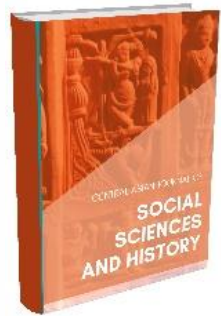




CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: <https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org>



Attaining Gender Equality in Post-Conflict Society: the Inexorable Course to Sustainable Peace-Building

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Abstract:

Ethnic, political, historical, economic, social and gender tensions within countries, and the quest for dominance by state and non-state actors are subsumed in a quantum of deleterious consequences. Despite, rivalry among global superpowers, there is no evidence of a decline in regional disputes or in organised violence by ethnic groups, religious fundamentalists, banditry, secessionist movements or terrorists. These internal conflicts are made more complex and lethal by modern technology and communications, international collaborations and the proliferation of cheap, but destructive weapons in the hands of young people. Contemporary conflict portends aggravated vulnerability of civilians, defined along gender and age strands, where women, girls, children and the aged are the most abused, raped, widowed, discriminated, debased and dehumanised. They are despondent, subjugated, traumatised and denied access to social good, status, education, health and equal rights - the fundamentals of equitable and just society. While data are derivatives of qualitative method, strands of feminist and social action perspectives offered latitude for theoretical analysis. It is alluded in the paper that peace-building in the post-conflict era would be elusive and ephemeral if gender equality is not actualised through social investment, gender intersectionality, masculinity connectivity, criminalisation of gender discrimination and violence.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25-aug-22

Received in revised form 28-aug-22

Accepted 25-sep-22

Available online 29-oct-2022

Key word: Gender equality, conflict, post-conflict society, gender violence, peace-building

Introduction

The weakness of state structures and institutions in many countries has heightened the challenges and risks of nation building. The scrambling for resources including economic, political, religious, in addition to ideological divergence and international collaborations have culminated into emergence of organised violence and conflicts by ethnic groups, religious fundamentalists, secessionist movements or terrorists, (Collier & Hoeffler, 2002). These internal conflicts are made more complex and lethal by modern technology and communications, and in particular, by the proliferation of cheap, but highly destructive weapons that are under the control of young people. In these places, when the state's monopoly over the means of conflict is lost, violence becomes a way of life with catastrophic consequences on the civilian population.

Conflict at any epoch portends aggravated vulnerability of civilians, defined along gender and ae strands, where women, girls, boys and the aged are the most abused, raped, widowed, discriminated, debased and dehumanised, (Awak, 2013a). They are equally despondent, subjugated, traumatised and denied access to social good, status, education, health and equal rights, which are the fundamentals of equitable and just society. Women in every known society experience one or other forms of violence, (United Nations report, 2006). This violence occurs daily “Including sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by an intimate partner; physical or sexual abuse by family members or others; sexual harassment and abuse by authority figures (such as teachers, police officers or employers); trafficking for forced labour or sex; and such traditional practices as forced or child marriages, dowry-related violence; and honour killings, when women are murdered in the name of family honour. Systematic sexual abuse in conflict situations is another form of violence against women”, (WHO, 2005 in Awak, 2015, p. 87).

Now that the conflict has abated, how do societies coming out of such gory tales of woes and rejig their social systems toward equitable and equal society? This is where the locus standi of the paper finds its essence in gender attainment through peace-building process and activities.

Conceptual clarifications

World Development Report, (WDR, 2012) conceives of gender as socially constructed norms and ideologies, which determine the behaviour and actions of men and women. This establishes a network of relationship, rules, roles and social structure between genders. Understanding these gender relations and the power dynamics behind them is a prerequisite for understanding individuals' access to and distribution of resources, the ability to make decisions and the way women and men, boys and girls are affected by political processes, economic relations and social development. “Gender is a term that has psychological and cultural connotations; if the proper terms for sex are ‘male’ and ‘female’; the corresponding terms for gender are ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’; these latter might be quite independent of (biological) sex”, (Stroller, 1968 in Haralambos & Holborn, 2013, p. 96). Consolidating on the above, Haralambos and Holborn (2013) posited that for one to be a woman or man does not follow that one is behaving in masculine or feminine manner. That is, those who are females do not necessarily care or have compassion, just like males do not necessarily become aggressive and competitive just because they are males.

