

Creating Women's Leadership for Peace and Security in the Greater Horn of Africa: the limitations of capacity-building as remedy for gender inequality

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Introduction: Contextualising Gender, Peace and Security

Post-Cold war global security shifts in the early 1990s created the space for a rethink of the dominant conceptualisations of security. Key questions could be raised in the search for a new security paradigm, namely, what is security, security for whom, who are the security actors, and how should security be provided? A growing consensus emerged on the skewed and limited focus of traditional security and the need for thinking beyond the state to address the security of peoples. Both Critical Security Studies and Feminist Security Studies, critiqued the state-centred and gender-blind approaches to security, critiques which found fertile ground in an international policy environment under intense pressure to address violent intra-state conflicts that had shattered any hope of a post-cold war peace dividend. The 1994 UNDP Report therefore took up the critical analyses emanating from feminist and critical security perspectives and introduced a perspective it named 'Human Security' (UNDP, 1994).

The Human Security approach defined security as 'freedom from want,' 'freedom from fear' and 'freedom to live in dignity', thereby reorienting security discourse to address the security of civilians in our societies. This new conceptualisation of security, while it was far from 'feminist', created an opening for those already challenging the invisibility of women, and demanding gender analysis and documentation of conflict and the various measures being taken to end conflict, restore peace, and rebuild conflict-affected communities. Feminist scholars and gender activists were vociferous in exposing the gendered nature of war and the exclusion of women from peace and security structures and processes (Enloe, 1998; Tickner, 1995; Hudson, 1998; Moser and Clark, 2001; Meintjies et al, 2002). They also

pointed to the unequal gender relations that precede conflict, intensify during outbreaks of violence, and persist long after ‘peace’ has been declared. In one of those rare historical moments, feminists scholars, gender activists and policy makers all came together to jointly advocate for action to address the abject situation of women in conflict situations. All this activism bore fruit as it led to the adoption of the landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (adopted in 2000).¹ This resolution calls for the increased participation of women in peace and security decision-making, the prevention of violence against women and the protection of women and girls against sexual and gender-based violence.

Across the African continent, the same period saw a renewed interest in setting out a pan-African agenda that would assist in resolving conflicts and advancing development goals, in accordance with a new mantra: ‘African solutions to African problems’ and President Thabo Mbeki’s declaration of an African Renaissance. This revival in regionalism was pursued by African leaders who proceeded to reconfigure the moribund Organisation of African Unity (OAU) into the African Union (AU) in 2001. The AU’s Constitutive Act committed the organisation to the promotion of gender equality and to women’s empowerment. Gender mainstreaming was taken up by the AU as a key tool for, among other things, the pursuit of regional commitments to peace and security. UNSCR 1325 was therefore integrated into other gender related frameworks, namely, the AU Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women (2003), the AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) and the African Women’s Decade (2010–2020). UNSCR 1325 is also a key component of the AU Policy Framework on Security Sector Reform (2012) and was incorporated into the 2014 strategic vision for the continent, Agenda 2063. This ‘roadmap’ includes calls for an Africa free from “gender-based violence as a major threat to human security, peace and development” (AU, 2013). The majority of post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding programs are currently failing women on the continent as women continue to be subjected to the extremes of violence and abuse. Gender mainstreaming in peace and security is being promoted in an effort to address sexual and gender-based violence.

Despite enormous human and financial resources expended on gender activism (advocacy and protests), capacity building (workshops and training), the adoption of more gender related UNSC resolutions (such as 1820, 1888,

1889, 1960, 2106, 2122) and UNSCR National Action Plans (46 NAPS, 12 of which are located in African countries), women's representation in peace and security institutions and processes remain minimal and their vulnerability in conflict and post conflict situations persists. Sexual and gender-based violence, or threats of violence and other manifestations of inequality, still characterise relations between men and women, boys and girls.

