

Women Transforming Conflicts in Africa: Descriptive Studies from Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Sudan

A Project Report compiled by Kemi Ogunsanya

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Disclaimer

This publication is located within ACCORD's Women in Conflict in Africa Project. The study is a modest contribution which seeks to provide an overview of some of the issues that influence women's contribution to peace in Africa. Country situational reports on Sudan, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi and South Africa formed the groundwork for the publication. The reports addressed key contributions made by women in conflict transformation, and the challenges this constituency experienced in their respective countries.

In November 2007, A Study Tour and Exchange Programme was hosted by ACCORD, bringing together women from these countries who were identified and selected through specific set criteria. The participants reviewed the country situational reports in order to enhance their accuracy and to reflect various perspectives on several of the issues influencing women's involvement in conflict transformation. External evaluators and experts from academia,

government and civil society further reviewed the publication. This publication is not a comprehensive assessment of the social, cultural, political and economic aspects of gender in conflict settings in each country. Any shortcomings of this publication cannot be considered a reflection of the perspectives of the participants in the project.

Abstract

There is evidence of successful efforts to constructively respond to conflict and to undertake transformation, reconstruction and reconciliation in Africa. The inclusion of women as a strategic constituency is central to sustaining and consolidating peace efforts. The involvement of women in post-conflict reconstruction is also critical to the transformation of conflict. The successes of women in conflict transformation efforts in Africa are varied and have not been mirrored in all conflict situations. For example, the gains made by South African women were more pronounced during both the conflict and the immediate post-conflict phase. Sierra Leonean women, on the other hand, were most effective during conflict. In Burundi, women noted gains during conflict and are currently strengthening networks to address the post-conflict challenges. Sudanese women continue to work across ethnic, political and religious lines towards the common goal of peace, while in Côte d'Ivoire women are not recognised in the transitional processes.

ACCORD's Women in Conflict Project seeks to strengthen the capacity of women organisations to address the challenges facing women as a result of conflict. The five focus countries were selected because of their geographic diversity, the different causes of conflict and varying levels of effectiveness of women organisations in each country. This publication is an attempt to present the challenges and key contributions of women in the resolution and transformation of conflict in the selected countries.

Country Profiles

Armed Rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire

Côte d'Ivoire gained independence from France in 1960 with the late Felix Houphoët-Boigny as the first President. The country was known to be a beacon of stability with relative peace for many years, but violent conflict emerged in the contest for power and control of resources, which led to war between the north and the south of the country.¹ Henri Konan Bédié succeeded President Boigny in 1993, but was overthrown in a coup d'état by General Robert Gueï in 1999. In a bid to become a civilian President, Robert Gueï contested elections and lost to President Laurent Gbagbo, despite fixing the rules to prevent the candidacy of Alassane Ouattara, the former Prime Minister, who hails from the north. In an attempted coup on 19 September 2002, Robert Gueï was killed and rebels led by Guillaume Soro, the Secretary General of the *Military Element of Forces Nouvelles* (New Forces), gained control of the northern half of the country.² Numerous peace efforts by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and France have failed to avert violent conflict and the Ivorian war has threatened West Africa's sub-regional stability. Before the outbreak of civil war, Côte d'Ivoire was the world's largest cocoa producer and one of the most prosperous nations in West Africa. Proceeds amounting to \$58 million have been used by the government of Laurent Gbagbo to support the war. Soro has also admitted to the use of cocoa revenues to fund the rebellion.³

Various agreements have failed to resolve the key issues in the conflict, namely xenophobia, citizenship, political legitimacy and disarmament. The Linas-Marcoussis Agreement, reached by the conflicting parties in January 2003, collapsed irretrievably when government forces attacked the rebel held north.⁴ In October 2005, the South Africa and Nigeria-led African Union (AU) mediated efforts recommended a 12-month transitional period with Laurent Gbagbo as Head of State. This was rolled over for another 12 months, during which an International Working Group was set up to monitor the transition. A renowned banker, Charles Konan Banny, was appointed interim Prime Minister by the international community under the auspices of Nigeria, South Africa and Niger, to oversee the transitional process and lead the country into

elections. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Banny was unable to make significant steps in this effort.

On 4 March 2007, a new agreement was signed between President Gbagbo and Guillaume Soro under the mediation of Burkinabé President Blaise Compaoré in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. The Ouagadougou peace agreement offered Soro the position of Prime Minister in the new transitional government. The agreement also set the framework for the demobilisation of armed groups, the integration of a command force, the commencement of a national identification process for all Ivorians in the north and south of the country, and the organising of free and fair elections. However, the agreement did not resolve the key issues that contributed to the breakdown of previous accords, which include the identification and voter registration process, as well as an election timetable acceptable to all conflicting parties.⁵ The long awaited polls may be held in 2008, yet progress has been slow towards the identification and registration of voters, and the United Nations (UN) has urged politicians to accelerate the implementation of the peace plan.

During the 'Flames of Peace Ceremony' in July 2007, when weapons of the rebels in the north were handed over and destroyed, positive euphoria was heightened as President Gbagbo declared that the war in Bouake was over. This significantly sealed the reunification of the country after five years of civil war, and officially launched the disarmament process.⁶

Attaining Peace in Sudan

Sudan's modern history can be dated from 1820-21 when an Egyptian-Ottoman force conquered and unified the northern part of the country. In 1881, Muhammad Ahmad ibn Abdalla, a Muslim religious leader, proclaimed himself a *Mahdi* (the guided one), led a successful revolt against the Ottoman-Egyptian rule and established the Mahdi state. After his death in 1885, the Mahdi state was defeated by an Anglo-Egyptian force in 1898, and the following year, Sudan was declared a Condominium under British-Egyptian administration. Through the administration of indirect rule, the Condominium developed the economy and infrastructure in the north with heavier focus on riverine states, and neglected the south and west. In 1946 this policy was reversed by the colonial authority,

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which commenced with attempts at integrating the north and south under one government. While southern Sudan was administered from Juba, the north was administered from Khartoum, and the official language was Arabic. The southerners were largely excluded from political positions in the new government. Also, the political structure in the south was not as organised as in the north, and political groupings/parties were not well represented at the various conferences and talks to establish an independent Sudan. In 1955, soldiers from the south serving in the Sudan Armed Forces at Torit barracks in the Equatoria State resisted transfers to barracks in the north, sparking a mutiny which spread throughout parts of the south. On attainment of independence on 1 January 1956, the northern dominated government reneged on the pledge to southerners to set up a federal system, and combined with the revolt of 1995, this led to the beginnings of a civil war that lasted 17 years from August 1955 to February 1972. In 1972, a peace agreement signed at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, brought the civil war to an end after it allowed for semi-autonomy for the south.

The second civil war began in 1983 after the government of President Jaafar al-Nimeiry abrogated the 1972 agreement. The second civil war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Nairobi, Kenya, on 9 January 2005. Highlights of the CPA include an autonomous government for the south for six years, to be followed by a referendum in the south to determine whether the South should continue as an autonomous state of a federal Sudan or the region should form an independent republic. Further, the agreement stipulated proportional sharing of income from oil resources, job opportunities to be split according to varying ratios, Islamic law to apply only to Muslims in the north while its application in the south would be determined by an elected assembly.

No sooner had the CPA been signed than a latent conflict in the western region of Darfur developed into a major conflict and humanitarian crisis. The Darfur conflict has resulted in an estimated 1.5 million IDPs, with many others seeking refuge in neighbouring Chad and Central Africa Republic.⁷ Though one of the rebel movements signed the AU-mediated Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in May 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria, conflict continues in the region. In the north-eastern region, another insurgency led by the Eastern Front was contained

by various peace agreements signed in Tripoli, Libya and Asmara, Eritrea respectively.

Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Burundi

Burundi is a small land-locked country in Central Africa, often referred to as ‘the heart of Africa’ due to its shape and central location within the continent. There have been outbreaks of conflict in Burundi since the country attained independence on 1 July 1962. More than half a million people died in the years 1965, 1972, 1988 and 1991, and more than 300 000 have died since 1993 following the assassination of the democratically elected President Melchior Ndadaye. After protracted negotiations, which began in 1996, the Government of Burundi and the various armed and unarmed opposition parties signed a peace agreement in Arusha, Tanzania, in August 2000. Later in 2003, the Transitional Government established by the 2000 Arusha Agreement signed a ceasefire agreement with the main armed opposition movement, *le Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie-Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) – after which this movement joined the transitional institutions. CNDD-FDD won the 2005 national elections with a clear majority and its leader Pierre Nkurunziza became the President of the country. The main challenges facing the new and fragile democracy in Burundi include the rebuilding of infrastructure, the economy, governance structures and fostering a climate of trust amongst the population. ⁸ In addition, the new government needs to consolidate national unity and reconciliation with other groups involved in the protracted conflict and pursue post-conflict reconstruction within the country.

Rebuilding Sierra Leone

The civil war between the Sierra Leone government and the Liberia-backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which began in 1991, disrupted the country for over a decade. In July 1999, the warring parties signed the Lomé Peace Agreement, and the UN Security Council established a UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in October 1999 to help implement the Lomé Agreement. But despite UNAMSIL’s presence, fighting continued. In May 2000, the crisis peaked as the RUF took 500 UN peacekeepers hostage,

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while the civil war in neighbouring Liberia also complicated the Sierra Leone conflict. In 2000, the UN officially accused President Charles Taylor of Liberia of being involved in RUF's illegal trade of diamonds, arms and timber, as well as supporting rebel forces in the killings, mutilations, sexual violence and recruitment of child soldiers in the Sierra Leone war. In May 2001, the Security Council imposed "smart" sanctions on Liberia, to curtail Taylor's supply of arms to the RUF.⁹

In January 2002, the war was officially declared over, leaving nearly five million IDPs, 50 000 deaths, and 100 000 mutilated, with over a quarter of women raped and sexually violated.¹⁰ The May 2002 elections, which were considered one of the most peaceful electoral processes since the country's independence in 1961, brought political stability to Sierra Leone. The country recently held national and run-off elections in which women increased their participation at all levels of decision-making.

Transforming Apartheid South Africa?

Until 1994, South Africa was ruled by a white minority government using the policy of apartheid, which disenfranchised and impoverished the black majority of the country. Further, the government's social engineering schemes, such as forced resettlement and creation of Bantustans, attracted massive resistance, which in turn attracted further repression. Democracy emerged in South Africa through a negotiated settlement between liberation movements and the apartheid government, and the new leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) pursued reconciliation. The legacies of apartheid include low skills capacity, poverty, unemployment, wide income disparity and high incidences of crime.

Status of Women in these Countries

Patriarchal Society

Patriarchy dominates in Africa, yet women are considered the ‘pillar’ of the family. Women are not recognized at decision-making levels, and most are relegated to domestic responsibilities. Women have been culturally subservient in their homes and dependent on their husbands. This leads to inequitable access to education, thereby inhibiting their full participation in peace processes.

Illiteracy and Poverty

Women account for more than 50 percent of illiteracy rates in developing countries.

In South Africa, studies indicate that illiteracy rates among women range between 27 percent in the metropolitan areas and 50 percent in the rural areas.

Similarly in Sierra Leone, 48 percent of women are illiterate,¹¹ while selected indicators on adult literacy in Sudan show that roughly 40 percent are illiterate – a majority of which are women and youth.¹² Prior to the outbreak of war in Côte d’Ivoire, educational opportunities for women had improved at all levels, and by 1987, about one-sixth of the students at the National University of Côte d’Ivoire were women; and the number of salaried working women had increased. As such, women accounted for one-fourth of the civil service and held positions previously dominated by their male colleagues. According to the Human Development Report 2006/2007 on Côte d’Ivoire, the female literacy rate stands at 34 percent.¹³

Illiteracy is glaring in Burundi, and 70 percent of Burundian women are illiterate. With the outbreak of the war, 65 percent of drop-outs in schools were girls. Similarly, women academics are greatly disadvantaged relative to their male counterparts. Apart from being in the minority in the education sector, women are disproportionately found in lower ranking positions and less secure posts in tertiary institutions. Between 2004 and 2005, Burundi women accounted for 25 percent of all full-time academics – with fewer opportunities to conduct research.¹⁴ Traditional stereotyping has disempowered Burundian women, and domestic violence is rife. Poor women make up 65 percent of the cases of

domestic violence reported, while 86 percent of female victims are orphans.¹⁵ Burundi is one of the least developed countries in the world with just 28 percent of its population having access to safe drinking water, and this affects a majority of the vulnerable population – mainly women and children.

National and Traditional Laws and Practices that Govern Women's Rights

Before the democratic dispensation in Burundi, national laws did not protect the interests of women. Although Burundi is a signatory to the *Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), there were no clear guidelines in the application of these laws under the Transitional Government of Burundi. Certain provisions of the Penal Code discriminated against women's rights, particularly on issues of rape, marital rape, domestic violence, and women in detention. Customary practices and prejudices against women became detrimental to their protection and advancement; women were considered as property to be owned while men have disciplinary rights over them. The promotion of women is now embraced in the new constitution of the country, which is an encouraging development.

Sudan has not ratified CEDAW, and discrimination against women varies greatly by region. Sudanese girls are exposed to the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) as a safeguard against promiscuity and AIDS. Although outlawed by the government in 2003, Sudan has the highest rate of FGM in the world. Major efforts by civil society organisations have reduced the prevalence of this practice from 99 percent to 69 percent in northern states, particularly the Pharaonic type of FGM.¹⁷

In an effort to sensitise Sierra Leonean women on their inalienable rights, civil society networks and women groups translated and printed CEDAW into recognised national and local languages, and further trained legal personnel on how to protect the rights of women.

The Impact of Conflict on Women

Gender Based Violence

Women are vulnerable and sexual violence is widespread in conflict situations. Armed groups carry out a host of abuses including killings, rape, sexual slavery, slave labour, abduction, assault, amputations, torture, trafficking, mutilation and disembowelment of pregnant women. Thousands of people were massacred in Burundi in 1993 and entire families separated. Public beheading, forced labour, amputation of limbs and other forms of humiliation were common in Sierra Leone. Over 60 percent of abducted children were girls who were subject to forced marriages, prostitution and consequently exposed to sexual related diseases and HIV/AIDS.¹⁸

Conflicts in Sudan have seen effects such as gang rape of young girls in Darfur.¹⁹ Such gang rapes traumatise victims and break down the social fabric of the community. A study by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) indicated that children born from rape in Darfur are often not accepted in the community.²⁰

The insurgency in Côte d'Ivoire caused widespread insecurity marked by several cases of rape and indecent assault. Girls as young as 12 were assaulted at gunpoint.²¹ In other incidences women were sexually violated in their homes in the presence of their husbands.²²

The Linas-Marcousis Agreement for Côte d'Ivoire raised expectations, which led to the establishment of a peacekeeping force to supervise the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process and planning for presidential elections scheduled for October 2005. The DDR process would have protected women from armed combatants and the violent crimes which continued unabated in heavily contested regions and along the frontlines following the collapse of the Linas-Marcousis Agreement.²³ The recent publication by Human Rights Watch (HRW) claims that the Ouagadougou peace agreement was silent on the sexual violence at the height of the war. Despite the symbolic ceremony of the burning of weapons at the end of July 2007 in Bouake, there are reports of harassment, extortion and sexual assault against

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women at roadblocks, carried out by security forces stationed at entry points in the northern part of the country.²⁴

A survey showed that more than 640 000 Ivorian's are infected with HIV, out of which 15 percent were pregnant women. The same survey revealed that over 80 percent of female sex workers were seropositive. The ratio between men and women infected with the virus has risen from four men to one woman in 1993, to recent rates of 1:1.²⁵ In the midst of the dire consequences of violent conflict in the country, women leaders at the community level decided to train other women to learn about HIV/AIDS, and to develop skills on how to negotiate for sex with their male counterparts. Different women's organisations championed cases of violence and sexual assault during the war. One such organisation is the Ivorian Association for the Defence of Women (AIDF).²⁶