Sex denotes human females and males, depending on biological features such as chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features, while gender denotes women and men depending on social factors such as social role, position, behaviour or identity, (Mikkola, 2019). However, the biological determinist's view such as Geddes and Thompson (1889 in Mikkola, 2019) contended that social, psychological and behavioural traits were caused by metabolic state. Since women are anabolic

in nature, where energy is conserved, it means that they are passive, conservative, sluggish, stable and uninterested in politics. Men on the other hand, expend their energy as katabolic, and this makes them eager, energetic, passionate, variable and therefore, interested in politics and social matters.

These biological facts about metabolic states were used in explaining behavioural differences between men and women, as well as justifying what ought to be the political and social arrangements for women. “Masculinity and femininity are thought to be products of nurture and how individuals are brought up. They are causally constructed”, (Haslanger, 1995, p. 98). “Gender is understood as pervasion patterns of difference in advantage and disadvantage, work and reward, emotion and sexuality, image and identity between male and female created through practical activities and representation that justify this pattern that result in social categories of men and women”, (Acker, 2005 in Awak, 2013b, p. 147). The author also sees gender as a basic principle of social organisation that involves distribution of unequal economic and social power, which is dominated by men. How will women experience equality in the midst of this mindset by society? This is where vital actions aimed at obliterating the obnoxious praxis are resonated within applicable theories.

Theoretical perspectives

Feminism: Peet and Hartwick (2009) conceive of Feminism as comprising several diverse social theories, political movements, and philosophies. Feminist theorists consider the origins, characteristics, and forms of gender inequality in order to focus on gender politics, power relations, and sexuality. Feminism could be considered as consciously political and activism because its politics revolve around immediate issues like reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination, and sexual violence as well as such long-term issues as patriarchy, stereotyping, objectification, and oppression. Also, various strands that lean-to development such as inequality between genders, the disproportionate amount of work performed by women, and the absence of women in development policy or group decision making are all elements of subordination of women, (Awak, 2015).

Indeed, feminist theorists find modern reason to be masculinity in logical disguise, with development practices subjugating women, while feigning humanitarianism. For most feminists, the idea is to rethink the meaning and practices of development from critical gendered perspectives that value the experiences and wishes of women, as well as men.

Social Action Theory: Social action theory as propounded by Max Weber emphasises the essence of human behaviour with respect to cause and effect in the social sphere. According to Max Weber, human beings adapt their actions according to social contexts and how these actions affect the behaviour of others, (Jones, Bradbury & LeBoutillier, 2011). Social action offers tangible exposition on human behaviours, effects and consequences and the extent to which such behaviour can influence the behaviour of other people, (Gane, 2005). The norms of a society stem from a behaviour that is not individualised and would serve as a yard stick to measuring levels of conformity by others.

For Weber, social action can trigger means and ends for social actors who want to achieve something specific. The theory has four strands namely:

- a) Traditional action where actions are carried out because it has always been done that way;

- b) emotional or affective where people engage in specific action without any compunction or reference to norms and values of society;
- c) rational-legal action where there are predefined goals and means to achieving the said objectives; and
- d) value-rational action where goals and means of achieving end is derived and determined by values. Action is rational in relation to a specific value; it is guided by ideology and collective ethics.

Social action is influenced by the past, present and future. Social action can be evolving as times change and human behaviour develops, improves, modifies or changes. Weber's typology subsists in the types of meaning men and women attach to their conduct across sociocultural systems, and there are multiple causations of human behaviour, (Elwell, 2013).

The above theories are descriptive of the current discussion because they fit all aspects of behaviour carried out by parties in the past, present or intended for the future. Therefore, for sustainable peace building to materialise, concerted efforts are required; past actions must be reviewed, and the narratives in the current and future must be guided to avoid misgiving and misinformation that can feed on susceptible minds.

Overview of global actions on gender equality

The persistence and obvious cases of discrimination, abuse and other gender related violence gave rise to Gender Equality to form part of international human rights law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10th December, 1948, where the organisation declared that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms, without recourse to race, colour, sex, language, religion, birth or other status.

