

## Women in conflict and post-conflict situations

### Background

Over the years, the Southern Africa Liaison Office (SALO) has hosted a number of workshops where women's perspectives on various subjects were included. It is important to examine the way African women experience life and how women can contribute to peace building and peace keeping. Since 2013, SALO has therefore designated August for hosting workshops focusing on women issues.

The first workshop was hosted on the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 2013 entitled *Building Regional and International Consensus – African Women and Peace Building with a Focus on Zimbabwe, DRC and Somalia*.

From left to right: **Fatima Swartz**, Chairperson, ACTION



Support Centre, Steering Committee; **Abshiro Said Haji Mohamed**, South African Somali Women's Network; **Zeenat Adam**, DIRCO, Director, Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Islands; **Isabella Matambanadzo**, Zimbabwean feminist activist & SALO Ref. Group

This dialogue reflected on the contributions made by African women towards building peace on the continent.



The keynote speaker; **Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu's** presentation focused on Women's challenges in African countries struggling with conflict.

Zeenat Adam, Fatima Swartz and Abshiro Said Haji Mohamed's inputs expressed a shared commitment to greater cooperation and mutual support between South Africa and Somalia as well as SALO's commitment to a greater partnership and cooperation between civil society and government.

Dr Julienne Katombe and Jean Bwasa spoke about the experiences of Congolese women, both in the DRC and in the Diaspora.

#### 20 August 2013

*Facilitator:* Molly Dhlamini

*Keynote Speaker:*

- **Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu**, International Relations Adviser to the SA President

*Introduction of Ambassador Lindiwe Zulu:*

- Carmen Smidt

*Presenters:*

- **Zeenat Adam**, Director: Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Islands, DIRCO
- **Fatima Swartz**, Chairperson, ACTION Support Centre, Steering Committee
- **Abshiro Said Haji Mohamed**, South African Somali Women's Network
- **Isabella Matambanadzo**, Zimbabwean feminist activist

*Presenting from the floor:*

- **Dr Julienne Katombe**, International Peace Making Church
- **Jean Bwasa**, Congolese Community in South Africa

*Closing Remarks:* Marissa Van Rensburg

**07 August 2014**

*Opening Remarks: Joyce Sikhakhane-Rankin*

*Co-Chairs: Molly Dhlamini and Venitia Govender*

*Presenters:*

- **Ms Modjadji Seabi**, Deputy Director general: Women empowerment and Gender Equality, Department of women, Children and People with Disabilities (DWCPD)
- **Ms Pregs Govender**: Deputy Chair: South African Human Rights Commission; former ANC MP and Chair of Parliament's Committee on Woman ('96 - 02); SALO Reference Group Member
- **Ambassador Sikose Mji**, Chief Director: Central Africa, DIRCO
- **Zeenat Adam**, International Relations Strategist, former Director: Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Islands, DIRCO
- **Litlhare Rabele**, Programme Coordinator: Peace, Security and Gender, HURISA
- **Carmen Smidt**, ANC International Relations, South South Cooperation

The second workshop was the *Women's Day Dialogue "Women and Children in Conflict Situations: Gaza, Sudan / South Sudan and the Central African Republic"*, which was hosted on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

This policy dialogue was aimed at raising awareness and promoting discussion on the issues affecting women and children in conflict zones.

The presenters focused of the countries mentioned above. The role played by South Africa in the protection of women's rights in the continent was also interrogated.



*From left to right: **Ms Zeenat Adam** – International Relations Strategist; former Director: Horn of Africa and Indian Ocean Islands, DIRCO; **Ms Pregs Govender** – Deputy Chair: South African Human Rights Commission; former ANC MP and Chair of Parliament's Committee on Woman ('96 – 02); SALO reference group member; **Ms Litlhare Rabele** – Then Programme Coordinator: Peace, Security and Gender, HURISA; **Ambassador Sikose Mji** – Chief Director: Central Africa, Department of International Relations and Cooperation; **Ms Carmen Smith** – ANC International Relations, South South Cooperation*

This Policy Brief summarises insights and experiences from these two dialogues. As August 2015 approaches, it is important to look at the recommendations made at the previous dialogues in order to incorporate them in this year's dialogue. It is also important to note that the African Union (AU) has declared 2015 as the "year of Women Development and Empowerment towards Africa Agenda 2063"; it would therefore be of value to evaluate interventions by the AU towards the development and empowerment of women in Africa.

