality in any country, much less so in conflict-affected states, which may make these steps seem lofty and unattainable. Yet, if there are important local, regional, national and/or international buy-ins for implementing gender-just processes and projects, the post-conflict period is a real window of opportunity for driving a more gender-just peace.

The following brief argues that to achieve a gender-just peace it is necessary to: 1) tackle security concerns both in the public and the private sphere; 2) empower women socioeconomically by pushing women’s (in)formal responsibilities to the public sector; 3) improve the participation and representation of women in higher positions. The brief also identifies potential best practices for each of these aspects and concludes that in spite of dilemmas, there are still many practical steps to be undertaken in moving towards a more gender-just peace.

### **TACKLING SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE**

Efforts to create security in the aftermath of a conflict are often concentrated on the public sphere. Security Sector Reform (SSR), which is the main tool for rebuilding trust in the security sector after the formal end of conflict, is, for example, almost exclusively focused on the public sphere. However, much violence against women takes place in the private sphere both during peace and war times. Global estimates indicate that about 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime, while as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.<sup>v</sup> These figures show that violence against women is not limited to the public sphere and does not stop when a peace agreement is signed.

The large majority of violence that takes place in the private sphere is directed towards women. To build a more gender-just peace, it is therefore necessary to go beyond the public and ‘extraordinary’ violence and into the private sphere to tackle this ‘ordinary’ violence. This requires focus on legal reforms of the justice system to fight against impunity for domestic violence. Current large-scale initiatives in this domain include the EU–UN Spotlight Initiative aiming to end violence against women and girls and the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies, which is a multi-stakeholder initiative aiming to fundamentally transform the way gender-based violence (GBV) is addressed in humanitarian emergencies.

Examples of concrete, immediate steps which can be undertaken to promote security in the private sphere include:

- **Establishing a gender desk/unit in security institutions such as the military & police**

The Rwandan government set up a gender desk within the Rwandan Defence Force in partnership with UN Women in 2007. This gender desk aims to reduce GBV by creating awareness within communities on gender equality and women’s human rights. It is also responsible for giving gender training and provide advisory and counselling services to military families. While questions remain regarding the benefits relating to its role as counsellor, the fact that it draws attention to and condemns GBV is a step in the right direction.<sup>vi</sup>

- **Providing better training of both male and female police officers to deal with SGBV issues**

Research in Liberia suggested that training can make police more attuned to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) regardless of a police officer’s sex,<sup>vii</sup> which may encourage reporting and alleviate stigmatisation.

- **Involving women’s organisations in identifying security concerns when planning Security Sector Reform (SSR)**

The participation of women’s organisations in the 1996–1998 South African Defence Review process helped draw attention to previously ignored harassment issues and build legitimacy for security reform processes.<sup>viii</sup>

For women’s voices to be heard however, it is also necessary to increase their status and empower them both socially and economically.

### **IMPROVING WOMEN’S SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS**

Feminist Political Economists (FPE) have long argued for the need to take a closer look at the link between women’s socioeconomic position and violence against women. In particular, they have suggested that neo-liberal economic globalisation is a major obstacle to achieving a gender-equal peace<sup>ix</sup>. There are three main reasons why neo-liberal policies are seen as particularly

damaging for women's socioeconomic positions in a post-conflict context:<sup>x</sup>

1) Neo-liberal policies entail cuts in public expenditure like healthcare, education, childcare and parental leave, which are all services that women rely on heavily because of their informal responsibilities in the private sphere.

2) Women's formal employment is mostly concentrated in the public sector, which means that they are more likely to lose their jobs when there are cuts in public expenditure.

3) The liberalisation of trade results in low wages in the export sector, in particular in labour-intensive industries such as the garment trade or electronics manufacturing where women are frequently over-represented.

How can these risks be avoided and women be empowered socioeconomically in the aftermath of a conflict?

Access to education and to the labour market are clearly crucial. Girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys in countries affected by conflict, while young women are nearly 90% more likely to be out of secondary school than women in countries not affected by conflict.<sup>xi</sup>

Yet there is no point educating girls and women only to later limit their access to the labour market because of child-caring responsibilities and unpaid work in the private sphere. Therefore, it is crucial that organisational reforms and restructuration of

state institutions include an emphasis on providing services from which women benefit and which can help a reinterpretation of gender roles.

Immediate to medium-term steps towards empowering women socioeconomically include:

- **Investing in childcare by building commonly funded day-care facilities**

Providing childcare facilities is a critical issue for greater gender equality as women may be unable to accept formal employment because the responsibility of childcare falls almost exclusively on them.

- **Improve access to affordable health care that can respond to the impacts of war and women's needs**

Health-care systems need to be affordable and able to respond to war-specific and some times gender-specific wounds, such as traumatic fistula,<sup>xii</sup> but also to provide adequate care for women throughout their pregnancies and childbirths.

