

WOMEN ON THE MOVE: ENGENDERING PEACE BUILDING IN UGANDA



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Isis - Women's International
Cross-Cultural Exchange
December 2005

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ENGENDERING
PEACE
BUILDING IN UGANDA**

Funded by Heinrich Boll Foundation

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Acknowledgement

Isis-WICCE is grateful to Ms Greta Jonikaite who tirelessly worked with the Isis-WICCE team during the evaluation of the grassroots women peace initiatives in Uganda. We applaud her commitment in putting together all the views of the peace activists and the excellent desk review that made the compilation of this booklet possible.



Greta, from Lithuania, is a Masters Student from the University of Florida, USA. She was an intern at Isis-WICCE from July - September 2005.

We also thank all the women peace activists for having shared their stories.

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INTRODUCTION

Building sustainable peace is a daunting and difficult task. In the forty years since Uganda gained independence from British rule, it has been gripped by civil strife and violent uprisings. Uganda has witnessed eight military coups as well as several rebel insurgencies in the North, Northeast, Central and Western regions. These conflicts have resulted in countless deaths, abductions, massive displacements of people, as well as widespread human rights violations, the destruction of social, economic, and political infrastructure, deeper entrenchment of poverty, disease, illiteracy and violence at all levels of society, not to mention the devastating effects on social, psychological, and other health aspects of the population.

While society as a whole suffers the adverse effects of armed conflict, women are among the most vulnerable due to gender inequalities that are pervasive in patriarchal societies. Yet, the cost of conflict to women remains largely undocumented and unrecognized, and the underlying factors are rarely acknowledged or understood by policy makers. Moreover, due to the failure to address these issues by policies and programmes in conflict and post-conflict situations, women remain invisible in emergency interventions, reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts, and hence, in peace building processes. Consequently, the cessation of hostilities and the signing of peace treaties rarely ends women's suffering.

'For women, the end of war rarely brings peace, and can in fact bring new levels of violence into their lives'¹

Although many times men have come together to negotiate the terms of peace and ceasefire agreements, sustainable peace has not been truly found. Such formal agreements largely failed to address the root causes of conflict or consider the economic, social, and political transformations that have occurred during conflict. Nor do they address the needs of the people in order to bring about the necessary changes in society so that peace could endure.

The purpose of this booklet is to bring attention to the need to engender the peace agenda and processes in Uganda by promoting women's participation in the struggles of conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peace building and by recognizing their unique approach to peace building. This booklet will illustrate how the inclusion of women can not

only advance their rights, but also promote the culture of sustainable peace. It will also demonstrate that women's participation in peace processes can provide valuable insights and approaches thereby enhancing the prospects for social justice, development, and peace for all in Uganda. Finally, it will advocate for the empowerment of women as well as other gender sensitive measures that are integral to women's equal participation and the engendering of the peace processes.

ARMED CONFLICT: A HIGHLY GENDERED PHENOMENON

Men and women die different deaths and are tortured and abused in different ways, both because of physical differences between the sexes and because of the different meanings culturally ascribed to the male and female body.²



Women survivors of conflict from Gulu District share massages of reconciliation and peace through songs

War has significant gendered impacts on women. Violence against women and girls during armed conflicts has reached unfathomable levels of brutality and cruelty as maiming, rape, forced impregnation, and mutilations have become a part of war tactics.³

While the extent and incidence of gender based violence, both in times of peace and war, is compounded by poverty and other social, cultural, and economic factors, its underlying cause is pervasive and intransigent gender inequality. Although, the existing power structures within a patriarchal society such as Uganda's perpetuate violence against women even in times of peace, conflict tends to intensify its brutality and increase society's tolerance for violence. Consequently, rape and other forms of sexual violence are often considered a 'natural' side effect of war.

The brutality of gender based violence exacts a severe toll on the physical and mental health of women and girls. Moreover, their traumatic experiences and health problems are compounded by the stigma, hostility, and rejection that these women face from their families and communities. The label of 'rape victim' is equivalent to being branded as 'dishonored', which not only negatively affects the survivor's status within community but also her economic well-being. An Isis-WICCE research report notes that social stigma and fear of HIV/AIDS have considerably increased the number of marriage break-ups in Uganda because many rape victims are being rejected by their husbands.⁴ By affecting women's marital status or their eligibility to marry rape has significant economic

impact on women because majority of the disadvantaged survivors access to resources is dependent on their relationship with their male relatives and spouses.