The reported decline in conflicts that has been achieved on the African continent since 2000 has brought little peace and prosperity for women. Currently, new forms of conflict are breaking out, some specifically targeting women (as in the case of Boko Haram in Nigeria). However, because women are predominantly framed as victims of sexual and gender-based violence, it is assumed that they only need to be included into peace processes primarily to address this particular issue, rather than allowing women to contribute more broadly to the pursuit of the long-term transformations that are sorely needed to bring about peace in war-torn countries.² Conflict management strategies to date have relied on bringing warring factions (whoever they are) to the table to discuss how they will apportion the spoils of the state. Within this political arena, all stakeholders are reluctant to include women. Analyses and activism on gender, peace and security should therefore not be limited to merely seeking to include women into inadequate existing peace and security processes. Our analyses must take a broader view of the ways in which our societies, politics and economies are being constituted and [re]configured by violent conflict. These militarising processes appear to contradict the AU's declared pan-Africanist and gender equity agendas, both of which emphasise unity, common destiny, non-discrimination and positive transformation.

Disconnects between the frameworks and initiatives being produced and the lived realities of men and women are increasingly being recognised.³ This paper, contributes to an understanding of this disconnect by presenting a retrospective analysis of a particular intervention that sought to increase women's participation in peace and security decision making on the continent. Since this was an intervention I was engaged in, it is a personal account of the assumptions and impact of our activism in the pursuit of enabling women to participate in peace and security decision making.⁴ I revisit the successes, challenges and unexpected consequences of the intervention to draw attention to the misconceived assumptions about how change occurs, the deeply entrenched nature of patriarchy, the power relations that inform and

shape interventions of this nature, and the inherent limitations of relying on training and advocacy to deliver the much-needed structural transformations.

The Women’s Leadership for Peace and Security Project

The ‘Women’s Leadership for Peace and Security in the Greater Horn of Africa’ was a three year project that began in mid-2009 and ended in mid-2012. It sought to “maximise the participation and contribution of women in national and regional peace and security decision-making and political dialogue in the greater Horn of Africa”.⁵ More specifically, the project wanted to create “security fluency” amongst women leaders, by increasing women’s knowledge and ability to converse on peace and security related issues. Secondly, it set out to “secure a seat at the decision-making table” by advocating for inclusion of women in peace negotiations and influencing peace and security policies and practices. The project identified six impact areas:

- strengthened relationships between women leaders in the greater Horn of Africa and national government/IGAD/AU/EU and other diplomatic strategic partners;
- creating an enabling environment through the institutionalisation of policy changes;
- increased knowledge and political skill to effect change;
- new faces and able voices for peace;
- enhanced mediation support functions played by women;
- strengthened women’s networking/organisational capacity for impact on peace and security policy and practice.⁶

The greater Horn of Africa – which for the purposes of this project consisted of Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda – was selected for intervention because many of the countries in that region were embroiled in violent conflicts at community, state and interstate levels. Women were victims (being killed, maimed, abducted, raped, displaced), supporters (wives and/or mothers of combatants giving tacit support to the conflict), actors (soldiers, rebels, cooks, intelligence gatherers) and detractors (those who spoke out against the violence and actively campaigned for peace) within all these conflicts. Yet, they were typically excluded from the peace processes that were unfolding in the region. Consequently, their needs and interests were not being tabled in the peace agreements, or in the post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding programs that emanated from the

negotiations. They remained marginalised from the deliberations that would constitute the foundation of the [re]constructed states. The adoption of UNSCR 1325 had already highlighted that this was a global phenomenon, not restricted to African contexts. The Women's Leadership project sought to respond to the evident need to give practical expression to the resolution's aims, which are integrated into the gender equity frameworks of the African Union.

