

ENGAGING WOMEN IN PEACE KEEPING: AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO CURBING SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN WOMEN

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Abstract

The main intention of this paper is to critically show the relevance of women in peace keeping operations. Since women are the worst hit and have been called the chief sufferers of violence, the need to engage female personnel in tackling sexual violence is not only the right thing to do, but the smart thing because women peace keepers are more effective, less aggressive, tend to have a better approach to dealing with conflicting parties, more effective in communication and are more trusted than men because it is almost always men who have perpetrated the violence against them. This paper engages the descriptive and analytic methods of philosophic research to examine the role women play in dealing with sexual violence. The paper argues that failure to take women into account can impact on reconciliation and peace building efforts. The paper concludes that there is need to eliminate cultural obstacles and policies that hamper the recruitment and deployment of female peace keepers if sexual violence should be reduced drastically.

Key words: Peace Keeping, Violence, Sexual Violence, Women.

Introduction

Violence has been described by many scholars as inevitable. According to Boulding (1989), human beings as social animals have always been enrolled in temporary and continuous disputes and fracas collectively called violence since time immemorial.¹ This comes in the form of individuals against individuals, families against families, kingdoms against kingdoms, and more contemporary, countries against countries.² Violence against women takes various forms. In the family, it could be in form of intimate partner violence, harmful traditional practices such as female infanticide, early or forced marriage, female genital mutilation etc. In the community, it is manifested in forms such as sexual/ dating violence, sexual harassment and girl child trafficking. In armed conflict, it is exhibited in forms of murder, torture, abduction, rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages and prostitution that a woman is endangered all her life. Before birth, cultural practices which view the girl child as inferior sometimes encourage sex- selective abortion. Sometimes, the mother is battered, and the unborn child harmed in the womb, born underweight,

miscarried or stillborn. As an infant, she may be one of the victims of wars who are murdered by female infanticide. In girlhood, she may suffer physical, sexual or psychological abuse. In adolescence, she is married off and becomes pregnant before she is physically and emotionally ready. Widows are harassed, abused and murdered on the death of their husbands. Throughout her life, depression and suicide are two predictable outcomes of a life endured under these considerations. In other words, violence pervades the whole of the female life cycle from pre-natal to adult hood.

Conceptual Elucidation

Violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread, persistent, and devastating human rights violations in our world today. Violence against women, also known as gender-based violence, is a term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women.³ violence against women is the most extreme form of discrimination. According to Makinde (2015), from 2005 to 2016, 19 per cent of women in 87 countries between 15 and 49 years of age said they had experienced physical and or sexual violence by an intimate partner.⁴ In the most cases, such violence can lead to death. Women experience violence in many ways, from physical abuse to sexual assault and from financial abuse to sexual harassment or trafficking. Sexual violence is any sexual act by violence or coercion, acts to traffic a person's sexuality, regardless of the relationship to the victim. It occurs in times of peace and armed conflict situations, is widespread and is considered to be one of the most traumatic, pervasive, and most common human right violations. The world health organization (WHO) in its 2002 World Report on Violence and Health defined sexual violence as:

Any sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.⁵

WHO's definition of sexual violence includes but is not limited to rape, which is defined as physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. According to Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia, sexual violence is a serious public health problem and has a profound short or long-term impact on physical and mental health, such as an increased risk of suicide or HIV infection.⁶ Murder occurring either during a sexual assault or as a result of an honor killing in response to a sexual assault is also a factor of sexual violence.⁷ Though women and girls suffer disproportionately from these aspects, sexual violence can occur to anybody at any age; it is an act of violence that can be perpetrated by parents, caregivers, acquaintances and strangers, as well as intimate partners. It is rarely a crime of passion, and is rather an aggressive act that frequently aims to express power and dominance over the victim.