In addition to severe health, social, and economic consequences for women, gender based violence has many negative effects on wider society. It disrupts the social fabric and humiliates, demoralizes, and destroys not only the victim, but also her family and community. Moreover, violence against women presents a significant obstacle to social and economic development due to its extremely high direct and indirect monetary and non-monetary socio-economic costs. Gender based violence (or its threat) impedes women's full potential to participate in the economy and society by draining women's energy, destroying their confidence, and detrimentally affecting their health or by restricting women's mobility and which in most cases deters them to take part in social, economic, and political activities.

While the above discussion briefly covers the atrocities and suffering that Ugandan women encounter in situations of armed conflict, it is not intended to reduce their experiences to mere victimization. Research has shown that women assume various roles in contemporary conflict such as combatants, spies, resource-mobilizers as well as peace makers. This diversity of women's experiences in conflict and post-conflict situations challenges the conventional image of women as passive and helpless victims of war. In addition to becoming combatants, women challenge traditional gender stereotypes by taking over traditional male occupations and responsibilities.⁵

Despite the absence of men, the loss of livestock and land, disruption of economic opportunities, destruction of community and kin support systems, women continue to provide and care for their families and sustain life in the communities during times of armed conflict. Unfortunately, women's efforts and contributions have not been recognized and, in most cases, are taken for granted by society. Similarly, women's capacity to mobilize the community and their unique role in non-violent conflict resolution and peace building activities have largely remained invisible in mainstream policies of Uganda.

Overall, the differences in women's roles and experiences point to the fact that women are not a uniform and homogenous group. This fact needs to be considered when designing emergency interventions, post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes as well as



Women survivors of conflict across Uganda joined women war survivors in Gulu District to participate in the peace week a recognition that the Northern Uganda war is a national concern.

peace-building processes. Viewing women either as helpless victims or a resourceful and stoic group struggling to take care of their families not only simplifies the significant differences between women, but also results in ill-equipped programmes and policies that are based on these distorted generalizations and therefore fail to address the actual needs of women.⁶

In post-conflict patriarchal societies such as Uganda there is a tendency to re-assert the pre-war patriarchal status quo, which undermines women's rights and their achievements and pushes them back to disadvantaged positions and confinement of women's traditional gender roles. A good example is when most of the female combatants who participated in the Luwero struggle were not given the option of integrating into the established military force but were told to go back to their villages to continue with their traditional "gender roles" with no long term support to help them integrate in the "new society".⁷ Thus, in addition to recognizing the variety of women's roles and experiences, a gender responsive policy for conflict resolution and peace building must consider the underlying gendered power relations and the dynamics of social change in order to avoid poorly conceived programmes and activities.

'MALE-STREAM' APPROACHES TO PEACE

*It is evident that men's efforts have not been sufficient, that belief in the efficacy of violence is misplaced and that women's participation provides breadth and makes a qualitative difference in the nature and the effectiveness of policies related to peace and security. Peace is a complex, multifaceted set of circumstances that provides human security. Authentic security and comprehensive peace require that the security of people takes priority over the security of states... Arms are not only inadequate to the provision of authentic human security, but, in fact, present the most serious threat to its achievement.*⁸

Considering the number of armed conflicts and the damage they have wrought in Uganda, it is imperative to revisit a number of basic assumptions about conflict resolution and peace building because the conventional male dominated solutions have proved costly to Uganda.

Uganda's experience demonstrates that military approaches to peace building do not work. Allowing the male leaders of the fighting parties who are primarily responsible for the conflict to negotiate the terms of peace is inappropriate. 'The justification often given is that the peace table must bring together those who have taken up arms, because it is up to them to stop the conflict. While this argument may hold true for negotiations to secure an end to hostilities, it cannot be sustained for the discussions that build the framework for a new society'.⁹ This was confirmed by a cross section of peace activists in Uganda

When we talk of ways of bringing about peace and we really compare the way men would like it to be handled, in most cases you find that men tend to use force as a way of bringing an end to the conflict. They believe in fighting, they believe in using a gun, they believe in using actions, using rude words. For instance with the current Karamajong attacks, whereas women are initiating non-violent means of bringing peace in the region, other than using a gun - like having dialogue meetings and so forth, we find in most cases it's men who oppose this approach. They say: '... I think it is high time we pick up guns and we go and fight'... Men look at one way of getting peace as the use of violence, the use of force and a gun. Whereas women are looking at it in a different way. In most cases women feel that things should be handled peacefully, people should sit together and, discuss their differences, find the root causes of the conflict, and find possible solutions towards achieving the peace... A gun has been used and it has failed.