Four organisations pooled their expertise as 'partners' on the project, namely, the Club de Madrid, ISIS-WICCE, Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa (SIHA) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS). The Club de Madrid, the lead partner, is a club of former Heads of State. They had the convening power to facilitate women leaders to meet with representatives of national governments and regional organisations. Isis the Women's Cross-Cultural Exchange⁷ is an international feminist organisation headquartered in Kampala. ISIS-WICCE provided support services and brought their over 20 years of experience and expertise on the issues confronting women in the region to the project. The Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa⁸, a network of women's civil society organisations, identified the participants and they were initially envisaged as the organisation that would co-ordinate the project given their work with and access to the women in the region. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS), based in Pretoria, is an applied policy research institution working on peace and security issues on the African continent. My role, as the representative of the ISS, was to assist in the conceptualisation of the workshops, to provide input on the conflicts and to bring our organisational experience with policy analysis and regional security mechanisms to the project. Those of us conceptualising and implementing the project, believed that by pooling our experiences and shared knowledge we could make a more substantive impact to increase women's participation than had hitherto been the case.⁹ Our major objective was to build a knowledgeable (security fluent) group of women leaders who could participate more meaningfully in peace and security decision making in the greater Horn of Africa. Failing this, we expected we would at least develop a cohort of women who could be drawn upon for advice on peace processes and gender-sensitive security policy formulation in the region.

The project targeted forty women who were identified as leaders from civil society organisations in the seven countries. Drawn from the SIHA and

ISIS-WICCE networks, the women were diverse in terms of age, language, types of organisations they worked for (human rights, development, media, lawyers, education, and peace organisations located in both rural and urban settings) as well as in their experiences of conflict and conflict management. There were also tensions between the women themselves (e.g., from Somalia, Somaliland and Puntland; Sudan and South Sudan were still at war at the time). Although the focus was on 40 women over a period of three years, it was envisaged that women leaders from larger organisations and networks, would somehow pass on their acquired skills in accordance with the assumed 'trickle down' effect.

The methodology for creating security fluency and getting a seat at the decision-making tables was predominantly through workshops which sought to share information and build capacity and through 'high level' dialogues in which stakeholders were engaged to both advocate for women's inclusion and to create exposure for the women leaders, i.e. training and lobbying. During the period of the project we held ten workshops and high level dialogues (cumulatively billed as 'high level missions') in Addis Abba (3), Djibouti (1), Kampala (2), Nairobi (2), Somaliland (1) and Juba (1) (Club de Madrid, op cit). Each mission targeted a specific country, although because Somalia and Eritrea were deemed high risk, their project missions were held in Nairobi and Addis Ababa respectively. Each mission consisted of a three-day workshop in which the peace and security challenges were discussed, the gender relations highlighted and the conflict management policies and programs analysed. Each mission also included reporting (women recounted what transpired in their country between missions) and a skills training component (on advocacy, messaging, policy analysis, conflict resolution and early warning). The 3-day missions also drew on a number of consultants, both international and local, for both content and skills input.

At the end of the workshop the women leaders, who soon began to refer to themselves as the G40, would develop resolutions and/or statements which they would deliver to stakeholders (government, INGO's and donor representatives) at a high level dialogue the following day. These dialogues were chaired by former Heads of State, such as Mary Robinson (Ireland), Valdis Birkavs (Latvia), Kim Campbell (Canada), Kjell Bondevik (Norway) and Benjamin Mkapa (Tanzania). The role of the former Heads of State was threefold, they drew participants, they were assumed to have leverage on the stakeholders (for advocacy purposes) and

they could share their experiences with the G40.

The first high level dialogue in Addis Ababa, was chaired by Mary Robinson and Kim Campbell (as members of the Club de Madrid), and jointly hosted with UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). At this gathering the G40 were able to engage with representatives of the AU Peace and Security Directorate, Gender Directorate, UN, Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), ambassadors and other aid agency representatives. The purpose of this and all the ensuing missions was to persuade government officials, donors and representatives of intergovernmental organisations of the necessity for gender sensitive and gender responsive security policy and practice, have them meet the women leaders, hear their concerns and recommendations and to call on them in their future programming. All the statements and recommendations produced during the ten missions have been compiled into a booklet.