Ultimately, the government, in concert with regional and continental organisations has to develop a concrete strategy for establishing the rule of law, so that individuals who committed atrocities are duly prosecuted. In Sierra Leone, the Special Court of Sierra Leone recognised rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, and forced pregnancy as crimes against humanity. A three-day hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was devoted to the impact of the war on women. However, women and girls who publicly revealed their sexual violence during the war were stigmatised and treated as outcasts in their own communities. Such an act is seen as a social taboo in the society of Sierra Leone.²⁷

Conscription of Women and Child Soldiers

Women have also been conscripted as soldiers during conflicts. In South Africa, women voluntarily joined the underground movement of the ANC as trainees in the 1950s.²⁸ Sudanese women were not merely victims of war, but played a variety of roles as fighters, peace makers and relief workers. In both north and south, women joined the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) and Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) respectively,²⁹ as well as joining Other Armed Groups (OAGs). It has been noted that women in the Nuba Mountains and southern Blue Nile contributed food to the SPLA.³⁰ Indeed, in many parts of Africa, women have been found to be more than mere passive victims of conflict,

reinforcing a militarised mentality by actively participating in war. In Sudan, women are reported to have directly encouraged their male relatives to join the military, to participate in communal cattle raiding, to seek revenge on neighbouring ethnic groups, and to utilise more indirect methods of militarization such as songs and comments to “shame” the men of their communities who do not participate in such acts.³¹ Thus, in the Nuba Mountains, the *Hakamas* were women singers who were attached to fighting forces during the civil war, and whose role was to motivate the men to fight by singing songs against displays of cowardice and retreat. Women have also been known to play a role in the arming of communities.

Women in specific circumstances have willingly and unwillingly, provided material and psychological support to armed groups.³² Women have purchased guns for their men, particularly their sons, and smuggled these across enemy lines and borders, sometimes hiding them with their infants.³³ As they are less likely to be questioned during a forced disarmament exercise, they become the custodians of guns, and are responsible for hiding them.³⁴ In Sierra Leone, it was estimated that up to 10 000 women actively chose to join or accompany the RUF, and as many as 9 500 were abducted.³⁵ The RUF used women as human shields and indiscriminately terrorised civilians. Child soldiers, including girls, were asked to murder members of their families as part of their initiation as combatants.

In the new political dispensation, a few girls have been reintegrated, while some women are still with the commanders that abducted them.³⁶ Part 5, Article 30 of the Lomé Peace Accords of 1999 for Sierra Leone gave special attention to child combatants. However, boys received more attention and resources than girls.³⁷ This is because women were not registered as combatants and the DDR practitioners failed to recognise women as combatants. Therefore, many girls did not participate in skills training programmes. The reintegration process ought to have provided long-term interventions for all.³⁸

In Burundi, the AU's first peacekeeping force, the African Mission in Burundi (AMIB), was deployed in 2003, and replaced in 2004 by the UN Operation in Burundi (ONUB). The UN Resolution 1545 that established ONUB urged consideration for different needs of women including recognition

of women in the DDR packages. The women demanded recognition in DDR packages for their role in taking care of the sick, injured, aged and rehabilitation of ex-combatants. As of 15 August 2005, 485 female combatants and 2 909 children were included in the demobilisation processes and were entitled to DDR packages.³⁹

Girl Education and ‘Brain Drain’

In Sierra Leone, primary and secondary schools were closed down for the safety of students. Similarly, the universities and other tertiary institutions experienced numerous rampages and lootings, and many students fled from the country as refugees. Consequently, the country experienced brain drain. Without education and the required skills, many women and young girls resorted to menial jobs which could not satisfy family needs.⁴⁰

Since the start of the Ivorian war, over 300 000 children have not had access to classes, while private schooling became difficult to achieve due to limited access to funds. This hampered essential skills transfer.⁴¹ According to UNICEF, over one million school children had their studies disrupted.

Poor State of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Refugee Camps

A majority of IDPs and refugees are women and children. In Darfur’s IDP camps severe malnutrition has been recorded. The problem has been complicated by Sahel related conditions of drought and famine. Over 3 000 malnourished children were identified and treated by Médecins sans Frontiers. In Côte d’Ivoire, a May 2003 report by the UN Secretary General revealed that over 800 000 people were internally displaced, while 80 percent of the one million Ivorian refugees were women and children. These refugees lived in deplorable conditions in camps in Liberia and Ghana.⁴²

Economic hardship and fear of violence generated thousands of IDPs in Burundi.⁴³ Hardships in these IDP camps forced women to exchange sex with soldiers. Such practices were also reported in Sierra Leone, where the police and security forces lacked skills in trauma recording. Many girls were forced to marry by their parents because of poverty, while others, who lost their parents, had turned to Economic Community West African Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)

and UNAMSIL peacekeeping troops. As a result, many became child mothers and resorted to crime for survival.⁴⁴

In Sudan, the absence of the men broke down traditional protection and support mechanisms.⁴⁵ This exacerbated the health conditions for women. A 2006 study by International Medical Corps of displaced women in south Darfur indicated that 31 percent of women suffer from a major depressive disorder and 63 percent have emotional symptoms of depression.⁴⁶ Although some women have benefited from humanitarian aid, their health and mental health still remain largely unaddressed.

Female Headed Households

Conflicts change the role of women resulting in an increase in female headed households. According to the 2005 Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) report on Côte d'Ivoire, around 20 percent of internally displaced households are headed by women, whereas 38 percent of the displaced are under the age of 15 years. Conversely, conflict brought new roles for women, who were forced to assume the roles as breadwinners of their families.⁴⁷

Racial and Sexual Discrimination during Apartheid

Under apartheid South Africa, women suffered different levels of discrimination, and imposed divisions which led to differences in the positions of women. The conditions of an African woman under this system were harsh, prejudicial and oppressive. Sexual and racial discrimination was rife for both African men and women, but black women were forcibly condemned to the bottom of the pile. As a result, sexual discrimination became embedded in the overall system of exploitation.

Weak Economic Opportunities for Women

The 2002 rebellion in Côte d'Ivoire cut off the northern half of the country from the government controlled south. Many civil servants fled the country, and a number of financial institutions were closed down. Illegal and fraudulent trading dominated the environment leading to an economic downturn. Many Ivorians sought employment in neighbouring countries.

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In Sudan, the discovery of oil, although contributing significantly to economic growth, has in some instances had a negative effect on the conflict. Many villages were also decimated, with livestock looted and grain reserves depleted, thus disrupting economic lives of the mainly 'agro-pastoral southern Sudanese population' and disintegrating families and community networks. As a result of the 20-year North-South war, Southern Sudan has one of the highest mortality and lowest literacy rates in the world.⁴⁹ Further, displaced women have few economic opportunities in Sudan. While some sold tea, peanuts and *kisra* (sorghum pancakes), others turned to the brewing of alcohol and prostitution. A sizable population were also employed as domestic workers. A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report found that 80 percent of women in Omdurman Women Prison in Khartoum were there because of prostitution or brewing of alcohol, which is legally prohibited.⁵⁰

In pre-colonial South Africa, women had economic status and authority as agricultural producers. The pattern changed with the advent of colonialism and its ideology of 'inferiority'. The colonial structure destroyed existent structures and customary laws were written into statutes, which gave African women fewer rights. The mines became one of the biggest employers of migrant workers from the rural areas, and by the 1930s some African women began to move into urban areas in search of work. However, the laws and regulations restricted African women to menial jobs through domestic work, hawking, beer brewing and casual work on farms owned by whites in the rural areas.⁵¹

The life roles of women were defined by skin colour, sex and economic status under the apartheid regime. Industrial development further relegated women to fulfilling their traditional roles. Moreover, racialism and sexism were not only entrenched in cultural attitudes, but also embedded in the legal institutions. White women had the right to vote with their male counterparts and had access to higher education and lived in physically well-endowed conditions. Despite these privileges, white women were non-existent in organs of decision-making in politics, the economy and in the armed forces.⁵²