## Summary of Dialogues

The following insights and experiences were shared by panelists and participants during the dialogue meetings:

### Challenges faced by African women

Women in Africa have common challenges. These are compounded by the general lack of good governance and the problem of weak institutions of accountability and justice on the continent. Even in countries that are considered to have strong institutions and constitutions that are committed to the protection of women's rights; there is a shortage of women in executive positions and political parties are still not fielding female candidates at the executive level.

Women bear most of the brunt of conflicts; the disintegration of the family, starvation, impact on family food security, patriarchy and the impact on identity of the family. There can never be development in any country without peace, security and stability; therefore the challenges of women in conflict zones are multifaceted. Women are affected psychologically, emotionally and economically. Some of the identified challenges are listed below:

**Class:**

- ❖ Western Bias; only women educated in the West are most likely to rise to respectable positions.
- ❖ People who are educated and speak English eloquently tend to think they know what is best for other women.
- ❖ There is a Western-centric prejudice which views some African women as timid and not deserving of the space to participate in public affairs.

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:**

- ❖ Rape is used as a weapon of war.
- ❖ Women are gang raped while escaping conflict zones.
- ❖ Rape is used by militia groups to mark their territory.
- ❖ Sometimes women are abused by peace keepers, prostituted and used as sex slaves.
- ❖ Mass rapes of women take place in mining villages to gain access and control over the geo-strategic minerals.
- ❖ Women's bodies are used to break the man and the soul of the community; fathers are forced at gunpoint and machete point to have sex with their own daughters and boys are forced to have sex with their own mothers in front of the entire community.

**Perceptions:**

- ❖ Women are judged by the way they dress.
- ❖ There is an idea that women need to be given a voice; that women cannot speak for themselves, so others speak on their behalf.
- ❖ There is a perception that women are susceptible to the lure of power and limelight and once they are in power they don't want other women circling them.
- ❖ There is also a perception that women are gentle and submissive and they don't really like the limelight.

**Undervalued:**

- ❖ People would pay more to a man than a woman irrespective of the value of the work.
- ❖ Women's contribution to the home economy is often undervalued even by the women themselves.
- ❖ Women are sometimes at the forefront of the struggle and once the purpose is achieved they are pushed aside and leading roles are given to men.

**Discrimination:**

- ❖ Young women can be victimized by the other women.
- ❖ Women are sometimes judged based on the colour of their skin.
- ❖ The lack of education of women and the girl child is institutionalised.

**Daily Struggles:**

- ❖ Women struggle in the home – whether children are fed, clothed and go to school
- ❖ Women struggle with inequality
- ❖ Women struggle with joblessness
- ❖ Women struggle with lack of space and opportunity to prove themselves

**Patriarchy:**

- ❖ Patriarchy has given the discourse that it is OK to violate women.
- ❖ Being an African woman means that you are really at the very bottom when it comes to getting justice in your lifetime.
- ❖ Sometimes women cannot claim even the homes in which they live in.

## Characteristics women bring to peace building and peace keeping

There was a call to encourage and open up spaces for women to participate in peace building negotiation and the peace keeping process. Below is the list of characteristics that women bring to the process:

- ❖ Women have unique perspectives because of their maternal instincts, they are selfless, have a sense of humanity and sense of other;
  - They would sacrifice anything for their families, for social justice and for socio-economic needs of their children.
- ❖ Women know what they want.
- ❖ Women are community-orientated and their participation result in community-centred outcomes rather than outcomes that benefit external interests
- ❖ Women are natural survivors and they understand that only peace ultimately secures survival
- ❖ Women are strong and resilient