The UN Secretary General's lament that the gender, peace and security frameworks and initiatives were not yielding tangible results ring true for this well-intentioned intervention as well. However, it is insufficient to simply dismiss the intervention because it did not succeed in getting more women to peace tables. There is a lot to be learnt from the limitations of capacity building initiatives to produce the structural change necessary to give effect to gender equality and it provides insight into why it is so difficult to achieve the objectives encapsulated in the many resolutions and policy documents. This project however had the unexpected outcome of building transnational connections between women in this region, increasing an appreciation of the commonalities of their conflicts and their gendered impacts, and of the need to work collectively to achieve the continental agenda of gender equality and peace and security.

Assumptions and Challenges

One of the early challenges that confronted the project related to internal organisational and interpersonal issues between the partners, and these led to the withdrawal of one of the main partners, SIHA. This is a common problem of collaborative projects. Partners sharing common interests enter into collaborative projects bringing different strengths, agendas, expectations and values, most of which are not clearly spelt out. 'Partners' are not equal in these collaborative efforts. It is therefore imperative to constantly reinforce commonality of purpose and realign where necessary. Fortunately, and with

a remarkable sense of organisational maturity and dedication, the SIHA board decided that their members would continue to be part of the project irrespective of the organisation's withdrawal. This incident highlighted the need for greater transparency, the building of trust and organisational and project flexibility as a fundamental part of partnerships and of working in environments in which there is heightened vulnerability and distrust.

This project was conceived of and designed without the participation of the women leaders themselves – they were viewed as 'beneficiaries.' We assumed that because the project was in the interest of women and that we – as the partners – knew what was needed we could go ahead and manage/manipulate a process that would see 'them' enabled and seated at peace tables. A hierarchical binary was unintentionally constructed: 'us,' the partners who supposedly embodied the knowledge, experience, enlightenment and 'them' the beneficiaries who were deemed less knowledgeable about the security issues in their own context, in need of guidance and of the opportunity to be put in touch with national and continental peace and security brokers. The G40 were constructed as women leaders, but essentially treated as learners. It is worth noting that participatory project design is constrained in projects that require a detailed funding proposal prior to the intervention. This apparently insoluble factor may well explain the low traction of many external projects.

The first few missions therefore had many curious participants. Many were reluctant to move away from their particular focus on development, human rights or sexual violence, to now engage in discussion about human security, peacekeeping, security sector reform, and the functioning of regional security mechanisms. The women were equally hesitant to engage government officials because they either did not think the exercise would be of use to them or they associated it with a potential security risk. They were more familiar with the donor community and some saw these 'high level missions' as an opportunity to try to direct money to their own in-country projects. The G40 also came to this project with their own agendas, which at times coincided and at times conflicted with what the project sought to achieve, and it was not long before they began to exert authority.

Many of the initial hurdles of the project were overcome. For example, although the overall goals and methodology could not be changed, participants were given the space to input into the types of skills they wanted to acquire, the content of the workshops and the choice of local consultants.

This created a much stronger sense of ownership of the project. The G40 were not neutral bystanders to the conflicts, they knew what the security issues were and what was needed to create peace and security, even if this was not articulated in security jargon. Our initial assumptions were that if we familiarised participants with the security jargon and linked this to gender related concerns before putting them in touch with the regional and national leaders, they would be enabled to participate in security decision making. Many of the project beneficiaries succeeded in familiarising themselves with 'security-speak', understood the purpose and functioning of security bodies and were able to articulate their own interests, needs and wants. This project was undoubtedly a learning curve for many of the G40 were at a qualitatively different level than when they first started in terms of their conceptualisation of security, conflict management, advocacy and lobbying skills.

