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A theoretical exploration of non-State actors and gendered dimensions of conflict prevention/sustainable peacebuilding in West Africa

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A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION OF NON-STATE ACTORS AND GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT PREVENTION/SUSTAINABLE PEACEBUILDING IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract: In countries rebuilding from war and violence, women are becoming important voices for peace, rights and inclusion. They are increasingly mobilizing across communities and using their social roles and networks to prevent violence and promote peace. Women individually and collectively contribute to peacebuilding in many ways. Yet, their contributions are often overlooked because they take unconventional forms, occur outside formal peace processes, or are considered extensions of women's existing gender roles. Even when women do not reach formal positions of power, they have been at the forefront of impactful movements related to global peace and nonviolence. Thus, building inclusive, sustainable, peace in societies affected by violent conflicts requires analysing and addressing gendered power dynamics, as well as gender roles and expectations. This study, therefore, examines the role of non-state actors in conflict prevention, management, and peacebuilding in the West African Sub-region, and seeks to evaluate the relationship among civil society groups, regional and sub-regional organizations from a gender perspective. It specifically investigates the role of women in conflict transformation and peacebuilding and concludes that women must be allowed and encouraged to bring their unique insights and gifts to the process because women and men have different experiences of violence and peace.

Keywords: Non-State Actors; Conflict; Gender; Peacebuilding; Prevention.

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"We can no longer afford to minimize or ignore the contributions of women and girls to all stages of conflict resolution, peace-making, peace-building, peacekeeping and reconstruction processes. Sustainable peace will not be achieved without the full and equal participation of women and men." Kofi Annan

I. Introduction and Background to the Study

As peace negotiations have resulted in the settlement of intrastate violence and wars over the last decade, several societies have began to experience difficult phases of post-conflict reconstruction. Negotiated settlements of long-term conflicts bring about new challenges, as well as opportunities for social transformation. The demand to rebuild divided societies emerging from serious long-term conflict is overwhelming, and recent efforts reflect the complex nature of the process of peacebuilding (Jeong, 2005). Much effort has been made around the world to maintain peace following conflicts. Some interventions have proven quite successful, while others have not. Notably, civil society involvement is one of the most important factors in determining whether a post-conflict peacebuilding initiative will be successful. Efforts put forth by local government officials towards peacebuilding often absent civil involvement, with the belief that it is in no way beneficial to the general goal   (Parver and Wolf , 2008:52).With the proliferation of armed conflicts in the 1990s, and the rising complexity of peace efforts confronting the international community, the attention of donors and related practitioners has increasingly turned to the potential role of civil society in the scheme of things. Although there has been a massive rise in peacebuilding initiatives aimed at strengthening civil societies, these initiatives have not been accompanied by a systematic research agenda (Paffenholz, 2009).

In recent years, gender in relation to armed conflict and peacebuilding has gained international attention. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, also acted as a catalyst in this process. The Resolution calls for greater support for women's participation in, and gender-sensitivity of, peace as well as security efforts. Over the last few decades, it has become apparent that supporting women's capacities to actually participate in peace processes is a crucial part of their advancement and contribution to peace, development and security. Women's potential as mediators has, however, not yet been extensively tapped, and thus, organisations at multi-lateral, regional and national levels engaged in establishing peace

need to increase their support for both women's capacity to participate in peace processes and their actual participation (Braude, 2015). However, the field has advanced in the last few decades. Before 2000, there were less reported analyses by international actors engaged in humanitarian and peacebuilding processes of how conflict impacts women and men differently. As a result, the perception of women as victims of conflict rather than agents of change had become embedded across societies and organisations. Now, a normative framework has been built, and policies at strategic level are slowly being translated into actual implementation (ibid).

While gender mainstreaming seeks to eliminate gender-based discrimination in policies and programs, initial evidence indicates that many of the institutional frameworks and implementation of peacebuilding and implementation continually fail to address underlying gender roles and the associated power dynamics that make room for institutionalized gender discrimination. Such lack of progress raises questions about the general approach to gender mainstreaming (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003). Too often, the perception of women as victims obscures their role as key players in reconstruction and peacebuilding processes. However, moving beyond the "victimhood" paradigm, recent conflicts have highlighted the multiple roles that women play as peace builders during conflicts, as facilitators of dialogue between warring factions as the sole bread-earners for their families in times of violent conflict; the repositories of societies' cultural values and norms, and as peacekeepers and envoys. Caution therefore, needs to be exercised against the tendency to classify women as passive victims. Such a perspective leads to their exclusion from peacebuilding, particularly from official negotiation processes (Schirch and Sewak, 2005).Why is it important to understand the gendered dimensions of war and peace? The reason is simple and profound: even though it is quite possible to make formal peace without including women and looking at gender relations, the transformation of violent conflict is impossible without using these gendered lenses (Harders, 2011:132). Women's peacebuilding efforts encompass a wide range of activities, and indeed, what women do for peace is sometimes said to expand the view of peacebuilding itself. For example, reconciliation features very significantly in what women peace-engendering organisations do, yet they receive little attention from formal donor-supported peacebuilding initiatives. Women's work in reconciliation includes mediating in localised conflicts within and among families (such as husbands rejecting their wives after rape, or disputes between siblings over inheritance), bringing estranged communities together, and supporting mechanisms to resolve inter-communal conflicts (El-Bushra, 2012).