Other actions taken to address the pervasiveness of gender disparity include:

- a) The General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year, where the first World Conference on Women took place in Mexico City.
- b) In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), also, known as International Bill of Rights for Women. The Convention details discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.
- c) In 1980, a Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen. The resulting Programme of Action advocated for stronger national measures to ensure women's ownership and control of property, as well as improvements in women's rights with respect to inheritance, child custody and loss of nationality.
- d) In 1985, the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, was held in Nairobi.
- e) 2030 Sustainable Development Goals containing 17 sustainable development goals has carved a role for women. Goal number five (5) specifies that efforts would be geared towards achieving gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.
- f) Beijing Platform for Action. These are commitments for gender equality and the empowerment of all women.

- g) In 2017, the United Nations, in conjunction with the European Union launched the **Sportlight Initiative**. This is a global multi-year initiative with a view to eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls.

These are few among many other initiatives aimed at addressing women's problems. However, gender disparity is still rife in all facets of human existence. It is more worrisome in societies like Africa, where patriarchy defines social relations.

Methods and materials

In the paper, a qualitative (descriptive) approach was adopted. This content analytical method guaranteed the application of words and logic of arguments, rather than the deployment of numbers in the discourse. Therefore, to verify, authenticate, validate and synthesise evidence (including past experience, present conditions and fear or hope for the future), it was expedient to extract data through secondary sources including articles, reports, online, and other documented resources.

Findings and discussions

The craving for strands of new social relations in post-conflict societies that could reconstruct, rehabilitate, reconcile and rekindle hope are expounded within the prism of gender equality and sustainable peacebuilding.

Women, discrimination and inequality: Despite the doggedness of Nigerian women, the magnitude and dimension of gender discrimination portrays how they are economically, politically, religiously, educationally, culturally and socially marginalised. They are despondent, subjugated and traumatised in the allocation of social good including higher status, (Awak, 2015). The situation has disavowed social status to women, except the status inherited or acquired through consanguine or conjugal affinity.

To Amadi (1982), women have been stereotyped, marginalised and trivialised in such a way that whatever men know and do in the society is considered superior to that which women do and know. This deleterious and precarious situation has caught the attention of many other writers including Abdullahi (2015) and Awak (2015, 2013b). They have posited that gender discrimination is perpetuated, driven, reinvigorated and aggravated by multifarious factors as mentioned above. These have concomitantly strangled any effort of women to actively participate in various segments of the society.

Rebuilding a post-conflict society through sustainable peace

Peace building is a complex and lengthy process requiring the establishment of a climate of tolerance and respect for truth. Peace-building is a long-term process that occurs after violent conflict has slowed or halted. It is a facet of activities taking place after peace-making and peacekeeping processes. It encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights programmes and mechanisms. Activities vital to assuage inclement and fragile state include:

- a) Early warning, response efforts and violence prevention through advocacy work;
- b) civilian and military peacekeeping/military assistance;
- c) humanitarian assistance including emergency relief, economic and social rehabilitation;

- d) military agreements and the establishment of peace zones or operational bases;
- e) the reinvigoration of soldiers and refugees;
- f) clearing and removal of war debris; and
- g) delivering aid such as food, water, healthcare, and reconstruction of infrastructure to communities that have been ravaged by conflict. This needs to be carefully managed to avoid deepening divisions between groups or prolonging the conflict or even resuscitating issues that gave rise to conflict in the first place.

To Baksh-Soodeen (2004), peacebuilding is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, political and economic transformation. This consists of a set of physical, social and structural initiatives that are often an integral part of post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. The central task of peacebuilding is to create positive peace, and a social equilibrium in which the surfacing of new disputes does not escalate into violence and war. Therefore, sustainable peace is characterised by the absence of physical and structural violence, the elimination of discrimination and self-sustainability. To achieve this means that the action or inaction of key actors must square-up beyond problem-solving or conflict management.

Peacebuilding is aimed at fixing core issues that underlie conflict and change the patterns of interaction of the parties involved; it is equally designed to cater for, change the narratives and instigates the vulnerabilities and dependency to self-reliance, self-sufficiency and wellbeing.