Already we have lost so many people... **Jane Apino Ekume, Programme Officer – Teso Women Peace Activists (TEWPA)**

Women always like a dialogue, but men! Our men here say: 'We cannot talk to Karamojong'. They like to use a gun, that is the problem with men. They say... 'No, no, no, we cannot talk peace while people are fighting'.

Christine Amaso, Founding Member – TEWPA

In Katakwi – in the Karamoja conflict there have been a number of treaties signed. There have been a number of accords signed by men and little has been done! Simply because the communities, the women, are not involved! **Cecilia Engole Alupo, Coordinator – TEWPA**

Formal ceasefire agreements do not put an end to the culture of violence in society as they simply signal a change from war to peace at a political level. As armed conflict has a profound impact on all parts of society, a political settlement cannot address the social problems caused by war.¹⁰ Beyond silencing guns, the process of social reconstruction and peace building must therefore consider economic, social, and political transformation processes that have occurred during conflict, it must consider and address the root causes of conflict and address the needs of people. The goal is not merely the absence of war, but to develop a culture of sustainable peace by fostering fundamental social and cultural changes and emphasizing a people-driven approach to stability, with equal contributions from women and men.

What we have been seeing in the mainstream is men coming around, and putting their rules and regulations of what they want to happen, at the same time giving conditions for their putting guns down. For us women, we feel that this is probably why we are not having peace because these guys just seem to be too busy trying to share the power and the control of this country. Whereas, when you look at what the Ugandan women have done... women go beyond that. Women want to see the social transformation of the affected communities and how to sustain this peace... They want to see that they have healed the pains that the survivors have gone through... So you find that women are bringing in different dynamics for total healing by negotiating with both groups. The one that has been hurt, and the one who has hurt. So that both people heal, both people are able to understand the wrong that has happened and work together towards reconciliation.

Women's initiatives have yielded quite a lot of good results that should show the policy makers that there is a need to merge the two... The negotiation

mainstream... and the grassroots initiatives, this actually helps in the democratic processes. These two chains must work hand in hand. And that's why women must be part and parcel of the [peace] process ... we need to take women's strategies to that table of power for them [policy makers] to start understanding that there will be no peace in Uganda, in Africa, not even in the whole world, unless those who are at the table start recognizing that peace means the holistic approach of bringing harmony to the affected communities.

Ruth Ojiambo Ochieng,
Director (Isis-WICCE)

In contemporary conflicts where civilians are deliberately targeted by warring parties and violence reaches into everyone's home, peace cannot be enforced from above. Just as warfare has become 'inclusive' - so too must the approaches toward ending the conflict¹¹. Because sustainable peace is dependent on people's involvement and ownership of the peace processes, the task of peace-building must be shared by all members of society. Peace negotiated at the political level therefore 'must be rooted and accepted by the people who have to live it in the future'⁹.

The exclusion of women from peace processes denies over half of the population equal access to formal negotiations and peace building initiatives. This undermines the legitimacy of the process by making it inequitable and unresponsive to the needs of all Ugandans. Moreover, it excludes women from playing a meaningful role in the post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction, and other transformational processes thereby denying people the benefit of having women's input and perspectives. Such marginalization means that women's practical and strategic needs remain unaddressed through post-conflict policies and programmes and their experiences and capacities are overtly ignored and underutilized in peace building. Consequently, although peace building processes present an opportunity to rec-



Women peace activists from Kasese, Lira, Kampala and Gulu districts in Uganda sharing peace messages on Radio Freedom (in Gulu) to reachout to the rebels, to resolve conflict through peaceful means

tify existing gender inequalities and to protect any advancements women may have achieved during armed conflict, peace agreements rarely consider such issues. The exclusion of women from official peace processes therefore obstructs the long-term sustainability of a peace agreement because vital voices of a majority of the population are not heard.