According to Makinde (2017), Sexual violence is unwelcome or forced sexual activity.⁸ She avers that examples of this sexual violence could include:

Unwanted sexual contact, forcing her to have sex even if you are the husband, forcing her to have sex with others, uttering threats to obtain sex, forcing sex when she is sick, after childbirth or surgery, treating her as a sex object, refusing to allow or forcing her to use contraception. If all this amount to abuse, clearly, sexual violence is possible even in marriage⁹

Sexual violence remains highly stigmatized in all settings, thus levels of disclosure of the assault vary between regions. In general, it is a widely underreported phenomenon, thus available data tends to underestimate the true scale of the problem. In addition, sexual violence is also a neglected area of research, thus deeper understanding of the issue is imperative in order to promote a coordinated movement against it.

Tools for Curbing Sexual Violence in Nigeria

Public Enlightenment

Public enlightenment has been shown to be a critical tool in changing behaviour, attitude, beliefs and value system of people. Therefore, there should be intense public enlightenment and education at schools, social clubs, cultural group gatherings, churches, mosques and through the media, to first of all, demystify the myths about sexual violence. These myths inform the way many people think about sexual violence, and because they are in the background unconsciously influencing people's thoughts, the false assumptions may be seen as being true. For example, when we read in the newspaper that a young girl has been raped, perhaps near a nightclub, we often instinctively search for a cause other than the real one (that she was raped because a man with the power to do so decide to rape her) perhaps we proffer the reason for the rape as tied to the time of the day, or the clothes she was wearing, or the fact that she was alone. This way of thinking deflects blame from where it rightly belongs with the perpetrator of the crime. To champion the public enlightenment crusade, the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the media occupy a major role in this respect. Recently in Nigeria, the president of African Civil Society against rape, a Civil Society Organization, called upon Nigerians during a media parley, to join forces with the CSOs in order to heighten public enlightenment in the fight against rape and sexual violence in the country

Education

The universal Basic Education (UBE) recently introduced by the federal government of Nigeria through an enabling federal law was meant to make education compulsory and free for all children up to junior secondary school level. It has been shown that education of children, especially the girl child, goes a long way in boosting the socio-economic and socio-cultural status of women in the society. This in the run long will inherently empower women who are often disadvantaged by the undue attention paid to the education of the male children over their female counterparts. This imbalance, coupled with poverty and ignorance, has led to persistent practice in certain parts of Nigeria where

children and teenagers, instead of being in the classroom, are used for street hawking of petty wares by their parents or “caregivers”, thus making them vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse. Child and women trafficking with the attendant risk of sexual assault and exploitation would be greatly curtailed if equal opportunity and free normal education is provided for all children. The UBE as introduced in Nigeria with the enabling law, has the potential to take children off the street and at least obviate the poverty reason, usually responsible for non- enrolment in school and may also mitigate other religious and cultural reasons adduced for not sending, especially

Conditions that Increases the Risk of Girl Child and Women Sexual Violence in Nigeria

Conditions that increase the risk of girl child sexual violence in Nigeria can be found in schools, baby factories, the practice of child labour and places where there are conflicts. In the Enugu survey, majority of the victims knew their perpetrators and the assault occurred inside uncompleted buildings and the victims or perpetrators residence.

Child Labour

One of the traditional means of socialization of children is through trading. However, the introduction of young girls into street trading increases the vulnerabilities of the girls to sexual harassment. Sexual abuse of young girls in Nigeria is linked child labour.

Baby Factories

Religious and communal stigma associated with surrogacy and adoption has created a rise in baby factories in Nigeria. A large number of female victims in the baby factories are young adolescents. Operators of the baby factories mostly prey on pregnant young girls who are from lower income households, unmarried and are afraid of the public stigma associated with teenage pregnancy. Though, majority of the girls who enter the factory are pregnant. Some of the girls in the factories were kidnapped or bartered to the operators. These girls are then raped solely for the purpose of procreation.

Poor Parenting

Poverty and inaccessible to funds for parents to take care of their wards has contributed to child sexual abuses.