Peace building measures should integrate civil society in all efforts and include all levels of society in post-conflict strategy. All society members from the elite in various positions such as economic, political, religious, academia, among others to those people at the grassroots have specific role to play in galvanising sustainable peace.

Peacebuilding measures involve all levels of society and target all aspects of the state structure. They require a wide variety of agents for their implementation. The agents take up the role by addressing functional and emotional dimensions in specified target areas, and this must be internally driven.

Since government's effort at peace building may be hampered by limited resources, lack of consensus and lack of political will, it behoves that other organisations, groups and individuals must be deeply involved to foster lasting peace on a society that have experienced conflict and its attendant consequences.

Pertinent strategies for gender equality and peaceful resettlement

Tailor-made approach within historical context: The fluid nature of conflict negates a customised approach to solving challenges that may arise in the post-conflict society. There are such things as nature, intensity and duration that may impress upon the remnant of infrastructure, people and relationships; just as there are many concerns to address immediately in the post-conflict era with a view to easing tension, heal the people and chart a new path. These concerns would usually rally around access to health care services, good and portable water, among other things that are specific to different groups. Indeed, every human right, from social and economic to access to food, water, and housing, civil and political can be impacted.

Solutions to each of these challenges will need to be addressed within the unique historical context and local socio-political environment, with the most vulnerable such as women, ethnic and religious

minorities, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly that have special need and attention. The obvious is that there is no conflict situation that would leave the social structure of the affected society intact, and those who pay the heavy price are the vulnerable groups that experienced systemic marginalisation before, during and after the conflict. These challenges can compound the circumstances of the vulnerable groups, and it is germane to addressing them as one of the strategies to a better and peaceful resettlement process.

Assess the structure and nature of gendered conflict: Gender roles is associated with the intensity or the depth of experience that people have of conflict and the transition to peace. For instance, the established process of power sharing, which at best, is unequal and imbalanced continue to affect and propel inequalities in post-conflict situations. This is why Handrahan (2004) concludes that national and gendered identities combine to put women at risk, while simultaneously providing little room for them to voice their security problems. Above all, women often experience legal and gender discrimination. In addition, minority women face intersectional discriminations that sustain beyond conflict period, and are capable of disrupting peaceful atmosphere after the conflict.

To Baksh-Soodeen (2004), gender issue is brought into the organisation of conflict, not by the fact that the armed forces in any conflict is predominantly or exclusively by men, but mostly that the notions of masculinity affect the conduct of individuals and groups within those forces. Arising from this, women participation in war for example, is viewed from a different perspective such that the masculinisation of conflict does not only affect those in arms, but also, how and who is considered in post-conflict reconstruction. For instance, McKay (2010) has observed that few girls go through the United Nations' disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes. While MacKenzie, (2009) had earlier noted that women and girls who participated as soldiers in conflict are labelled and known as 'females associated with war', 'dependents' or 'camp followers', and are de-emphasised in policy-making and practical DDR training. The author also, posited that while the male soldiers' participation in DDR process is seen as a security concern, women's integration is viewed as a social issue and is well deprioritised. This is just one of the many cases where gender impinges decided approach towards post-conflict measures, (Chaudron, 2019).

As if the above is not enough, the masculinisation of conflict exposes women and girls involved in conflict to untold victimisation. They are also prone to various forms of abuse such as forced prostitution and sexual assault, and the attendant psychological and physical repercussions including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and higher rates of HIV/AIDS transmission, (McKay, 2010). The frequent exclusion of girls from the standard DDR process is an indication that these women face tremendous obstacles to physical and psycho-social recovery, (McKay, 2010). One wonders what happens elsewhere when gendered stereotypes exist within international development organisations such as the United Nations, as depicted by its failure to address girls' post-conflict. Such failure contributes to an atmosphere where women's roles in the conflict are ignored or their concerns are marginalised, thereby, leading to poorer outcomes for women, (Chaudron, 2019).

Indeed, when the needs of women such as sexual harassment, abuse, rape, deprivations and safety at home, work and IDP camps are addressed, and the veil, fear and pangs of insecurity in the post-conflict era taken off, the outcomes for female empowerment are better. Then, women's empowerment stands to benefit peace and stability of society as a whole, (Hossain, 2012).

