



Building International and Regional Consensus

Policy Dialogue Report No. 18

African Women and Peace Building with a focus on Zimbabwe, DRC, and Somalia



20 August 2013
Burgers Park Hotel, Pretoria

Speakers/Chairs:

Zeenat Adam (DIRCO, Director, Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Islands)

Fatima Swartz (Chairperson, ACTION Support Centre, Steering Committee)

Abshiro Said Haji Mohamed (South African Somali Women's Network)

Isabella Matambanadzo (Zimbabwean feminist activist)

Molly Dhlamini (SALO Researcher, Member of the ANC International Affairs Sub-Committee, former International Relations Coordinator: National Union of Mineworkers)

Marissa van Rensburg (SALO, University of Cape Town, Young Communist League, and ANC Youth League Western Cape Provincial Task Team)

Keynote Speaker:

Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu (International Relations Adviser to the SA President)



Zeenat Adam thanked those present for the opportunity to speak at an event that coincided with South African Women's Month, focusing on the role of women in peace building in Africa. She referred to women leaders, such as Lillian Ngoyi (ANC Anti-apartheid activist and struggle stalwart), wondering how much we learnt and carry their values, because "if it wasn't for those women ... we wouldn't be here."

In various countries, women bring unique perspectives of humanity and *ubuntu* to their nations' peace making, peace building, and peacekeeping processes. Ms Adam spoke about women, particularly in South Sudan and Somalia, whose priorities are their families, their children, and social justice. Despite this, there is a lack of inclusion of the vast majority of women in formal peace negotiations. Not only that, women are sometimes made 'double victims' by those entrusted to be the peacekeepers, such as women in the DRC who are used as sex slaves by United Nations peacekeepers, or women in Somalia who are abused by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) in the internally displaced persons' camps.

Contrary to the perceptions many people may have about them, the women she met from Somalia and Sudan to Palestine and Iraq "can tell you exactly what it is that they need and what their country needs". In Mogadishu, it is women who are physically rebuilding their country to make sure that their children have a better life.



Fatima Swartz of the Action Support Centre spoke about what civil society and NGOs can do to support women's peace building efforts. Conflict transformation, she said, starts with how we see women; and key to this is the value we place on the work that women do.

"... and it is sometimes unfortunate that women themselves don't value what they bring to the table. So part of that is about the education that we need to go through and unlearning some things as women for ourselves, in terms of how we view our contribution."

Women are on the forefront of all the effects of conflict, in terms of what it does to the disintegration of the family – its economy, politics, and identity. And part of what needs to be grappled with is how that affects women's lives. "Because it changes who you are: you can't go through these traumatic experiences of conflict and think that women, after everything has been settled, must go back to the roles that they've played." Even in South Africa, after the struggle, spaces close up again for women's roles in the new nation.

"And so there's always seemingly a reversal after liberation, after women have made so many sacrifices, to go back to the place so that we can recoup, and men can again assert

their position in terms of where they were before. And I think fundamental to us in terms of conflict transformation is transforming the relationship.”

Ms Swartz believed that one of the priority areas where women are being disadvantaged is in the the lack of empowering education. Another key issue is the need to increase women’s economic opportunities and power.



The next speaker was **Abshiro Said Haji Mohamed**, one of the founders of the South Africa/Somali Women’s Network. Ms Mohamed, together with her young children and siblings, left Somalia for Kenya, then Egypt, then United Arab Emirates, before they reached Canada, and then finally South Africa. Ms Mohamed shared some of the challenges she faced in Canada - struggling to work and raise her children by herself.

“... I am the only adult of this family. I am the grandma, grandpa; I am the aunt, I’m the maid, I’m the cook; I have to be also the breadwinner. So I remember the first day I went to the shop, I fell six times because I don’t know how to walk on the ice. And when I come home, I sit and cry. I couldn’t hold anymore; I cry so hard.”

She believed that women can benefit and learn from exchanging their ideas and stories with one another, and “knowing each other, we can contribute a lot and give back to the community”.

The next speaker was **Isabella Matambanadzo** who stated that patriarchy is one of the final challenges of a genuine liberation of the people of Africa.