Cases of Nigerian Officials abusing Displaced Women and Girls in IDP Camp

Government officials and other authorities in Nigeria have raped and sexually exploited women and girls displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram. The government is not doing enough to protect displaced women and girls and ensure that they have access to basic rights and services or to sanction the abuses, who include camp leaders, vigilante groups, policemen, and soldiers. In late July, 2016, Human Rights watch documented sexual abuse, including rape and exploitation of 43 women and girls living in seven internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Maiduguri, the Borno state capital. The victims had been displaced from several Borno towns and villages, including Abadam, Bama, Baga, Damassak, Dikwa, Gambone Ngala, Gwoza, Kukawa, and Walassa. In some cases, the

victims had arrived in underserved Maiduguri camps, where their movement is severely restricted after spending months in military screening camps.

Cases of Rape and Sexual Violence by Boko Haram Terrorists in Nigeria

The human right watch has it that since 2009 Nigeria's homegrown Islamist movement, Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, which means “Western Education is forbidden,” has waged a violent campaign against the Nigerian government in its bid to impose Islamic law. The attacks have increasingly targeted civilians, mainly in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa.¹⁰ Borno state, the birthplace of Boko Haram, has suffered the highest number of attacks. In an October 2012 report, Human rights Watch estimated that some 1,500 civilians had died as a result of the violence; by November 2013, estimates showed that this figure had risen to 5,000 deaths. In the first half of 2014, Human Rights Watch documented the death of at least 2,053 civilians from Boko Haram attacks. The total estimates from 2009 till date, revealed that more than 12,000 civilians have died during the Boko Haram related unrest and violence in northeast Nigeria.¹¹ These figures are derived from analyzing credible local and international media reports, the findings of human rights groups, and interviewing witnesses and victims of numerous attacks. Human Rights watch has extensively documented the widespread abuses carried out by Boko Haram as well as by the Nigerian security forces in response to the insurgency. A 2012 report, “Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria,” explored the roots of the insurgency and implicated both sides in serious abuses. These include excessive use of force, burning homes, physical abuse, and extrajudicial killings of those suspected of supporting Boko Haram.¹²

Abductions of Women and Girls by Boko Haram

The abduction of schoolgirls from the Government Secondary school, in Chibok, Borno State, on the night of April 14, 2014, is the biggest single incident of abduction by Boko Haram. According to a June 20, 2014 report by Nigeria's presidential Fact-Finding Committee on the Chibok attack, Boko Haram abducted a total of 276 schoolgirls. Human Right Watch interviewed 12 young women and girls who escaped from Boko Haram custody after the school attack.

The young women and girls described hearing gunshots some kilometers away between 11:30 pm and 11:45pm., and soon after, observed the young men entering the school compound on motorcycles.¹³ An 18-year-old described what happened after Boko Haram gathered the young women and girls together:

Two men told us we should not worry; we should not run. They said they had come to save us from what is happening inside the town, that they are policemen. We did not know that they were Boko Haram. The rest of them came and started shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and at that moment we realized, they were Boko Haram. We were told to be quiet. One of them told us that the horrible things we heard happening elsewhere, like burning houses, killing

people, killing students, kidnapping people, would happen to us now. We all started crying and he told us to shut up.¹⁴

The only guard, a civilian, who had been posted at the school fled as soon as he saw the Boko Haram fighters approaching the school. According to the teenage student, the lack of security made it easy for the fighters to overrun the compound, seize the young women and girls from their dormitory, organized their transport. The students said they believed the primary objective of Boko Haram's attack was the stealing of the brick-making machine as well as food and other supplies. However, this apparently changed once the men realized they had access to the young women and girls and faced little resistance. Human Rights watch also documented eight cases of sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram combatants. Five victims, ranging in age from 15 to 22 years old, described their ordeal, while the three other assaults were described by witnesses. Four of the assaults occurred after the girl was forced to marry a Boko Haram combatant. Before the marriage, commanders appeared to make some effort to protect women from sexual assault. However, in two cases, insurgents took advantage of the absence of a commander and sexually abused abductees who had yet to be married.