Overall, the lack of dialogue between different levels of peace building efforts (government, civil society, women and the grassroots) combined with 'male-stream' thinking about war and peace, which regards women as victims or ignores them altogether, are the main reasons why peace remains elusive today for many people in Uganda.

A PLACE AT THE TABLE: WHAT WOMEN CAN CONTRIBUTE

Women have sacrificed their lives for peace. They have challenged militarism and urged reconciliation over retribution... They have contributed to peacebuilding as activists, as community leaders, as survivors of the most cataclysmic horrors of war. They have transformed peace processes on every continent by organizing across political, religious and ethnic affiliations. But their efforts are rarely supported or rewarded.¹²



Activists and Policy Makers coming together to build the capacity of women in negotiation skills

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (Par. 142a) emphasizes the need to 'promote equal opportunities for women to participate in all forums and peace activities at all levels, particularly at the decision-making levels' and the need to 'strengthen the role of women and to ensure representation of

women at all decision-making levels in national and international institutions which may make or influence policy with regard to matters related to peace-keeping, preventative diplomacy, and related activities in all stages of peace mediation and negotiation'. Despite this international recognition, official peace processes in Uganda remain an almost exclusively male domain, and little has been done to encourage women's equal participation. This glaring lack of Ugandan women in main stream peace building must be urgently addressed based not only on the fundamental principle of the equality between men and women, but also on the dire need for the new perspectives and unique experiences that women can bring.

Despite the notable absence of women in formal peace processes and mechanisms, Ugandan women have been actively involved in informal peace building initiatives and have used methods that have created an enabling environment for some level of sustainable peace at the grassroots. They have been active in mobilizing communities, creating

opportunities for dialogue and non-violent means of conflict resolution, as well as mending the ripped fabric of society. Ugandan women have utilized their traditional mediating roles and communication techniques to promote peace in their communities as shared by women policy makers and peace activists below.

In my language women are called oku. Oku means to bring together... So, traditionally we know that women are peace makers. And for us culturally, women are peace makers... Its not because we have no options... We are mothers, we are nurses, we are everything. You see it in the family - even when a woman gets beaten, she will still wake up and give food to her husband, she will still nurse him... It is not because we have no options . . . We have hearts that forgive and don't carry grudges. That is the beauty of a woman's heart. **Hon. Zoe Bakoko Bakoru, Minister of Gender, Labour & Social Development**

Women look at issues carefully and take things slowly. We know how to talk to our people. We talk to people the way we talk to our children. Yes, we know how to cool tempers down... And people understand us very well. **Veronica Obot, Peace Activist, Gulu District**

There are numerous individual women as well as women's groups working throughout Uganda to build and promote sustainable peace in their communities. Below are three examples chosen to highlight the diverse strategies and approaches women have utilized in their peace building work in Uganda.

Lira Women's Peace Initiative (**LIWEPI**) in Lira District, Northern Uganda, uses a variety of strategies to help people, in particular women, look at peace as the basis for sustainable development. The organization emphasizes the need to build and enhance the culture of respect for women's rights as a foundation for sustainable peace. Through advocacy and awareness raising campaigns LIWEPI aims to bring attention to the violations of human rights of women and girls in the area. The organization also aims to increase awareness of women's reproductive rights issues and the HIV/AIDS problem. In addition, LIWEPI is also devoted to responding to the needs and problems of women and children affected by war. It therefore provides psychosocial support to women and girls who have experienced sexual abuse or rape, or have been affected by war in other ways. LIWEPI activities also include socio-economic empowerment programme and educational support programme for women and girls.