Therefore, reconstruction is an opportunity to increase social equality across the gender spectrum. This is where the role of local and international peace workers such as policymakers, activists, development organisers is essential to erode gendered reality of conflict.

Reposition the vulnerable groups: Addressing post-conflict situations through gross economic growth alone does not ensure a sustainable and equitable future. Post-conflict peace subsists in how available resource in the society are managed and equitably distributed. The priority of policy makers and the investment of resources in such prioritises would to a large extent, determine how the fragile peace is maintained. Allocation of development aid and other resources should be tailored towards meeting the needs of the most vulnerable, including women, children, as well as sexual, ethnic and religious minorities. Allocation and reconstruction planning process are central to the empowerment of people from the vulnerable groups. This is because they offer the chance to appreciate the peculiar needs of the people, and strategies of meeting those needs are equally designed, based on fore-knowledge of the circumstances involved.

It must be understood that gender stereotypes that victimise women or villainise men and their role in the conflict are capable of causing disenfranchisement within the local context post-conflict. Also, a person's political involvement or their contributions to household and family work can vary based on gender expectations, which then complements their ability to contribute to reconstruction.

It is established that gender inequality is too often attended to without the historical and socio-political backdrop of the community, society or country, which poses a risk to well-intentioned policy and economic support. This is why Breslin (2019) has noted that factors such as poverty, diminished access to life-saving resources, unemployment and insecurity all intersect with gender to perpetuate conditions of vulnerability, suffering, and violence. A case cited is the invasion of Iraq by United States of America and the Allied forces, where reconstruction efforts targeted at women's equality did not sufficiently tackle the root causes of suffering and discrimination experienced by vulnerable populations following armed conflict. The writer admonished that it is appropriate for the affected community, state or country to bear the responsibility of addressing the systemic causes of gender inequality, rather than have the allied forces or peacekeepers impose their own views of how to implement this goal. If such is allowed to happen, there is a possibility of an increased inequality in the post-conflict era as is the case in Iraq and recently, Afghanistan and Nigeria.

It is noted that when vulnerable groups are deeply involved in the process of reconstruction, offering suggestions and devising means on how to tackle local challenges, they would be doing so because:

- 1) They appreciate the enormity of the problems;
- 2) understand the context of the problems;
- 3) appreciate the people affected and the socio-historical contexts within which the best solution could be provided and accepted.

Therefore, it is important to co-opt representatives of the minority groups into local, national and international reconstruction efforts from the outset. The action will also take into consideration the creation of systems where local involvement is integral to the creation of plans, agendas, and messaging. The insights and investment of vulnerable groups can contribute to a more effective implementation of post-conflict reconstruction measures, (Chaudron, 2019).

Reframe post-conflict narratives: According to Pugh (2005), it is obvious to state that policies designed to promote gender equality are not a sufficient replacement for actual inclusion of local

women in the reconstruction process. Indeed, it is sad that many basic assumptions of the liberal peace are not challenged, while potential alternatives are overlooked. Pugh advocates for an inclusive or emancipatory participation of local actors and structural diversity in political economies, which is capable of offering alternative options to the revisionist ideology. This is submerged in a liberal structuring of global political economy. By this, the starting point for reconstruction, and the narratives that are told about it, should be developed with an open view on the many possible futures for the society in question, so that a more communitarian, rather than individualistic approach to social care could be implemented in the post-conflict reconstruction era.

Uvin (2002) is of the opinion that although, the measurement of success of post-conflict reconstruction poses gendered challenges, but an outstanding definition for post-conflict success rallies around the development outcomes as depicted by the improved quality of life for a majority of people. Some infrastructural issues can be identified, funded, measured and resolved more openly, while other societal changes are subtler. However, an aura of peace must prevail to the extent that encourages:

1. The participation of women in elections that are free from all sorts of intimidation;
2. ability to pursue any career without limitation and harassment;
3. freedom from the shackles of rape, maiming, and fear of night shadows;
4. unhindered access to education; and
5. unfettered access to free medicare services.