Response of Women to Conflict

Solidarity of Ivorian Women for Economic Viability during the War

Before the war, Ivorian women accounted for more than 70 percent of the informal economy and used to receive supplies from all over the country and other neighbouring countries such as Niger and Burkina Faso. With the outbreak of war, fewer products were received due to the dangerous conditions in the supply routes and high costs of transportation. In order to survive, women cooperatives were compelled to sell their goods at very high prices. This was complemented with the support of the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) providing food aid to families, giving priority to female headed-households.⁵³

To further enhance the solidarity of women, working committees were formed, in which they were able to develop individual and community action plans. The committees thus served as a filter to develop income generating activities, resulting in small business projects namely flour mills, agricultural produce, handicraft development and sales. The success of these projects attracted international donors, including the World Bank, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNDP. These activities have supported existing HIV and AIDS related activities in the communities. As a result of these interventions, over 500 women in 25 communities in the north and south of the country have been trained.⁵⁴

The Ivorian Movement of Democratic Women (MIFED) formed in 1990, was very active in defending and protecting the rights of women, and encouraged their effective participation in Ivorian society. After the outbreak of the conflict, the movement expanded its mandate to include effects of conflict. Therefore, MIFED documents the situation in the country and often denounces violations of human rights. Other women's groups have collaborated and held protest meetings to highlight the violations against women.⁵⁵

Sudanese Women Bridging the Gap in the midst of Institutionalised Discrimination

Similar responses have been recorded in Sudan. Though various Sudanese constitutions have since independence afforded women equal rights, these rights have not always been observed. In some communities in southern Sudan, for example, customary law holds sway and local chiefs have absolute decision-making authority.⁵⁶ Women in southern Sudan have in some instances had limited access to education, primary healthcare, inheritance, divorce and custody of children. Lack of access to these services has also been influenced by the conflict and poverty which affect women as well as men. Women in Sudan joined nationalist movements in the mid-1940s, and created independent organisations. These include the ‘League of Sudanese Women’ and the ‘Society for Promoting the Status of Women.’ The Sudanese Women’s Union (SWU) was founded in 1952, and, in the following year, it succeeded in acquiring the right of women to vote. The women’s movement was led by SWU in collaboration with progressive political parties and trade unions. SWU continued to tackle major legal concerns and women’s rights including issues of equal pay, pensions, education and maternity leave under civil law. The organisation published a *Sawt al-Marra* (The Women’s Voice) magazine in 1955 to articulate critical issues, and its campaign bore fruit when the Grand Shari’a Judge of Sudan issued an order that a marriage contract was only legal once the bride had given her consent. By the 1960s, Sudanese women constituted seven percent of the formal workforce, gaining posts as physicians, engineers, judges, lawyers, diplomats, journalists and university professors. The military government of General al-Nimeiri enacted a policy of equal pay, eight weeks’ maternity leave and pension. It also granted a divorced woman 50 percent of her husband’s estate. It is worth noting that in 1964 and 1985, women took active roles in the uprisings against the military rulers. In 1970, SWU lobbied the al-Nimeiri government to expand health, education, electricity, piped water and roads to rural communities. One of the founding members of SWU was elected the first woman MP in Sudan and women were appointed as ministers and other top positions in the ruling Sudan Socialist Union. Women also joined the armed forces, the police and prison authorities.

These gains were, however, short-lived as the government banned SWU in 1983 and arrested its leaders. SWU returned to public life after the fall of the al-Nimeiri government in April 1985 following a mass uprising. The women lobbied for an end to the civil war through 'Peace Mothers Society' and the 'National Women's Forum'. Meanwhile, cooperatives were established to cope with commodity shortages and the rising cost of living.⁵⁷

South African Women's Response to Exclusion and Colonial Rule (1912 – 1945)

South Africa's women protests against apartheid are well documented.⁵⁸ Though women were involved in many organisations including church groups and liberation movements, the trade union movement was the progenic ground for women organisers. As at 1912, both black and white women were excluded from decision-making processes, leadership roles and disenfranchised. In 1910, the women of Transvaal protested the lack of employment opportunities, and 122 women presented a petition to the Mayor of Johannesburg on 23 March. This resistance triggered the militant Orange Free State Anti-pass campaign of 1912, which was organised by the Orange River Colony Native Congress (ORCNC). These concerns were raised by the founding members of the newly formed South African Native National Convention (SANNC) - later renamed the African National Congress (ANC). SANNC passed a resolution urging the repeal of all laws which compelled African women to carry passes at its conference in 1912. Exclusion of women from the SANNC made them adopt different approaches of resistance such as collection of signatures for a petition to be presented directly to the authorities in Cape Town. Within a few weeks, the women had collected over 5 000 signatures to present their petition to the Minister. In recognition of the efforts of the women, many centres of the ORCNC elected one man and one woman as their delegates to their Annual Conference, where one of the women leaders reported on the progress of the anti-pass campaign.⁵⁹

The Free State campaign did not end with representations only; the women stopped carrying passes or buying permits. In support of the women,

the Secretary General of the SANNC, Sol Plaatje, accessed women who had been arrested for defying pass laws and pledged to mobilise support for their campaign. Although the SANNC applauded the efforts of the women, it did not accord them full membership. Instead, in 1918, the SANNC encouraged women to form the Bantu Women's League. The constitution of the SANNC extended auxiliary membership for women from all indigenous races over the ages of 18 the following year. The ANC resolved to accord women equal membership in 1943, and in 1948 the BWL was converted to the ANC Women's League.⁶⁰

Contribution of South African Women to the Liberation Struggle (1950s – 1980s)

Thereafter, women organised resistance against apartheid. One of the notable protests against pass laws occurred in October 1955 in response to the Ministry of Native Affairs directive that women be required to carry passes from January 1956. This national protest involved 2 000 women in 1955 and more than 20 000 in 1956,⁶¹ when women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August. This day is observed as Women's Day in post-apartheid South Africa. The 1956 march inspired sporadic protests in the country. The Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) had been formed in December 1954 with the aim of ending apartheid. Women from Craddock, Durban, East London, Johannesburg, Kimberley, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town attended the inaugural conference of FEDSAW in 1955 and compiled a host of demands which included free and universal education, proper housing, the right to vote and be voted for, and equal pay. However, black women could only claim these rights after the end of apartheid.⁶² FEDSAW organised another protest in January 1957 against increases in bus fares by the Public Utility Transportation Company which transported over 25 000 Africans.⁶³ Another march against pass laws occurred on 13 June 1957.⁶⁴

The Beer Hall riots of 1959 in Cato Manor, Durban, occasioned by the forceful attempts to move people to racially exclusive African and Indian townships of Umlazi, Kwa-Mashu and Chatsworth, is another example of women uniting against racial discrimination on a large scale.⁶⁵ Over 3 000 black women, some with their babies on their backs, besieged beer halls.⁶⁶

The protests in Cato Manor inspired further protests, such as the Sharpeville march of 21 March 1960, which led to a massacre of Africans. The UN General Assembly proclaimed 21 March as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1966.⁶⁷

Throughout the anti-apartheid struggle, black and white women met and discussed prospects of working together. This partnership was, however, cut short by the 1976 Soweto uprising after which the Black Women's Federation was banned and their officials imprisoned without trial.⁶⁸

In the early 1980s, women formed political organisations across South Africa, as part of the broader strategy of the liberation movement to organise people around their local grievances and needs. Such organisations include the United Women's Organisation, which was formed in 1981 in the Western Cape; the Natal Organisation of Women, which was formed in 1983 in the Natal Province; and the Federation of Transvaal Women, which was formed in 1984 in Johannesburg. Other activities include consumer and bus boycotts. One notable strike was organised by the Port Alfred Women's Organisation (PAWO) in 1986. Other memorable protests include the Women's March of 20 April 1986 in which the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation (PEWO) solicited the support of local churches to end the cycle of violence during funerals. Analysts posit that the extreme state repression of 1980s worked against the specific interests of women.⁶⁹

The Participation of Women in Peace Processes

Only one woman participated in the peace negotiations in Côte d'Ivoire that culminated in the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement of 2003. But the agreement failed and the relationship between the government and rebel forces deteriorated. Women lobbied for an end to the war. With the support of UNICEF, children and young girls also lobbied for an end to war through media forums.⁷⁰ Thereafter, the UN and other members of the international community have welcomed the 'Flame of Peace' as the official launch of the disarmament process for the country.⁷¹ Moreover, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary

General for Côte d'Ivoire, Pierre Schori, has stressed the commitment of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) to ensure women are involved in all the mechanisms to bring about peace in the country in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security 1325 of 2000.⁷²

Women and Peace Initiatives in Sudan

Sudanese women contributed to peace making and reconciliation through various activities such as songs and dances, peace missions and marriage. In one community in the south, Sudanese women threatened to withdraw conjugal duties from men, while in other areas in the south women threatened to expose their nakedness, which is regarded as a curse.⁷³ Women in Lekwongole, Jonglei State, at a PACT-Sudan workshop spoke openly of their role in both encouraging inter-communal conflict and peacebuilding through education. The women emphasised the influence they had over their sons to give up arms, with the threat of “coming naked before them”. The women further suggested bringing women from the Nuer, Dinka, Murle and other communities in an effort to build relationships and attain peace.⁷⁴ Similarly, whereas the *Hakamas* were used as tools of conflict during the civil war, they are now slowly being harnessed as tools of peace.⁷⁵

The North-South conflict in Sudan saw a myriad of resolution initiatives. However, the conflict had become tangential – involving different factional groups, issues and interests. Hence a comprehensive agreement was required. Consolidated efforts of seven peace parleys - Koka Dam (1986), Abuja (1992–3), Khartoum (1997), Nuba Mountains (1997), Fashoda (1997), Blue Nile (1999), and the Libyan-Egyptian Peace Proposals (2001), a number of Declarations, Covenants, Homeland Calls and Charters and five substantive agreements culminated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signed in January 2005.⁷⁶

Previous peace negotiations and mediation processes failed due to a number of reasons, such as some parties' lack of commitment, non-involvement of significant parties, lack of proper monitoring mechanisms, violations of agreement terms by all the parties, granting of autonomy to south Sudan

without adequate resources, limited skills of the mediators (the World Council of Churches and African leaders), imbalance of power and leverage between the parties. Further, in specific circumstances, the agreement was dependent on the parties' moral obligation and did not deal with acts of impunity.

Parallel to the internationally sponsored peace negotiations, there was an array of local peace meetings and conferences between representatives of ethnic and community groups. Women and traditional leaders convened peace meetings; these processes are still common today. Such indigenous conflict resolution processes have proved positive and have been modified and adopted under the auspices of international non-governmental organisations to deal with endemic conflicts in the country.⁷⁷ Women have played a large role in inter-ethnic reconciliation across southern Sudan. Notable interventions include reconciliation efforts played by the peace council comprising of one-third female members that brought about effective solutions between the Nuer and Dinka communities.⁷⁸ Since the early 1990s, peacebuilding initiatives during and after conflict have been moving away from the conference tables of diplomats to informal settings created by the local civil society. Many civil society organisations in the Sudan are headed by women and have become pivotal vehicles for peace. Participating at these levels, women focus on the root causes of the war, using established indigenous peace processes of conflict resolution such as the *judiyya*⁷⁹ – customary mediation practised in Darfur and other parts of northern Sudan.⁸⁰ Yet, many women's groups in urban centres are represented by men. Even though the Government of South Sudan (GoSS) has allocated an official 25 percent representation for women, few positions are actually held by women. The Southern Sudan Peace Commission (SSPC), for example, has only one female member.⁸¹

Engendering the Peace Process in Sudan

Women organised themselves into groups and networks in order to address the social and economic consequences of the war and advocate for peace internationally. Sudanese women realised that without the support of other African countries and the international community, the conflict in their country would not end. In their search for peace, they engaged willing partners for encour-

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agement and support. They further raised their concerns and highlighted the consequences of the civil war, in an attempt to be incorporated in the peace process and draw the attention of the international community.⁸²

The Netherlands responded by forming The Initiative to Facilitate the Participation of Sudanese Women in the Peace Process. The Initiative targeted women from all political groupings in the conflict, who formed Working Committees. Through a mediator, each Working Committee held hearings in its constituency to collate grassroots' understanding of the conflict and women's possible contributions to peacemaking. It also targeted male leaders and followed up issues that were relevant for women in the peace negotiations. The Netherlands Embassy contracted ACCORD to build the skills of these women in conflict resolution.⁸³

ACCORD's intervention was in three phases. The first phase of the training took place in Kenya and Egypt in March and July 1999, respectively. The second phase brought 38 leading women to South Africa for a study tour of Parliament and exchange programmes with civil society organisations in Durban and Cape Town. In April 2000, ACCORD formed part of a panel of facilitators at the International Conference held in Maastricht to facilitate the participation of Sudanese women in the peace process. The conference provided a platform for the women to articulate their interests in the peace process, and defined a common agenda and plan of action to support the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD) led peace process. It also served as an opportunity to inform and lobby international partners to support the presence of women at the negotiation table.⁸⁴

In spite of Sudan's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, and promotion of affirmative action for women in the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM) constitution, women were excluded from the North-South formal peace negotiations.⁸⁵ In 1997, the SPLM admitted two women on their negotiating team and by 2002 this number had risen to six. Civil society organisations associated with the SPLM attended briefings and consultations, but were not included in the formal peace negotiations.⁸⁶ Throughout the Machakos and Naivasha meetings, women worked for the integration of women's priorities into the peace negotiations, organised demonstrations and

demanded representation in the peace talks. Some women's organisations were registered as observers with IGAD and presented technical papers to the negotiators. Despite these efforts, their exclusion from the formal negotiations continued. Ultimately, women had no other option but to present their documentation with recommendations to the parties by pushing them under the closed doors of the negotiating room.⁸⁷

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was, therefore, negotiated with minimal participation of other entities and organisations in which women are more represented. Even the power-sharing arrangement in the transitional government and various commissions identified in the agreement only applied to political parties and not to civil society organisations. This left women with no alternative but to demand involvement in the implementation of the CPA. The women were resolute to have a voice in the new governing institutions and share in the resources of the country. As a result, women were included in the Constitutional Review Commission, and succeeded in increasing the representation of women by six and 26 percents in Sudan's High Court and General Court, respectively. Notably, two female ministers were appointed to the Ministry of Social Welfare and Development, as well as to the Ministry of International Cooperation and Ministry of Health.⁸⁸

During the first six rounds of the Darfur peace negotiations, women were mostly excluded. In order to ensure the participation of women in the process, funding for the mediations in Abuja was restricted subject to identifying long-term initiatives aimed at strengthening the participation of women. The AU, with the support of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other partners, provided necessary technical support and advice to facilitate the participation of women in the Darfur peace talks. The Foreign Affairs Ministry of Canada was among the donors that facilitated and coordinated the participation of women to the Darfur peace process. Under the auspices of the AU, women formed a Gender Expert Support Team (GEST), which formed a unified platform for women's priorities through including women from the three Darfurian states. In December 2005, they presented a paper, *Women's Priorities in the Peace Process and Reconstruction in Darfur*, in which they demanded that Darfur women play a role in shaping policy in the

distribution of wealth and determination of resettlement processes. The women also demanded land reform; extension of land ownership to women; improvement in lives; equitable access to education, primary health care, safe sex; and inclusion at all levels of decision-making.⁸⁹

Overcoming the Culture of Silence in Sierra Leone

Culturally, women in Sierra Leone are not usually allowed to talk openly nor are they regarded as credible witnesses. In many of the public assemblies in the communities, the audience always includes women but does not *permit* their participation or inclusion in consensus based approaches. At the height of the war, educated women decided to break the norm and this *culture of silence*. The elite women realised that mass action would only be effective with the collective action of grassroots' women. Thus, community women were mobilised and sensitised to lead and participate in peace meetings.

From the onset, the Sierra Leone peace process did not include any women. Women were not at the Summit of Heads of State, nor invited as Expert Consultants to the peace negotiations. Therefore, the women had to lobby to participate in the processes. Through shuttle diplomacy, the women met with warring factions and the government of Sierra Leone as an intervening measure to bring them to the negotiating table. The response was positive and women were trusted by the rebels and became filters of communication to the government and, thus, bridged the divide between the warring factions.