Another women's group actively involved in peace building is **Teso Women Peace Activists (TEWPA) in Eastern Uganda**. TEWPA aims to promote sustainable peace in the region by building the capacity of rural women to participate in conflict resolution processes and by fostering a dialogue between the Teso people and their neighbours the Karamojong, who for decades have used cattle raiding as a means of livelihood. The organization is dedicated to empowering women and encouraging their active participation in the social, political, and economic development activities in Teso region. TEWPA has recruited women peace animators as well as women's peace committees throughout the region and has trained them on peace building and conflict resolution, human rights issues, and leadership. This has enabled peace animators and peace committees to effectively resolve conflicts among families and within villages, has raised awareness, and promoted peace at the grassroots level. TEWPA activities also include research and documentation of women's human rights violations in the region. TEWPA recognises the power of information in peace building processes. The organization uses various lobbying and advocacy strategies as well as its networking connections with policy makers (at local level) and other civil society organizations to create awareness of women's rights in society. TEWPA sensitizes communities on issues such as domestic violence and early girl child marriages using TEWPA's information unit, radio programmes, dance and drama performances and educational posters.



Women have used creative indigenous knowledge to communicate peace messages and provide space for interaction

The final example is **Luwero Women Development Association (LUWODA)** in Luwero District, in the central part of Uganda. Likewise, LUWODA promotes peace in the communities using a number of different strategies. The organization focuses on packaging information about peace and conflict resolution in dance and drama performances and presents them to communities. This allows LUWODA to educate people on the importance of peace and related issues as well as how to attain sustainable peace for development in the area. This enables the community to have a collective platform where all can contribute ideas for a peaceful environment. In addition, the organization holds seminars and workshops, which emphasize conflict resolution and peace building, at parish, sub-county, and district levels. One of the main messages LUWODA brings to the communities is that peace must begin in the home, from there it spreads to the neighborhood, the village, and finally to the whole country. Another activity that the organization uses to promote peace is focused group discussions for women. LUWODA mobilizes groups of women to discuss specific topics concerning peace, which allows women to share their ideas and find solutions to problems related to conflict in their localities. The organization also emphasizes the importance of food security as a prerequisite for peace in the home and the community, and therefore encourages a number of income generating projects for women. Lastly, the group provides women with access to information from other regions through the information unit. This empowers women with knowledge about peace building and other important issues.



Peace activists have facilitated numerous village meetings to impart information on conflict resolution strategies.

A male leader confirms the effectiveness of women's approach to peace building.

Women, being mothers, they are actually best heard if you compare to men. The message they send across to the rebels in the bushes carry more weight than if I speak to the rebels myself. I would say that ...women, being mothers, they know how to talk. For example, there is the chief mediator Ms Betty Bigombe who is now trying to connect government and the LRA leadership. She is the daughter of the soil, she is an Acholi, and her peace process with the rebels is really paying. There are several brigadiers, colonels who came out [of the bush] simply because of her initiative. And now that we have some enlightened women, I hope that things continue to improve. More women should be involved in the peace process than men... even if we are now going to the political transition, women are looking closer at bringing peace to this part of Uganda more than men are doing. And the inclusion of women at any level, the local level, the national level, even at the international level, will pay a great deal in the peace process.

***Ojok Kerobino, Vice Chairman
Local Council V, Gulu District***

While women's reliance on their gender based roles offers them an opportunity to participate in peace processes, it considerably limits their potential as peace makers beyond their communities. To be truly effective, women need to participate in all aspects and all levels of planning, implementation, maintenance, monitoring, and evaluation of conflict resolution and peace building processes.¹³ Women in conflict zones in Uganda have thus been mobilizing and asserting their right to fully participate in a process that has important consequences on all aspects of their lives. For them, peace table is an opportunity not only to negotiate the formal end of war, but also to lay the foundations for a new society based on the principles of social justice, human rights, and equality.⁹

The issues of violence, war, and peace are at the center of many of the problems Ugandan women face in their everyday lives. Consequently, women perceive more clearly the continuum of conflict and violence that extends from violence at home to systematic rape during conflict and 'witness vivid links between violence, poverty, and inequality in their daily lives'. **While women bear the brunt of war, they rarely receive any compensation because the rewards negotiated at the peace table benefit men.** Women, however, have to live with the consequences of the realities negotiated in gender blind peace agreements.

Often there are significant qualitative differences in women's and men's understanding of the rationale behind formal peace negotiations. Hence, they come to the peace table with different motivations, aims, and objectives. Male dominated agendas tend to emphasize issues of power and political positions as priorities. In contrast, women look at it not as an opportunity for personal political advancement, but as a chance to heal the wounds of the affected society for the betterment of all. Women focus on issues that make a difference to human lives and realities, not to their own careers. ⁹



Women policy makers in Uganda have been part and parcel of advocating for peaceful resolution to the conflict

Three grass root women peace activists in Uganda confirm this analysis.