These issues are considered fundamentals to gender equality and should never be ignored in the process of rebuilding a post-conflict egalitarian society.

Gender analysis: This should be carried out to identify and address the impact of policies, programmes, actions and initiatives by men and women. It involves collecting sexually desegregated data and gender-sensitive information about the population concerned. Corroborating Moser, (1993) and UNDP, (2002), asserts that gender analysis is the first step in gender sensitive planning, and promotion of gender equality.

Women inclusiveness in the peace process: It is found that women often organise themselves at the grassroots level in order to promote activities for peace, but they do not get access to the negotiation table in the formal peace process. It is important to stress that the exclusion of women from the peace process jeopardises a sustainable peace-building process. The idea is to better utilise the time between the end of a conflict and the beginning of the reconstruction process in order to promote the participation of women in peace efforts, (EI Bushra & Lopez,1993). It is evident that once the people appreciate the political, economic and social implication of wars on men, women, girls and boys, they would be in a better position to define the needs of a post-conflict society. According to UNDP (2002), this is a very important phase that gives an opportunity to promote reconstruction efforts with a gender perspective, while enabling women to participate actively in this process.

It is acknowledged that women all over the world perform multiple roles in productive labour (paid and unpaid), which is not reflected in their official measures of economic activity. Their access to equal pay for comparable work, family benefits, financial credit and the right to own and inherit property are either non-existent or are limited by law and traditional patriarchal constraints that

continue to undermine female economic life, (UNDP, 2002). The traditional gender division of labour treats domestic work as a voluntary contribution by women and perpetuates inequity at every income level, (Date-Bah, 1996). Issues to be addressed should include greater vulnerability of women due to loss of employment, interrupted employment occasioned by conflict, and a gender differentiated assessment of the discrimination faced by women in social welfare systems. In situations of armed conflict or impoverishment after conflict, women in developing countries tend to maintain their livelihood and that of their families by working in the informal sector. Their labour is not recognised and socially protected, and they are completely dislocated from the traditional community in the holding of lands and resources. Resettlement is conducted under patriarchal processes, and it gives control of rehabilitation packages to men. Arising from these issues is the fact that the eventual return to their ancestral home would not make up for lives that have been redesigned by conflict.

Intersectionality of gender and other forms of discrimination: People are discriminated against for a multiplicity of reasons including ethnicity and race, religion, caste, age, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic status and geographic location, in addition to gender bias. Therefore, when gender intersects with other axes of marginalisation, women are more likely to experience many layers of discrimination. In some cases, these other forms of discrimination can be more intense than gender discrimination. For instance, an ethnic minority man can be less powerful and more discriminated against than a middle-class woman from a majority ethnic group, although a female from this same ethnic minority group could face even greater discrimination, (Chow, Segal & Lin, 2011).

In consonance with Chow, Segal and Lin (2011), intersectionality could serve as a veritable tool for appreciating how these discriminations materialise and intersect. It is based on an understanding that men and women have layered identities, which have resulted from social relations, history and power structures. Through a deeper appreciation of multiple identities and consequent patterns of discrimination, more effective responses can be specifically designed to address them.

Masculinities to the rescue: It is becoming increasingly acknowledged that there is a need to better understand how the gendered identities of boys and men are formed and how they can be better mobilised as a force for gender equality. According to Cornwall, Erdström and Greig (2011), the Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2012-2018) has depicted the essence of male champions in ensuring the security of women and girls. Arising from this is the fact that men and boys can be powerful advocates for gender equality. They can help to reduce and prevent violence against women through provision of essential needs to women, and making women issues crucial elements in peace negotiations, as well as advocating same at international fora.

Although, older men are often seen as barriers to women's empowerment, but small-scale programmes that work with men and boys demonstrate some success towards more gender equitable attitudes. This is so because men and youth who suffer from exclusion do not get involved in violence and can be positive agents of change.