The Role of Women in Peace Keeping in Nigeria

Over the years, women have been relegated to the background in the area of peace building, whereas, they bear most of the negative consequences of violent conflicts. Women's role in conflict resolution and prevention, peace keeping and reconciliation cannot be over-estimated or overemphasized. This is because apart from performing their biological and social activities of caring, giving birth, and bringing up humans as mothers, women also have the potentials of partaking in activities that geared towards peaceful resolution of conflict as well as in peace building. Equally women have been at the fore front of efforts to build peace across the world. According to Adeiyi (2015), women are often the stabilizing force in the societies in which they exist.¹⁵ This is certainly true in post conflict settings where women represents essentially the back bone of reconstruction and rehabilitation as well as the re-integration of former combatants and the re-emergence of basic economic activities in a society which is a war torn society, once peace is achieved.

Long before the recognition of the role of women in peace building process, they had already been very much involved in such activity. As a social group, women have been suitably identified as being pro- peace. Women have been highly visible in the forefront of movements for non-violence and peace worldwide. Women usually assume the roles of peacemakers in families, in communities and in society even though they have often been victims. Women have been at the fore front of efforts to build peace in countries all over the world. In many instances women have come to the peace negotiations united across party, class and ethnic differences. According to Adeiyi (2015):

Their unity and determination to make peace may come from their everyday experiences and concerns: protecting their children; finding food, clean water or shelter,

protecting themselves from the violence and particularly sexual and gender-based violence associated with conflicts.¹⁶

The activities of umuada (women born in an Igbo community who have gone to marry in other areas) led to the resolution of the land dispute between Umunebo and Umuokuzu communities in Owerri Local Government of Imo state. Similarly, it was the intervention of umuada of both Aguleri and Umuleri communities in Anambra State that contributed towards the cessation of hostility between the two communities. To show the importance of women in peace building the UN Security Council on 31st October 2000 adopted the resolution 1325, which deals with women, peace and security. This resolution highlighted the importance of bringing gender perspectives to a centre of the UN conflict prevention and resolution, peace building and peace keeping. This resolution was initiated after the UN Secretary General was invited to do a study on the impact of conflicts on women. Since the adoption of the United Nations Resolution 1325 of 2000, the Kigali Declaration of 1997 has reinforced positive and active roles.

Concluding Reflections

Women suffer differently in conflict situation and have called the chief sufferers of violence and displacement as the women are the ones who suffer through rape, other forms of gender-based violence and its trauma, loss of husbands who are recruited, captured, killed, and have to initiate starting life again. Women, men, girls, and boys have different roles, needs, experiences, and contributions throughout the different stages of transition from conflict to post conflict. For example, it is more likely that women may become the sole providers for their families post-conflict as a single parent after husband is lost to war, and in post conflict, women are more active in informal sectors of the economy. This is why they must be fully represented in decision making to ensure women are equipped with adequate tools for reintegration into society. Women must be present to ascribe the resolution to experiences unique to the female gender. For example, a woman who has overcome and survived an act of sexual violence makes her privy to this form of psychological self-healing and is more likely to be able to communicate in policy, the trauma of sexual violence survivors in conflict situations.

Lack of women in peace building and peacekeeping undermines the goals of sustainable peace when critical contributor of the community is held back from playing a role in negotiations, planning and implementation, a gap is left open for the continuation of the ailments present during conflict. It cuts to the heart of national security and the security of the lives of people everywhere. In Africa, women play important roles as custodians of culture and nurturers of families, yet in times of conflict they are not represented at the peace negotiating table or in community reconstruction efforts. However, this research concludes that leaving women out of peace and security process hinders communities from finding long-lasting peace. In times of conflict, women's vulnerabilities and unique needs are often forgotten during negotiations, which in turn limit the effectiveness of both peace and security agreement, and humanitarian responses.

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