...the way men resolve conflicts is looking at whose power is greater... They don't look at that possibility of saying: 'Let me listen to him, let him listen to me and analyse Why we disagreed?'...They don't look at it this way. They say: 'I am powerful. I am more powerful than that one.' **Rita Popo, Peace Activist, Arua District, North Western Uganda**

Men ... the first thing they look at is the financial part of it. When they are going for peace, they want to have a lot of money, they don't want to sacrifice themselves... While for a woman - she will sacrifice her time, and, you know... everything; she can volunteer to do it freely... if she

wants peace she will just go full swing to talk about peace, without even thinking: *'I still need this, I still need salary, I still need a vehicle'*... Even if it means walking - because of peace, a woman will walk. **Betty Acan Tino, Peace Activist, Gulu District, Northern Uganda**

Men want materialistic gains: *'When I have more and more, I am in power... they say. But a woman in her own way believes that 'What I need is really peace - peace of mind'... for me and others...* **Cecilia Engole Alupo, Coordinator – TEWPA Eastern Uganda**

Women bring very different perspectives to peace negotiations because they tend to articulate peace in terms of meeting human safety needs and other aspects of well-being. Their vision of peace entails not only the absence of war, but also the absence of explicit and implicit violence and oppressive structures at a personal, structural, and cultural level, as well as a just social system and economic, social, cultural, spiritual, and emotional well-being for all. ¹⁴ UNESCO's research on women's approach to peace in Tanzania was echoed by many women peace activists in Uganda as highlighted.

Peace is not just... an absence of war. Because wars may not be there but you can still live un-peacefully. For example, you can be affected psychologically or mentally. You may also not have enough food within your house hold and that is already a conflict and you are not at peace, or you are not able to access all the services that one should have e.g shelter, food, education for the children, freedom to express your views... Then, automatically you cannot say that you are living in a peaceful environment. There is quite a lot that peace entails. It also covers things like love, care for others, having passion for others, and tolerance.

Jane Apino Ekume, Programme Coordinator – TEWPA, Eastern Uganda

Peace does not only mean the absence of war, but it incorporated a lot of things. For example, there is need for harmony, working together and collaboration between different people. That shows that there is peace. There is also having enough food. You can't claim to be in peace when you don't have enough food for your family. There is also having enough wealth. In order to say there is peace in your area at least you should... be having enough wealth to sustain you and your community. There is also having a good working relationship, first within your home, as husband and wife, with your children, then that spreads to your neighbourhood. You should have a good working relationship with your neighbours. Then, from the neighbours you come to the village around you. All that incorporates peace. And all in all, there should be love for one and another.

Margaret Nassozi Kakembo, Coordinator – LUWODA, central Uganda

Men don't really understand what peace means because for them they are not the ones who suffer during conflict. But the women understand it so well because of the consequences of conflict that come to them. **Annette Kyambadde, Peace Activist, Luwero District, Central Uganda**

Defining peace in terms of human well-being leads women to promote viable solutions to peace building. While the official political processes tend to get stalled in issues of power and historical grievances, women, although acknowledging the importance of political issues, feel that the quality of life is a more crucial matter. They highlight the human consequences of violence and armed conflict. Women emphasize the importance of understanding and addressing the root causes of conflict as a way to promote sustainable peace. They add value to peace negotiations by bringing in practical understanding of the problems faced by civilian populations as well as tangible and effective solutions and approaches for addressing them. Therefore, by ensuring that peace accords signed during negotiations correspond to the daily realities and needs on the ground, women advance prospects for sustainable peace.⁹

Women's direct participation in formal peace processes may be the only way to ensure that women's demands and their unique gendered



A peace activist in Lira District reaching out to the IDP camps to share the little she has, as well as counselling the depressed

realities are addressed in peace agreements. Since peace processes set guidelines for new political, economic, and social institutions in the post-conflict period, women's participation can make critical contributions toward the empowerment of women and the advancement of their rights. Within the context of defining the reconstruction agenda, women can effectively articulate measures to rectify existing political, economic, social, and cultural gender disparities. Women's partaking and contributions at the peace table can offer them an opportunity to secure gains on a variety of issues related to gender equity and equality and open up opportunities for women's participation in political institutions and decision-making processes. Thus women at the peace table can make a difference by opening the door to greater social justice.⁹ Although many of the women's demands and propositions specifically target women, their implementation would ultimately benefit the social and economic development of the nation and society as a whole.