She described a meeting convened by Zimbabwean feminists and representatives of women’s rights from different civil society organisations and political movements with former South African President Mbeki who was then the mediator for the Zimbabwean crisis. There were three key demands that the women activists tabled outside the rubric of the broad ongoing political negotiations. The first was that Section 23C, then in the Lancaster House-negotiated Constitution, which provided that Zimbabwean women were minors in terms of customary law, needed to be removed. Under the present-day Constitution, women are equal citizens.



The second, which was driven by women inside the political parties, was for a protected set of seats for women in Zimbabwe’s Parliament. Today, at least sixty seats are for women. Ms

Matambanadzo reiterated that although this is an important step forward, any government that has less than half of its office-bearers being women, not only in parliament but also in other areas of state power, needs to ask why.

The third demand was for an environment of peace. And though there are many questions and conflicting statements about the recent elections in Zimbabwe, almost universally, the elections were held in an environment of calm, and part of that was due to the demands that women's rights groups put before President Mbeki and his successor. There was, in particular, a demand to dismantle the youth militia bases across the country especially in certain constituencies, where there was a pattern of sexual violence in the bases and in the communities surrounding them.

Historically on the continent, too often the targeting of women and girls for sexual violence has been perceived as being acceptable. According to Zimstat, one out of four Zimbabwean women or girls by the age of 18 has experienced sexual violence. "... Africa cannot claim any authentic, genuine emancipation, in my view, for as long as African women across many generations have a dominant narrative of violence."

Comments & Questions

Julienne Kakokatombe, a doctor originally from the DRC, called on Congolese and African women to come together and strategise to put an end to the war in the DRC. **Jean Bwasau**, a teacher from the DRC, appealed to the leaders present in the room to break the silence about what is happening in the Congo, and take a decision to end the war and bring peace. Both commentators stressed that Congo is at the heart of Africa and hence of the world, and that the conflicts and violence in the Congo is for access and control over its vast riches in minerals.

"Women's challenges in African countries struggling with conflict"

Carmen Smidt then introduced the keynote speaker, **Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu**. Ambassador Zulu acknowledged that despite South Africa's almost twenty years of democracy, and although there are many milestones to be celebrated in terms of women's participation, ordinary South African women are still struggling with many issues of basic survival and well being for themselves and their families. South African women have not only cared for their children and grandchildren, such as Ambassador Zulu's own grandmother who raised eight grandchildren, they also joined the struggle for freedom.



Having worked within negotiation and facilitation processes in the context of Zimbabwe, Burundi, and the DRC, the Ambassador suggested that women's organisations share their experiences of these processes.

“I think that – I throw this to SALO – that at some point you might want to call some of these women together so that we can really talk about how difficult it is to be part of a facilitation, and how more difficult it is to be a woman in the middle of that facilitation when you find that it’s just you and the rest of the negotiators and facilitation team are males. I think that that experience is very important.”

As part of the team working with Dr Nkosazana Dhlamini-Zuma in Burundi, Ambassador Zulu said that Dr Dhlamini-Zuma always raised the issue of the absence of women at the negotiation tables. Dr Dhlamini-Zuma’s influence and bold discussions also got the Burundi women saying “Nothing About Us Without Us”. The number of women in key decision-making structures in Burundi today arose because “the struggle for women was carried through during those negotiations.”

Meetings in South Africa with DRC women also arose out of working as part of Dr Dhlamini-Zuma’s team dealing with the conflict in the DRC. During their own struggle, South African women had experienced being left out of the processes and agendas run by the men. Hence South Africans must continue to pledge solidarity with other African women struggling in conflict areas, and ensure that our governments pay attention to their plight.

“... if we say Africa is the next best thing, are we including women who can participate in making sure that Africa is the next best thing? For me as an individual, Africa cannot be the next best thing when the women of Africa still have to run around carrying dirty little possessions, running away from gun-toting men. For me, Africa cannot be the next best thing when most women have to struggle for the most basics in their day-to-day lives.”