However, we learned that we were working with a false assumption about why women were not participating in peace processes (broadly defined). It was not their lack of knowledge and skills, their capacity to participate, or their invisibility that were the inhibiting factors. Women are marginalised because of the way in which peacemaking and peacebuilding have been structured. Training and delivering capable women leaders to peace processes that had, no real interest in their participation, despite the agreed to frameworks, proved to be a rather futile exercise. Peace negotiations are habitually organised to bring warring parties (usually rebels, warlords, political parties and government representatives to the table) to generate ceasefire agreements, governments of national unity and roadmaps to elections. Within this hyper-masculine space in which 'hard' power prefigures who gets what, where and when, gender is unwelcome, even as an add-on. Peacebuilding has largely come to mean [re]constructing the same gender biased state and security institutions, by many of the same people that had participated in their erosion in the first place. Since peace agreements and peacebuilding programs make far-reaching decisions about the future representation, structure and functioning of a particular country and its peoples, it is understandable that women have clamored for participation in them. Women have rightfully contended that issues pertinent to them – gender based violence, dignity, representation, protection, empowerment, access to resources among other things – have to be dealt with when the blue print for the transition is being negotiated. However, even the most dedicated women activists have not sought to change

the structure and orientation of the peace process itself or the institutions involved. Rather, women have fought – perhaps rather simply – to be included in the existing structures, assuming this would make them more accountable to women. Events over the last two decades show that there is little or no political will to bring about change, and that no amount of training will open up the space for women’s participation, let alone the transformation of gender relations. This may explain why between 1992 and 2011 only 4% of signatories, 2.4% of chief mediators, 3.7% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators were women (UN Women, 2010).

Those who have studied gender and development have long pointed to the pitfalls of the gender mainstreaming approach, because it concentrates on inclusion and capacity-building, both of which overlook the reality of men’s resistance to women’s equal participation, and outright hostility to anything that might be associated with feminism. However, given gender mainstreaming’s late entry into the security discourse, it has taken nearly a decade for activists in this field to come to very similar conclusions to that reached by development studies in the late 1980s – partly because of the silos in which the respective disciplines continue to operate. Noteworthy, too, is Connell’s reflection that men are the gatekeepers for gender equality for they control the very “economic assets, political power, and cultural authority, as well as means of coercion, that gender reforms intend to change” (Connell, 2005:1802). She notes that part of men’s resistance to change can be located in the ‘patriarchal dividend,’ the threats to their identity that occur with change and the continuing ideologies that value male supremacy (in religion, culture, organisational mission, etc.) (Connell, 2005: 1811). As far back as the early 1990s, Cynthia Cockburn (1991) pointed out that men resist organisational change either overtly or more subtly. Male resistance to gender transformation in the security sector is bound to be far stronger for here constructions of masculinity and gender power hierarchies are, in large part, constituted through the images, discourses and practices that emanate from the historically all male and masculinising environment of security institutions.

Feminist perspectives point to structural transformation as necessary for the attainment of the broader and more meaningful participation of women that is a prerequisite for sustainable peace and security. Currently, so few women are in leadership positions in governing structures, political parties, rebel groups, and intergovernmental organisations that they are not called

upon to participate in negotiations. At best, and if they push hard enough, they may be allowed in to observe. Then, too, where women are included, they generally negotiate in accordance with the interest of their respective affiliations. A rare exception can be found in the success of South African women with regard to the ending of apartheid. Here they succeeded in making an impact because women from the different political parties joined forces to advocate for the rights of women. Conflict management must entail broader processes – such as national dialogues – in which the needs, concerns and interests of the whole society can be meaningfully addressed. The current format in which access to the means of violence is the determining factor for inclusion and distribution of power and resources will never be gender representative, gender sensitive or gender responsive. No amount of capacity building will change this status quo. Therefore, women's quest should not be limited to mere inclusion into structures and processes that were not designed to deal with the broader issues of equality and human security. It should rather be to create alternative structures and processes that can be more responsive to the needs of all and in which a pan-African spirit can enable cross-border connections, important in the light of the regional dimensions of most of the conflicts on the continent. This will take more than having women's voices heard and being put in touch with the right people. The right stakeholders have heard the pleas of women many a time – they know the message packaged in its varied forms. Messaging, lobbying, advocacy, are clearly not sufficient to create the desired shift: women's participation to address issues of gender inequality and the security of women – requires nothing short of quite dramatic change in the ideological, cultural and structural conditions creating insecurities that are felt in particular ways and carried by women.