This feeling was also shared by women activists;

When I look at the level of sufferings women go through in crisis, in violence, in armed conflict, then I just feel the need to play a key role to stop wars and violence from happening - like in our case now in northern Uganda. During all this period, most of the work to help keep the families, to look for food, to provide for children, to pay for them in school, is resting on women. And when we have conflict, it makes that work very difficult. So we just feel that if there is peace, it would enable us do our work much better. Also, for us women because we nurture life, we are mothers, and we have relatives across the borders, we feel that a man who is called a rebel could be our husband, a son, an uncle, a relative... So... we really feel that if there was a way at getting that person and reforming the person, that is much better than thinking that someone will have to go and kill them. Because what do we get if they are killed? We don't really think that people like that should be killed. We believe they can still be useful to the society. We believe they can be reformed. Because we still believe they are part and parcel of us. If I have not given birth to that person, another woman would have given birth to that person. So we really feel touched, because we are mothers and that is what really keeps us on our feet to work night and day at different levels to bring security to our communities.

***Rosalba Oywa, Founder - People's Voice for Peace,
Gulu, Northern Uganda***

I think it is very important that women should participate in the peace processes. War affects them and, in fact, affects them very badly, to the point that many of them are forced to become heads of households, they are the care givers, they are the people who hold the community together . . . therefore, they are the ones who actually care enough when they are at the peace negotiation table - they are the ones who care enough to look at the root causes of the conflict . . . to look at the fact that there are social issues to deal with, there are economic issues to deal with, there is infrastructure to rebuild. Many times the men are looking at power sharing, rather than how they can rebuild the community to ensure such things don't happen again.

Jessica Babihuga Nkuuhe, Associate Director – Isis-WICCE

Women's perspectives and experiences related to social injustice and gender inequality can make peace negotiations more productive and more sustainable because their approach to peace tends to emphasize participation, inclusiveness, and consensus building. Women emphasize participatory approach and constructive dialogue as a means to identify, agree upon, and prioritize the important issues as well as a way to ensure the transparency of the processes, and link together different levels and participants of the peace processes.⁹ In addition, women's ability to listen to all sides as well as the use of a specific unifying identity, such as their role as mothers, to bridge divides between conflicting groups contribute to a conducive environment for dialogue. Since women have their fingers on the pulse of the community, 'they can predict the acceptance of peace initiatives, as well as broker agreements in their own neighborhoods.'¹⁶



Women peace activists have continued to share knowledge with survivors of war.

Overall, the participation of women in peace making and peace building ensures that their needs and experiences as well as innovative solutions and effective approaches contribute towards sustainable peace in Uganda. Moreover, it provides an opportunity to address the fundamental causes of women's oppression, such as gender inequality, which in turn contributes to broader goals of peace and development. Women's participation changes the tone of peace negotiations because their perspectives remind the parties that safety and well-being for all is the true goal. Thus, 'with a clear international mandate and a wealth of knowledge derived from their practical experiences in building peace within communities, women have a strong justification for claiming equal participation at the peace table'.⁹

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER EQUALITY AS A PATH TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The UN Security Council calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements; (c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;

- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Par. 8)

As discussed in the previous section, the inclusion of women at all levels and stages of peace processes is a crucial step towards effective conflict prevention, non-violent conflict resolution, and sustainable peace. Thus, a gender sensitive policy is necessary to encourage women's equal and full participation in decision-making structures and all levels of social, economic, and political processes. Moreover, to engender peace processes Uganda must match its international commitments regarding 'women's equal participation in peace mechanisms with a concrete action plan and the necessary budgetary allocations' as well as 'institutional framework that gives women's peace initiatives clear mandates and responsibilities and that ensures that all actors in the peace process are committed and accountable to women's participation'.¹⁶

Despite Uganda's gender sensitive constitution, a wide gap remains between de jure and de facto gender equality in current decision-making structures. Due to prevailing negative attitudes towards women's political participation, their engagement in politics is still considered as an intrusion into 'a preserve that was previously almost exclusively male'.¹⁸ Consequently, women in ministries and parliamentary committees have been mostly relegated to areas traditionally considered as 'female domain' – social issues, labour, health, or being vice to men when it comes to key ministries such as defence etc. However, to effectively contribute to peace building, women also need to be actively involved in areas which are considered 'male domains' such as foreign affairs, defence, and security.