- **Facilitating access to education by lowering school fees**

In post-conflict Burundi, the government's decision to increase access to education by making primary education free increased the enrolment rate from 81.6% in 2004–2005 to 101.3% in 2005–2006, with a substantially increased gender parity index accompanying these numbers.<sup>xiii</sup>

More female participation overall and female role models and representatives in higher positions in particular, can also serve to improve women's socioeconomic status.

### **NOT JUST SYMBOLIC PARTICIPATION BUT ACTUAL LEADERSHIP**

'P for Participation' has been one of the three 'P's underlined as necessary for the implementation of the 1325 UN Security Council resolution on Women, Peace and Security, the other two referring to prevention and protection. Women's participation is clearly crucial for building a gender-just peace, but the discussion about how and why women's participation should increase in matters relating to peace and security has been fraught with disagreements and dilemmas.

The 'add-women-and-stir debate' has, for example, concluded that it is not enough to just increase the number of women if the system itself is gender-biased to the detriment of women.<sup>xiv</sup> In other words, women should not just be 'allowed to participate' in a system which ultimately reinforces their subordination: they should be part of deciding how the system itself should be reformed in a more gender-equal way.

In the same vein, efforts to increase women's participation has at times been criticised for the apparent instrumentalist reasons behind the push for their inclusion. Women's participation is often conditional

on how they could improve, reform or transform organisations for the better. Such arguments risk backfiring against women's participation rather than increasing it. First, they imply that women will carry an extra burden of expectations of what they can and should achieve – a burden that men do not have to carry. Second, if women fail to live up to the expectations, their right to participation is put into question.

While these points underline the implicit and explicit dilemmas of pushing for women's increased participation, they should not serve as excuses for excluding women. Women need to be represented in larger numbers in all areas, not because they should serve as symbolic tokens or be expected to perform as super-heroines, but because the alternative of a male monopoly over decision-making is no longer a viable option.

Increasing the number of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions has proven to be a slow process, mainly because the UN has no leverage over the troop contributing countries when it comes to the gender composition of those forces. This, in turn, is due to the high demand and low supply of troop contributions. If the UN had a high supply of troop contributors, it could install a carrot-and-stick system to improve female representation, but as long as it struggles to get enough troop contributors, this is not a realistic option.

There are however further concrete measures for improving the participation of women within peacekeeping missions:

- **Select leaders who have a clear view of how to implement gender mainstreaming**

A strong leadership is essential for achieving change in a mission. Making sure that the Force Commanders, Special Representatives to the Secretary General (SRSGs) and Police Commanders are keen and ready to implement gender mainstreaming policies in an effort to promote gender equality is crucial.

- **Make sure those committing sexual exploitation and abuse in missions are punished**

Accountability and conduct have risen to the top of both the UN and the African Union's (AU) agendas for improving peacekeeping performance during the past years. This is a welcome development that needs to be reflected not only for abuses committed in the host country but also within the peacekeeping mission itself.

- **Put more women in high positions with leadership responsibilities**

Best practices include UN Secretary-General Guterres delivering on his promise to 'reach gender parity sooner rather than later', as the senior leadership of the organisation now reaches 50% females,<sup>xv</sup> and in January this year the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) became the first peacekeeping operation in history to not only be led by a female Special Representative but to also have a female Force Commander and a

Female Senior Police Advisor.<sup>xvi</sup> In Africa, the AU's recent initiative to establish a network of African women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation (FemWise-Africa) stands out as another example with the aim of boosting women's roles in peace processes.<sup>xvii</sup>

These are important developments in the quest to improve participation, as female leaders can serve as inspiration and motivation for other women to strive for higher positions, but also because they give women greater influence in decision-making matters at higher levels.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The last two decades have in many ways been a period where women's roles in peace and conflict matters have received much-needed attention in both academic and policy circles. Yet, while the adoption of resolution 1325 also raised hopes for more gender-equal peacekeeping and peacebuilding, these hopes have so far largely failed to materialise.

This brief has turned the spotlight towards three necessary conditions for building a more gender-equal and durable peace, including broadening the scope of security concerns to the private sphere to tackle domestic violence and promoting women's socioeconomic empowerment not only through access to education and the job market but also by creating adequate infrastructure for child care, education and health care. Finally, it has underlined the

importance of not only increasing women's participation but also of making women lead and direct efforts to reform and build peace in conflict-affected areas.

In terms of best practices, it has highlighted the need for structural reforms to end impunity for domestic violence and greater access to education as well as a stronger welfare system where women's caring responsibilities are alleviated by the state. It has also pointed out the importance of going beyond the idea of 'allowing women to participate', by making women lead figures in an effort to increase participation and improve gender-equality.

The election of men in countries such as the US, Brazil and the Philippines with a clear disregard for women in general and gender equality in particular, and the recent questioning of abortion rights in European countries such as Poland, show us that the fight to build gender-equal societies is an uphill struggle. However, you do not need to

be a feminist to understand that if we are to build sustainable peace it is not only desirable, but necessary, to include women as equal partners.

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