The contribution of the women had a big impact on the peace negotiations before the warring factions went to Lomé, Togo, to sign the peace agreement. The women organised marches and sit-ins in front of parliament; presented submissions to Summit Meetings and wrote articles; and discussed issues on the radio in an effort to overcome aggressive and hate messages. The mass action of women exposed the exigencies of the war. Women became a formidable voice calling for peace at every public forum, thus gaining access to the international community. Their endeavours had a positive effect during the signing of the peace agreement.⁹⁰ The success of Sierra Leone women led to the replication of similar approaches in Guinea and Liberia. These civil society initiatives laid the foundation for the creation of the Mano River Women's Peace Network in Sierra

Leone, Liberia and Guinea (MARWOPNET). In recognition of its contribution to peacemaking in the West African sub-region, the network was awarded the UN Human Rights Prize in December 2003.⁹¹

Many factors ushered in the participation of women in the peace process in Sierra Leone. In 1994, diplomatic efforts to broker peace between the government and the Revolutionary United Front leaders were both complemented and preceded by women's civil society groups and national networks, notably the Sierra Leone Women's Peace Movement within the framework of the Women's Forum. The women lobbied regional security organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States for the participation of women in peace processes, and trained women in conflict resolution skills to facilitate their participation. The women also issued public declarations and directly met with leaders. Incidentally, the Lomé Peace Negotiations in July 1999 referenced women in the peace agreement.⁹² There were two women in the government negotiating team and five others in the civil society observer group. Other notable influential women groups that emerged during the transition were *The Women's Forum and Women for a Morally Engaged Nation (WOMEN)*, who championed popular demands for democratic renewal. WOMEN and other civil society organisations monitored government activities and enhanced government capacities by targeting specific training and capacity building programmes for parliamentarians, the cabinet, judiciary, civil service and mass media. These organisations groomed women like Zainab Bangura, who was a Presidential candidate during the 2002 elections.⁹³

Burundi Women as Ambassadors for Peace

Sustained efforts of the international community contributed a great deal to consolidating peace in Burundi. In 1998, the women of Burundi applied the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, and with the support of UNIFEM were able to participate as 'Observers' in the Arusha Peace Negotiations. Even without the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, Burundian women are seen as pioneers in the application of the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 to participate in peace processes in Africa.

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The women mobilised themselves to re-establish peace and campaigned against violence through public education, conferences, intellectual debates and declarations. Their views converged during the Arusha negotiations, which began in 1996 under the mediation of former Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere and later, after Nyerere's death in 1999, under President Nelson Mandela of South Africa. In collaboration with the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation and the UN Department for Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and UNIFEM the first 'All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference' was convened in 2000. The women presented a common vision for peace and reconciliation, held vigils and raised placards at the venue of the negotiations, demanding inclusion in the proceedings. The women's demands were recognised and 19 of their recommendations were included in the final agreement. Key recommendations made by the women include the establishment of mechanisms to punish and end war crimes against women; guarantees for women's rights to property, land and inheritance; measures to ensure women's security and safe return; and guarantees that girls would enjoy the same rights as boys to all levels of education." In recognition of their efforts, Catherine Mabobori, who led the women's delegation to Arusha, was appointed as a Member of Parliament under the Transitional Government in Burundi, representing civil society organisations.⁹⁴

Women rose above the endemic conflict in their country and became a force for positive change.⁹⁵ One example is *Le Collectif des Associations et Ongs Féminines du Burundi* (CAFOB), an umbrella organisation that convenes women's organisations in the country. CAFOB greatly enhanced the role of women in conflict resolution. The organisation encouraged and inspired women in Burundi, and organised credit schemes to empower women economically. The challenge for CAFOB in the new political dispensation is to maintain solidarity amongst the women from different political groups.

The following initiatives are evidence of the vital role women have played in building sustainable peace in the country:

- Before the arrival of President Mandela, the *All-Party Burundi Women's Conference* met in July 2000 for three days to focus on issues affecting women. Issues raised included ending impunity for gender-based violence;

training of defence and security personnel to understand their responsibilities towards women and children; guaranteeing women's rights in the constitution; enacting laws regarding sex discrimination; and ensuring the equal participation of women in political processes. The Conference yielded a set of recommendations to the 19 negotiators, and all parties agreed to implement them;⁹⁶

- *The Burundi Women Refugee Network* was granted observer status at the Arusha negotiations. As observers, the women engaged political representatives informally and articulated the gender perspective into the official peace plans;⁹⁷
- In collaboration with UNIFEM, AFRICARE⁹⁸ Burundi supported a four month reconciliation programme for women IDPs, returnees and residents in Gitega and Kausi in 2002, focusing on concepts of conflict transformation with special emphasis on communication, networking and gender sensitive values that promote peace and reconciliation;
- CAFOB compiled a list of women with the necessary education and skills required to serve in government. This list was developed as a response to the assertion at the Arusha Conference that there were not enough qualified women to justify a legislative quota. This list was presented to the team of mediators to legitimise the 30 percent gender quota in the legislature;
- *The Burundi Women's Journalist Association* (BWJA) was founded in 1997, and their main objectives included the promotion of women's rights, freedom of expression and liberty of the press. BWJA also provides training in proposal writing and fund-raising to members, and they have assisted in building capacity for women in this area;
- *Dushirehamwe*, which means "*Let's Reconcile*", is a network of women's peace building organisations from ten provinces in Burundi. The network has promoted inter-ethnic dialogues and has been called on numerous occasions by factions to diffuse tensions between groups;⁹⁹
- With the support of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 60 traditional midwives were trained to assist women who were brutally attacked and sexually violated during the fighting. The midwives were taught how to recognise gender-based violence survivors and respond in

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a gender sensitive manner. This training expanded the role of midwives to intervene and assist women who were physically and psychologically traumatised from the war;¹⁰⁰ and

- In February 2004, representatives of women's organisations in the Great Lakes region recommended the formation of a regional women's network, which would ensure the effective representation of women at regional meetings towards preparation for the international conference for the Great Lakes region. Representatives of women's organisations held a one day brainstorming dialogue session in Nairobi, and devised a strategy for the inclusion of women's issues and gender perspectives in the Great Lakes region.¹⁰¹

Women's Activism in South Africa's Transition to Democracy

The political identity and black consciousness inspired by Steve Biko gave rise to grassroots' mobilisation informed by the feminist agenda to promote gender equality and eradicate all forms of subjugation and subordination of women beyond struggles against apartheid. In order to create more awareness and reach a wider audience on the issues affecting women, *AGENDA*, a journal on women and gender, was published in 1978 as an entry point to raise women and feminist concerns to form part of the political debates. The Durban Women's Group founded *SPEAK*¹⁰² magazine in 1982 with its last publication in 1994.

The decline in the mass mobilisation struggles of the 1980s prepared the women's movement to participate in the political transition in the country.¹⁰³ 'Following the un-banning of liberation movements in the 1990s, women organisations ceased being semi-autonomous organisations and merged with the ANC Women's League'.¹⁰⁴ The context of the struggle dramatically changed to pursue claims for gender equality at a national political level.¹⁰⁵ Women's activism led to the insertion of gender equality into the heart of democratic debates. Meanwhile, the ANC Women's Section in exile had made giant strides in gaining recognition within the liberation movement for women's increased representation. South African women thus opted for a broad, non-

racial organisation along the lines of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) of the 1950s.