## The role of South Africa in the protection of women's rights

South Africa has a progressive Constitution that is committed to creating a conducive environment for the protection of women rights and for the participation of women in various sectors. Because of this there is an expectation for South Africa to play a role in ensuring the protection of women's right on the continent. Below are some of the actions South Africa has taken to ensure that women's issues are addressed in other countries:

- ❖ During South Africa's facilitation in Zimbabwe, Zimbabwean women met with the former South African president Mr Thabo Mbeki, where they tabled the following demands:
  - To remove Section 23C in the Constitution, which said Zimbabwean women were minors at law in terms of customary law;
    - Today Zimbabwe has a Constitution that says women are equal citizens in society.
  - To have a protected set of seats for women in Parliament;
    - Today Zimbabwe Zimbabwe's constitution provides that at least sixty seats that are preserved for women in Parliament.
  - An unquestionable and undeniable environment of peace.
  - To dismantle the youth militia bases that had been put in place across the country.
- ❖ Dr Nkosazana Dhlamini-Zuma the AU Commission Chair has successfully advocated for the inclusion of women in the negotiations.
- ❖ Dr Nkosazana Dhlamini-Zuma and Mrs Zanele Mbeki successfully advocated for DRC women to participate in dialogues where their issues were voiced out.
- ❖ DIRCO conducts diplomatic training, where they have insisted that women be part of the training
- ❖ DIRCO also conducts post-conflict reconstruction and development training through a diplomatic institute for the whole of Africa; within that programme there are very specific lectures and interactions in terms of what the role of women is in peace keeping.
- ❖ South Africa deploys women on peace keeping missions and as facilitators in peace building negotiations.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Governance challenges, ethnic and regional conflicts, lack of socio-economic progress and the continuity of some of Africa's most demeaning and derogatory traditions, especially those that keep women and girls on the back burner have hampered the continent's development. Women want to find a creative and conducive environment to make their living on a day to day basis. It is important to change the way women are viewed and value placed on the work that women do in conflict transformation. Below are the recommendations made during the two dialogues:

- ❖ There is a need to recognise women who contributed to the liberation struggle and carry with their values and learn from them.
- ❖ Civil society and NGOs need to support the peace building efforts of women.

- ❖ Women need to be brave and take the risks.
- ❖ Women need to move from victims to victor through cooperation, solidarity and promoting each other.
- ❖ The world, and specifically Africa has to wake up to the capacity of women and what they can contribute in every aspect of society and not just simply be ring-fenced as home-makers and care-givers in the house.
- ❖ There is a need to bring more women into the arenas where decisions are being made around their lives, around their children's lives and around the next generation's lives
- ❖ Women, NGOs and activists need to take their governments to task to ensure that they pay full attention to the plight of women.
- ❖ The hype about Africa Rising can never become a reality without full participation of women;
  - Africa cannot be the next best thing when the women of Africa still have to run around carrying possessions, running away from gun-toting men.
  - There needs to be an end to the horrific systems of violence against women across the African continent.
  - Africa cannot claim any authentic, genuine emancipation for as long as African women across many generations have a dominant narrative of violence.

There is need for more education for the empowerment of women and girls.

It remains Africans' responsibility to understand what kind of leaders they want.

- ❖ It remains Africans' responsibility not to allow the people to come and exploit the continent's resources.
- ❖ Women and men need to be re-learn to value women's capacity and strength.
- ❖ Africa needs to change the institutions that educate women and men in a manner which disempowers and devalues women in societies.

SALO was advised to host a dialogue for women to share experiences and strategise on what their vision for Africa is. Women also need strategies that complement the legal approach, around protecting women's rights in an extra-legal context.

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The Southern African Liaison Office (SALO) is a South African-based not-for-profit civil society organisation which, through advocacy, dialogue, policy consensus and in-depth research and analysis, influences the current thinking and debates on foreign policy especially regarding African crises and conflicts. SALO believes that sustainable conflict resolution requires dialogue among a wide range of stakeholders in order to shift the positions and therefore the actions of key decision-makers



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