Conclusion

Peace is priceless, but elusive. Therefore, acquisition of peace is the superstructure of peacebuilding, and attaining gender equality cannot stand where there is no foundation laid through peacebuilding process. Persons and organisations desirous of achieving gender equality must first seek peace-making, peacekeeping and peace-building. To actualise this, subsumes in appreciating the intrinsically gendered nature of society; gearing towards addressing various misnomers imbued within it; identifying and insisting on direct participation of vulnerable groups in reconstruction processes; and a

determination to question the manner of engagement of locals and their post-conflict narratives, along with how events aimed at addressing concerns of the conflict are perceived and what dimension of assessment they have applied against measurable success so far.

It is a trite that unequal societies are incohesive; prone to inestimable rates of social vices, and violence of varying degree. Indeed, societies with greater gender equality are the bastion of hope. They are socially connected and interdependent. They experience robust economic, social, political, health, higher life expectancy and overall well-being that foster love, peace and a modicum of comfort, even after the orgy of destruction.

Recommendations

Corroborating Chaudron (2019), diverse challenges are bound to emerge in the post-conflict society. Such challenges include stories, issues and themes that persist across time and geographic lines. Therefore, integrating a gender-mainstreaming approach to reconstruction can inform the understanding of these persistent themes, and mitigate some of the issues in post-conflict settings.

Some of the activities to consider in peace building include:

- **Humanitarian relief and development:** This involves aid delivery such as food, healthcare, and provision of infrastructure.
- **Disarmament and reintegration:** These incorporate processes and activities transforming ex-combatants and other war or conflict participants into peaceful and productive members of society.
- **Refugees and displaced people:** Those saddled with the responsibility of resettlement must devise workable mechanisms that would facilitate seamless process of the people returning home and settling down with minimum discomfort after conflict since their property and means of livelihood might have been destroyed, stolen or misused, while the conflict lasted.
- **Economic development:** Small loans, training, food for work programmes and other means of support that would enable the returnees to start life and settle down are part of the package.
- **Women:** Women experience effects of armed conflict or conflict of whatever dimension in a very different perspective, which makes their need special. For instance, women are tools for war, they are abused, raped, made sex slaves, and are widowed. They become breadwinners as their husbands and brothers are consumed in the conflict. They are made childless as some may have all their children gone in the wake of the conflict. However, all these traumatised effects are overlooked by the society, and they are left to the vagaries of the weather. Therefore, peace building process must specifically take into accounts the plight of women in the most enduring approach.
- **Children:** They are affected by conflict in varied ways such as starvation, homelessness, out of school for months or years, malnourished and diseased. Others include experiencing gory sights of conflict and conscription into armed groups as child-soldiers. Therefore, to rebuild their lives beckons social rehabilitation, trauma counselling, peace education and overall social reorientation and resocialisation processes.

- **Reconciliation:** No matter the magnitude of war or conflict, no one leaves without tales of blood, sorrow and tears. Conflict situations are calamitous and should be avoided by all means. Where it becomes inevitable, resolution and reconciliation processes should be expedited so as to return the people to normal life. Therefore, the route to returning to normal life is by developing trust and soliciting cooperation from the people within communities affected by conflict. It involves balancing competing demands for justice and accountability for perpetrators of violence with the need to reconcile differences and move forward. Activities inherent in this process include amnesty, dialogue with the communities, community building activities and peace education.
- **Post-conflict peace building is connected to peacekeeping:** The process involves demobilisation, reintegration programmes and reconstruction. Meeting immediate needs and handling crisis properly are crucial for peace to thrive.
- **Long term peace building techniques:** These are designed to fill the void created by the inability of peace-making and peacekeeping processes. They are aimed at pulling away parties from confrontation and violence towards political and economic participation, peaceful relationships and social harmony. Thinking about the future should project a society that is imbued in structural, systemic and network of interdependence and interrelationships.
- **Investment, not empowerment of women:** Women play a major role in the society. When women's contributions in areas such as education, health and nutrition are assessed, it is unarguable to note that women invest substantial resources in their families. They create a secure foundation for the future of their families and communities. So "investing", not "empowering" women economically, creates job opportunities, wealth and sustainability for everyone.
- **Criminalisation of gender discrimination and violence:** Concerted effort by various governments should be directed at criminalisation of gender discrimination and violence of any dimensions. Where there is a law criminalising these obnoxious acts, it should be strengthened and executed with strict and due diligence.

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