Although the affirmative policy has increased the number of women legislators in Uganda, quotas alone cannot guarantee the emergence of gender sensitive perspectives in political realm. Quantitative measures must be viewed as a temporary measure to reduce the existing gender imbalance and to support women's participation in decision-making. In the long term however, quotas cannot replace qualitative measures and strategies that address the patriarchal structures in political processes and the socio-economic and cultural constraints that deter women's participation in politics. This analysis was very well discussed by one of the Uganda feminists in her book, "when hens begin to crow".¹⁷

The greatest challenge currently facing women legislators and Uganda's feminists is how to change gender equality from a constitutional mandate to a social and cultural reality. ***Dr. Sylvia Tamale, Dean of the Faculty of Law, Makerere University, Kampala***



Solidarity and Co-existence is the way

So far, women's peace activism has been largely confined to grassroots, which has limited their full potential as peacemakers. To effectively advocate for their needs and concerns, demand equal participation, and assume leadership positions women need to be empowered with relevant information, knowledge, and skills. This would also ensure that women do not merely 'participate', but have a direct influence on peace processes and promote a meaningful change in their environments towards greater social justice, peace, and equality.

Empowerment of women is particularly important in peace promotion because sustainable peace, justice, and freedom from violence cannot be achieved as long as individual persons or groups, in particular women, are excluded or marginalized. Thus, all governmental and non-governmental actors and society at large have a responsibility to make concrete steps towards gender equality and translate the constitutional gender equality into reality by implementing measures that promote the advancement of women and their rights.

*'For women's empowerment to succeed, men need to understand that such processes will not disadvantage them and that the idea is not to invert the balance of power, but to abolish domination, oppression, exploitation, discrimination and injustice. When women acquire skills or learning, or become politically engaged, this can benefit the whole society, including men.'*¹⁹

Overall, a culture of sustainable peace requires that fundamental human rights as well as women's rights at legal, political, social, and economic levels are recognized and upheld. This includes honoring and implementing the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights instruments as well as signing and ratifying the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (OP-CEDAW). It is important for Uganda to ratify the Optional Protocol to the African Charter on Human Rights and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa if women's rights are to be upheld. A culture of sustainable peace requires that economic, social, cultural, and political violence should be eradicated from all institutions and all spheres of life. Ugandan government and society must therefore recognize that violations of women's rights in times of war are an extension of the gender based abuses they encounter in peace time. This cycle of violence cannot be eliminated until the division between the 'public' and 'private' spheres is challenged and peacetime violence, especially the abuses in the 'private sphere', is addressed.

Another prerequisite for sustainable peace is fundamental social transformation, which reforms the socialization processes and changes the societal structures that uphold and reinforce patriarchal ideology and gender inequality. Therefore, it is important to use a gender sensitive lens to thoroughly examine and redefine existing social institutions, from the family to the state apparatus, because they all perpetuate gender discrimination. This, in addition to being a violation of women's human rights, is the most formidable barrier to women's effective participation in the peace processes. Ultimately, women's equal participation, their perspectives, knowledge, and experiences are all crucial to the creation of a more just, prosperous, and peaceful Uganda.

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Isis - Women's International
Cross-Cultural Exchange

MISSION

Isis- WICCE exists to promote justice and empowerment of women through documenting violations of women's rights and facilitating the exchange of skills and information to strengthen women's capacities, potential and visibility.

VISION

Isis-WICCE envisions an informed society that values and ensures women's rights, in order to realise their capacities and potential.

CORE PURPOSE

Isis-WICCE promotes cross-cultural exchange of information and skills amongst women.

ISBN: 9970 - 574 - 14 - 8