In order to guarantee equality for women, a national coalition was formed in April 1992 from a broad base of 70 organisations and eight regional coalitions. The main task of the Women's National Coalition (WNC) was to campaign for the Women's Charter and to mobilise women to participate in the transitional process.¹⁰⁶ The Women's Charter was initially adopted on 17 April 1954 at the founding conference of FEDSAW in Johannesburg, and revised by the WNC to accommodate the current issues affecting women. The Women's Charter significantly served as the basis of the demands for women's rights during the constitutional negotiations. The Charter also provided the framework for the achievement of gender equality in the South African Constitution as a fundamental principle of the new democracy, and entrenched a Bill of Rights establishing government's accountability to gender rights.¹⁰⁷ In framing the equality clause, the Constitution provided for a 'Commission on Gender Equality' to promote gender equality, to advise and make recommendations to Parliament and any other legislature with regards to laws or proposed legislation which affect gender and the status of women.¹⁰⁸

The strategic ground for an alliance driven by women presented itself in the non-representation of women in the first round of multi-party negotiations of South Africa's transition to democracy. Women activists had to force open a small space to facilitate the participation of women in the negotiations. Women had now realised that they were no longer just a resource for mass mobilisation, but a strong constituency with electoral power which should be included in the political negotiations. In response to the exclusion of women from negotiating teams, the ANC Women's League (ANCWL) sought admittance through the Management Committee of the Congress for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). After intense lobbying, the ANC officially accepted a proposal to set up a Gender Advisory Committee (GAC) to monitor and offer advice on the gender implications of the CODESA negotiations. The GAC proved ineffective and had limited powers, but served as a 'symbolic, but brief, victory for women'.¹⁰⁹ Reacting to the ineffectiveness of the GAC, the ANCWL "stormed the negotiation chambers" in March 1993 and prevented the continuation of the

negotiations until women were allowed to participate.¹¹⁰ The women further staged a protest outside the World Trade Centre and threatened to boycott the first elections if their demands to be included were not met. As a result, a meeting was convened of all women representatives where a Women's Caucus was established to leverage their demands. The women demanded expansion of delegation teams to include one woman with full voting rights.¹¹¹ Each of the 26 parties present at the negotiations agreed upon the gender quota of 50 percent representation of women, which thus set in motion the essential involvement of women in governance.¹¹²

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Women's Civil Society Initiatives in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has made giant strides in restoring state authority throughout the country, disarming combatants, resettling one million displaced people, holding elections, re-establishing public and social institutions, rehabilitating infrastructure and providing some basic services. However, there are more difficult tasks ahead. Sierra Leone has a young population, with over 60 percent under the age of 35 years. A vast number are unemployed. In order to prevent anti-social activities in the youth population, the country embarked on long-term capacity development efforts and sustainable international partnerships that would produce concrete results in helping to reinforce the country's peace.¹¹³

Women are key actors in the creation of an enabling environment for development and reconstruction. The Mano River Union countries have played a major role in Sierra Leone's emergence from conflict, and have been active in creating policy frameworks for post-conflict development. The issues of youth and women's employment are significant and civil society involvement has been extensive in developing these frameworks. Women have advocated forgiveness for perpetrators of violence and reconciliation with ex-combatants. They have also encouraged ex-combatants to participate in the reconciliation processes and seek forgiveness through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Women

are now focusing on the future, prioritising reintegration of child soldiers, imparting of skills-based knowledge, lobbying for comprehensive education, particularly free education for all, and primary health care support. Through civil society organisations, they have initiated programmes for the co-existence of various sectors of society.¹¹⁴

The government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah made Agriculture and Food Security one of its main goals in 2002. The food security policy was aimed at creating decent and rewarding job opportunities for youths in the agricultural sector. However, plans for reconstruction should be linked to education and skills training. As many women are informal traders and farmers in the countryside, they require modern farming equipment, seeds and fertiliser and farming skills. Women also need micro-credit facilities in order to invest in small business, as well as adult literacy classes on how to start and run businesses. These strategies have a short and long-term impact towards reintegrating the society and rebuilding the country as a whole towards peace.

Before the war, many women had economic power in the diamond-rich Tonga fields. The fighting forced many women to flee the area. In recent years, women from Tonga have reorganised to survive economically. With the assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the women have overcome some of the challenges and are now involved in the mining business. The proceeds from the diamonds have funded basic community development projects, such as running water and electrification services. Benefits of these activities include reinvestment in the agricultural activities and business projects.¹¹⁵

Further, women organisations with support from the government are sensitising other members of society on their health rights through radio, television, posters and other media. An example was the popular radio soap opera sponsored by USAID called “*Atunda Ayenda*” or “*Lost and Found*”, aired in the Madingo language, which helped people understand the political and social events unfolding in the country. The aim was to disseminate as much information as possible to the public on early pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and other health issues. The government sponsored health programmes focus on trauma counselling, and employing survivors of sexual violations as educators and assistants

in health institutions. Women groups are calling for more health institutions in the countryside with qualified medical personnel, and health facilities in schools for easy access for young girls.¹¹⁶

The TRC has mandated the establishment of an impartial record of the abuses committed during the war, as a step towards achieving national reconciliation. The Commission also urged reforms in Sierra Leone's legal, judicial and police systems to make it easier for women to report cases of sexual and domestic violence. It called for the repeal of all statutory and customary laws that discriminate against women in marriage, including inheritance, divorce and ownership of property. The Commission further recommended that the government should campaign against the customary practice whereby a rape victim is obliged to marry the rapist.¹¹⁷ The country now recognises rape and other sexual violent acts as gender crimes and is now working towards achieving gender based laws which will protect women from gender violence and other forms of discrimination.¹¹⁸ A Rape Bill has been introduced by the Sierra Leone legislature, dramatically changing the culture of impunity. Under the new laws, a convicted rapist may be jailed for life. To further sensitise society about the rights of women and young girls, women civil society networks have organised and provided support systems for rape victims, including counselling and training to make them self-sufficient.¹¹⁹

Zero-tolerance on Sexual Exploitation in Burundi

In Burundi, civil society organisations in collaboration with the United Nations Operations in Burundi (ONUB) Gender Unit, embarked on a nationwide public awareness campaign against sexual violence. The goal was to change attitudes towards sexual abuse and treatment of victims. ONUB continued its campaign against sexual violence and its 'zero tolerance' policy on sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as discouraging the settlement of rape cases out of court. To this effect, the government of Burundi highlighted the need to provide immediate medical care for rape victims, enact forceful laws against rapists, and tackle impunity by creating a positive environment to enable women report rape cases without fear or reprisal.

South Africa's Peacekeeping Role in Burundi

In response, the national government submitted legislation to Parliament to create a national committee that will oversee land and property inheritance rights for women, which would improve the situation of women returnees – widows in particular. After the expiry of ONUB's mandate, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi, known as BINUB, whose mandate includes establishment of a national Human Rights Commission and transitional justice mechanisms. Part of the function of the Commission is to ensure the protection and promotion of human rights, particularly the rights of women and children.¹²⁰

Consolidation of Democracy

Women Sharing Power in Burundi

The power sharing agreed to by parties to the Arusha Peace and Reconstruction Agreement for Burundi, stated that the Government should be comprised of 30 percent women. The constitution thus promoted the participation of women at all levels of decision-making, which saw the resounding appointment of Alice Nzomukunda as second Vice President of the country in August 2005.¹²¹ On 5 September 2006, she resigned from her position,¹²² and Marina Barampama was appointed as the 2nd Vice President.¹²³

Seeking Equal Representation for Women in Côte d'Ivoire

In 1963, women formed the *Association des Femmes Ivoiriennes* (AFI) and succeeded in persuading the President to establish the *Ministere de la Condition Feminine* in 1976, with the AFI leader as the Minister. The National Commission for Women's Protection was established by Decree No. 76-882 of 22 December 1976.¹²⁴ The Minister's set goals were to improve educational and employment opportunities for women and to establish judicial gender equality. Towards achieving these goals, two of the sub-commissions within the Ministry dealt directly with women's education, training and employment. The interventions of the Ministry saw the enactment of a new law in 1983 that permitted women some measure of control over property rights and the right to appeal to the

courts to seek redress for their husbands' actions. Despite these giant strides, the status of women in practice and law were still below the status of men through most of the 1980s.