The Women's Leadership for Peace and Security was in the end, just one more project. As a project it had to meet set objectives within specific time frames, and it came to an end after just 3 years. Understandably, the women involved were reluctant to let go of the 'partners.' Even though the G40 organised themselves into a steering committee and drafted an action plan and funding proposal to continue their work after the project, the fear was that without the money they could not convene. Funds would be needed to provide the structures and support required to communicate and advocate across vast distances, and without this – given immediate challenges of their own contexts – little would be achieved. Needless to say, their fears proved

correct. At the end of it all, it seems that we had inadvertently created new forms of dependency, rather than empowering women as change agents. Three years was much longer than most projects of this nature, but clearly not sufficient for the G40 to stand on their own. Given the severity of their situations, I suspect this would have been the same even if we had continued for another three years.

The project, however, unexpectedly and despite its flawed assumptions and conceptual limitations, did create a strong sense of unity and belonging, camaraderie and sisterhood. It strengthened relations between women in the region so that they began to see themselves as a regional movement on gender, peace and security, which could reach out to similar movements across the continent. The in-country exposure to the conflicts as well as continuous updates created a much deeper understanding of the differences and similarities of what they were experiencing and enabled a collective thinking through of possible ways to deal with country and regional challenges. This type of interaction is therefore beneficial for the pan-Africanist agenda we hope to cultivate. Walking through the corridors of power and engaging the power brokers also demystified these institutions and individuals located within them. It exposed their weaknesses and lack of effective response. The women leaders we involved could see where the deficiencies, lack of capacity and ideological and conceptual bankruptcy were actually located. At the first high level dialogue many women were tentative about engaging their government representatives, as well as other stakeholders such as the UN, AU and donor agencies. By the end of the three years they were much more assertive and demanding of accountability. The project therefore added value to participating women leaders personal growth and served as a means of focusing attention on gender, peace and security in the region, but it was not, nor could it be transformative.

To bring about transformative changes in the sphere of gender, peace and security will require a multi-pronged approach that reaches all the way from individual to international levels, and targets all peace and security ideologies, structures and processes. The piecemeal manner in which we have been dealing with gender, peace and security has allowed for a mushrooming of frameworks that have minimal impact on the actual peace and security of women. The renewed pan-Africanist agenda on the continent should heed to the many calls for revisiting the current limiting institutional approaches to

gender, peace and security.

Endnotes

1. A point noted in a discussion I had with 'Funmi Olonisakin and Awino Okech in Pretoria in August 2014.
2. Also see Ayiera, E. 2010. "Sexual violence in conflict: a problematic international discourse" who problematises the normalisation of violence in conflict situations. <http://agi.ac.za/journals>
3. UNSC. 2013. Report of the Secretary General on "Women, Peace and Security" and "Global Technical Review Meeting: Building Accountability for the Implementation of Security Council Resolutions on Women Peace and Security" – Background paper produced for the UN Women Conference, New York, November 2013.
4. I wish to thank Ruth Ochieng Ojiambo for brainstorming some of the ideas in this paper with me.
5. http://www.clubmadrid.org/en/programa/project_in_action_1
6. Club de Madrid, Ibid.
7. www.isis-wicce.org
8. <http://www.sihanet.org/>
9. Although we worked for organisations, which were considered as the partners, we, as the representatives of the organisations, were responsible for the conceptualisation and implementation of the project and have to take responsibility for both its success and its challenges.

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