Comments & Questions



Violet Gonda asked Ambassador Zulu about the lessons learnt from the facilitation process in Zimbabwe, and what went through her mind when President Mugabe called her names and then apologised much later. **Tebogo Ramutloa** from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) wondered how international humanitarian law can be used to protect women and children in areas of conflict.

Masoma Matieme from the Young Communist League asked about the peacekeepers who are abusing women. **Farai Nengomasha** from the Embassy of Zimbabwe commented that Zimbabwe doesn’t fit into the day’s discussions on ‘peace building’, as that term is defined as action to solidify peace which relapsed into conflict according to the UN Secretary General’s report in 1992 in Agenda for Peace, and peace building consists of taking away weapons and integrating former militants into society. **Arnaud Munieze** from the Jesuit Refugee Centre, South Africa asked what is the role of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) in empowering Somali women? **A contributor in the audience** who is chairperson of an organisation called Movement Congo Paradise criticised the absence of a Congolese representative on the panel, and asked what the South African government is doing to help the Congolese in the diaspora and to help with the negotiations coming up in the Congo.

Ms Swartz explained that it is important to move away from too much theorising and “put a woman’s face, or put a face of humanity, on what we are talking about ... because it’s not just about the theories and the economic policies. Peace building is about people ... and we so easily fall into our own trap of dehumanising ourselves.”

Ms Adams clarified that AMISOM has a gender unit, and they had instituted an investigation into allegations against them and began an educational programme about gender sensitivity and sexual violence.

DIRCO, she said, is working closely with organisations such as the Action Support Centre, SALO, and ACCORD to look at what they can do in South Africa amongst the Somali community and in terms of reconciliation abroad. They share South African experiences and hold training sessions, such as diplomatic training that includes women as part of the training. They also conduct post-conflict reconstruction and development training, including information on the role of women in peacekeeping, for countries in Africa.

Ms Matambanadzo observed that a limitation of the law is that in times of instability the law is not as effective as it is during times of peace. Therefore other strategies that complement the legal approach around protecting women’s rights in an extra-legal context are necessary.

With respect to the absence of a Congolese panelist, she noted that in her view, today’s discussion was a follow-up to the seminar that SALO organised last year where much of the panel was from the DRC. Nevertheless, she apologised and promised to try to redress such lapses in future.

It was logical to include Zimbabwe in today’s conversation because Zimbabwe played a role in the UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC. In addition, weapons are not the only reason there is an absence of peace in a society as conflict manifests differently in societies.

Ambassador Zulu’s response was that many lessons were learnt through the Zimbabwe facilitation process and going further back. As to what went through her mind,

“there’s a job that needs to be done and if I am going to wallow in what is being said and not get to focus on the job that needs to happen, I may just as well not have belonged to the facilitation team. I had learnt many a-times that once you are given a responsibility like this you need to gather all your strength, gather all your whatever is possible to assist you in your process to get the process forward.”

Another learning that spoke to the question asked on what the South African government can do for the DRC is that though the solidarity, support, sharing, and the space will always be there for the DRC from South Africa, the people of the DRC must be in the forefront, leading and taking the responsibility of being consistent and united in their struggle and of knocking on all the doors.

Marissa van Rensburg closed the day's dialogue by thanking everyone present and recapping on the common themes raised by the speakers. On behalf of SALO, Ms van Rensburg thanked the Royal Norwegian Embassy of Pretoria, the European Union, the Danish Embassy of Pretoria, and the Olof Palme International Center for their support.



The analysis and recommendations included in this Policy Dialogue Report do not necessarily reflect the view of SALO or any of the donors or conference participants, but rather draw upon the major strands of discussion put forward at the event. Participants neither reviewed nor approved this document. The contents of the report are the sole responsibility of SALO, and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the donors who provided financial assistance for this policy dialogue session.

About the Southern African Liaison Office:



The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a non-governmental organisation which promotes informed process and debate about regional conflicts and crises. SALO does this by organising dialogue events and forums for informed discussion amongst key government and civil society actors from South Africa, the SADC region and internationally, as well as through advocacy, documentary media production, and research and analysis.

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