Women occupy only 8.5 percent of seats in Parliament,¹²⁵ and mostly function as assistants rather than decision-makers.¹²⁶ Côte d'Ivoire is a one-party dominated state with the Ivorian People's Front (FPI) in power, Simone Gbagbo, the country's first lady is also the President of the ruling party.¹²⁷ The Ivorian Movement of Democratic Women (MIFED) works directly with women from all political parties and conducts capacity building workshops for women to effectively participate in governance. This national organisation also tries to overcome stereotypical tendencies towards women involved in politics, and documents the lack of economic support for women in this regard.¹²⁸ In 2004, in an attempt to increase the number of women elected into public office for the October 2005 elections, 150 members of the Coalition of Women Leaders of Côte d'Ivoire (CFeLCI) participated in a leadership training programme hosted by the United States Embassy in Abidjan. Several notable international women leaders shared their insights on power sharing, grassroots' mobilisation, electoral processes and techniques. The leadership programme energised women to campaign in the 2005 polls. At the end of the training, 25 women declared their intention to stand as candidates for the elections before the collapse of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement.¹²⁹

Enabling the Participation of Women in Sierra Leone Politics

One key measurement of democratic growth is the extent to which previously disadvantaged sectors of society are able to participate in politics. Many aggrieved Sierra Leonean women engaged themselves with the political discourse and played a critical role in advocating for a peaceful settlement and democratic rule. Women represent an important component in Sierra Leone's reconstruction process, having demonstrated their capacity to influence national policy during negotiations to end the civil war. Once the May 2002 elections were scheduled, women demanded their place in a more inclusive political system. With the support of the National Democratic Institute for Elections (NDI), the British Council, the Commonwealth Parliamentary

Association, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Sierra Leone Ministry for Gender, a number of workshops were sponsored to acquaint women aspiring to political positions with skills and techniques needed for these positions. The series of workshops culminated in a forum at which political aspirants, political party leaders, and foreign ambassadors and members of parliament identified avenues for increasing women's participation. These interventions saw political parties put forward more female candidates. NDI's local partner 50/50 Group in collaboration with women candidates produced and distributed the Sierra Leone Women's Manifesto, which underscored the importance of meeting the needs of women in all sectors of development and established a strong foundation upon which to set priorities for a future legislative agenda. The consortium of international organisations continued to provide professional development to newly elected female parliamentarians – focusing on improving skills directly related to their work, including practical information on parliamentary organisation and procedures, as well as public policy issues likely to be considered in parliamentary sessions. The efforts of NDI culminated in 16 women being elected to parliament, three times the number elected in 1996.¹³⁰

Women candidates have seriously considered that without a clear and comprehensive platform on women's issues, they would continue to be marginalised in the political process. Thus, to improve upon the six percent representation of women in the next elections, women decided to strengthen their capacity in democratic governance by developing a new strategy to broaden community based political participation in a national dialogue through a variety of activities. These activities include the promotion of open debate, training in advocacy skills and education of citizens on their rights and responsibilities. In addition, civil society organisations provide training and mentoring programmes for newly-elected local leaders, paramount chiefs and members of parliament that encourage informed dialogue, with special emphasis on increasing active participation of women in leadership and political processes.¹³¹ In preparation for the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, women pressed for 30 percent representation in decision making processes.¹³² However, the preliminary statement made by NDI expressed concern at the low number of women selected

as candidates to contest the elections. Women represented 11 percent of candidates, and only won 16 (14 percent) out of 112 parliamentary seats.¹³³ However, the results showed a significant increase in the representation of women from the 2002 elections.

South Africa Champions a "Women-friendly State"

South African women's contribution to transformation from apartheid to a democratic society enabled them to lay claim to their participation in governance. Hence, they became well-positioned to represent women's interests through developing strategies, methods and tools to attain gender equality at all levels of government institutions.¹³⁴ The ANCWL included mechanisms to implement affirmative action policies to ensure representation of women and pushed 'for the constitutional recognition of 30 percent female representation in the ANC decision-making structures.'¹³⁵ 'The champions of this process ensured the development of a "woman-friendly state".'¹³⁶ South Africa's adoption of the Party List Proportional Representation electoral system afforded the inclusion of minorities and women into politics. Women have since become increasingly involved in politics. After the 1994 democratic elections, a third of public representatives elected by the ANC to national and provincial legislatures were women. This was a giant leap from four percent in previous parliaments. Similar strides were realised during the 1999 elections, with significant representation of women in the Cabinet and other major portfolios. Out of 27 ministers, nine were women and of the 14 deputies, eight were women.¹³⁷ In fact, key ministerial positions such as Foreign Affairs were held by women. The 2004 elections maintained the success of gender equality in governance, followed by the appointment of a woman Deputy President in 2005, the highest position ever held by a woman in South Africa. However, the debate of quotas persists as questions arise over the quality of leadership versus the quantity of women in governance.

Although South Africa has the biggest economy in Africa, with strong financial and manufacturing sectors, many South Africans remain poor and unemployment is high. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) is a response to this reality.¹³⁸ Further, a very pertinent problem in South Africa is the high

incidence of crime. The success of South African women as agents for transformative change during the liberation struggle and the transition to democracy serves as a milestone for women to stand in solidarity against crime.

Women in 'peacetime' South Africa still experience endemic poverty and violence in the home and society, ranging from domestic abuse, rape, sexual harassment and assault. In order to effectively deal with the issue of gender-based violence, the government embarked on an annual nation-wide campaign – the 16 Days of Activism of Non-violence Against Women. This brought civil society and the Correctional Services and Justice Departments into a collaborative partnership to create awareness, leading to the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in 1998. Activists are now calling for 365 days of Non-violence Against Women. South Africa is known to have one of the highest HIV prevalence levels in sub-Saharan Africa with over five million people living with the virus. The government has embarked on a nation wide campaign to combat the disease and has made anti-retroviral drugs available under a state-funded scheme. Research has shown that women are particularly vulnerable to the disease both biologically and socially. Women have joined in solidarity with civil society organisations, the corporate sector and government institutions to create greater awareness about the disease and to overcome the recurrent rape of young girls as a perceived cure for the disease.

Conclusion: New Challenges Facing Women

A number of reports reveal the challenges of gender mainstreaming in Côte d'Ivoire. The outbreak of war divided the country and thus affected the health system, weakened the education sector, caused an economic downturn and led to a deplorable security situation. Despite the numerous peace agreements to bring stability to the country, the disengagement and unfulfilled promises of conflicting parties have been drawbacks in attaining peace in the country. The agreements are silent on the impact of the violent conflict on women and girls. Against these odds, many national women organisations, with the support of regional and international organisation, are contributing towards

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post-conflict reconstruction. The challenge now is to implement and sustain the March 2007 Ouagadougou Peace Accord.

Sudanese women have worked across the conflict divide and have contributed to the many peace efforts in the country. Sudanese women continue to work across ethnic, political and religious lines towards the common goal of peace. Although they were involved in the negotiations leading up to the signing of the peace agreement, women as a group were not signatories to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of January 2005 between the North and South. However, they were more than determined to participate in the implementation of the Agreement. The women succeeded in pressuring their leaders to appoint women to strategic positions in the Transitional Government. New challenges in Darfur and in the Eastern part of the country have the potential to destabilise the fragile peace process.

Sierra Leone experienced war for many years, and women and children were mostly affected by the brutal war that saw the amputation of limbs by the armed rebellion. Although, many women fought alongside their men during the war, they successfully became mediators between the government and the armed groups, and were signatory to the Lomé Peace Accords (2002) in accordance with the United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security that demands the participation and recognition of women in peace processes.

Burundian women noted gains during the civil conflict and are currently strengthening networks to address the post-conflict challenges facing women. Even without Resolution 1325, women in Burundi were seen as instrumental to the peace process, and their participation was seriously considered in the peace negotiations. Towards implementing UN Resolution 1325 and the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, the all-inclusive peace agreement for Burundi guaranteed women 30 percent representation at all levels of decision-making. With the opportunity to govern, Burundian women are building capacity and making efforts to consolidate democracy in their country.

South Africa serves as a success story in its ability to transform to democracy without recourse to war. The gains of South African women were more pronounced in the immediate post-conflict phase. A critical mass of women participated in the struggle against apartheid. With the advent of the feminist

agenda, women proved themselves by guaranteeing their equal representation in the CODESA peace talks and have succeeded in mainstreaming women issues at all levels of decision-making. New challenges however, face women in South Africa, ranging from high incidence of crime, unemployment and HIV and AIDS. Women are now involved in the moral regeneration movement to combat crime in the country.

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