Women engaged in formal peace negotiations often bring a non-partisan, process-oriented approach to bear, ensuring that the needs of a broad range of stakeholders, rather than just the previously violent protagonists, are on the agenda. Many women organisations which promote their roles in community-level reconciliation and dialogue view their work as secondary, but important in enhancing the positive perception of women's potential contribution, thus, leading to a greater acceptance of women's empowerment, generally (El-Bushra, 2012).

Often, women are not included in formal efforts to resolve conflicts and build peace; however, the participation of women represents a potential opportunity to bridge seemingly insurmountable divides and also to incorporate actors from civil societies and the family, rather than the battlefield, for the purpose of creating sustainable peace (McCarthy, 2011:6-7). Women are often key players in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), popular protests and other grassroots movements, which empowers them in civil society and allows them to inspire societal change and support sustainable peace. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the ways in which women are incorporated into, or excluded from, the process of building peace, and whether the level of female involvement can enhance the success and longevity of that peace (McCarthy, 2011:6-7).This study, therefore, examines the role of non-state actors in conflict prevention, management, and peacebuilding in the West African Sub-region, and seeks to evaluate the relationship among civil groups, with regional and sub-regional organizations from a gender perspective. It specifically investigates the role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and also presents a bottom-up approach to community-based effort, exploring how groups led by women, can play a crucial role in rebuilding peace in West Africa.

II. Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict prevention rose to a position of importance on the 1990s' political agenda due to a number of factors; international organisations and non-governmental organisations were the key actors in line with a significant policy objective in the post-Cold War years. Some obstacles to collective action present during the Cold war were removed, and there was widespread optimism about the prospects for global peace and security. There was also a pressing need to find new ways of mediating and resolving the growing number of internal conflicts emerging

during the process of state formation and disintegration in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

In general terms, conflict prevention in the international arena refers to any attempt by third parties to prevent the outbreak of violent conflict. Conflict prevention is a multifaceted, complex process involving long-term or structural policy aimed at promoting stability, to short-term intensive diplomacy meant to resolve disputes ("preventive diplomacy") as well as civilian or military intervention to monitor and/or control the early stages of conflict ("crisis management"). It also refers to attempts to stop the recurrence of violence in conflict zones ("peace-building" or "post-conflict reconstruction/rehabilitation"). It is, therefore, an activity primarily, although not exclusively, concerned with the period before the outbreak of war (Stewart, 2003). Conflict prevention covers a range of activities associated with gathering information on impending conflicts ("early warning"), to relieve the effects of the conflicts, sanctions, and humanitarian intervention. Preventing the recurrence of violence also includes issues of peacebuilding and post-conflict rehabilitation. It is because conflict prevention covers various stages of the cycle of conflict, (as well as the arbitrary use of multiple similar and interchangeable terms), that confusion concerning policy application arises (Stewart, 2003).

Different conceptions of prevention are used according to the conflict stage when actual prevention strategies are implemented. Conceptualising conflict into a life-cycle may help to visualise how the three notions can be applied (Svanström and Weissmann, 2005). The narrowest conception (sometimes referred to as primary prevention) implies that prevention occurs only before violence has broken out. A broader conception (secondary prevention) includes prevention during the violent phase as well; here, it is more the expansion of the conflict (geographically and/or in intensity) that is aimed at being contained. Though the most debated, a third conception (tertiary prevention) would also add peacebuilding in the aftermath of violent conflict so as to prevent the recurrence of violence. This third conception is notably shared by the Carnegie Commission (1997), which stresses that the prevention of future conflict can be achieved "through the creation of a safe and secure environment in the aftermath of a conflict and the achievement of a peace settlement."

Conflict management and conflict prevention can be seen as different sides of the same coin, though intertwined. Preventive measures are designed to resolve, contain and manage issues, so conflicts do not crystallize. Thus, conflict management is required to allow the

initiation of preventive measures. Post-conflict peacebuilding evolved after the 1992 Agenda for Peace defined it as 'action(s) to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict' (Ghali, 1992). With this definition, the concept acquired new dimensions for policy and academic literatures, as Ghali exemplified peacebuilding with tasks such as weapon destruction, refugee repatriation, institutional strengthening, state-building, political participation processes and cultural processes linked to reconciliation. Peacebuilding includes a much wider agenda than simply preventing or ending civil wars. It addresses the structural causes of conflict and the interplay between categories of secondary violence. It also requires an agenda to work on violence against women, both in times of national and international destruction such as wars, and when there may be "peace" at the national level, but unrest in communities that turn the violence inward (Schirch and Sewak, 2005).According to Michelle Maiese (2003), affirms this, thus, 'Peace building is a process that facilitates the establishment of durable peace and tries to prevent the recurrence of violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building, and political as well as economic transformation' .

Peacebuilding is a generic term that refers to all activities and initiatives intended to create the conditions necessary for sustainable peace in the aftermath of violent and destructive conflict. The achievement of such durable and self-regenerating peaceful conditions is only possible where the citizens enjoy a degree of human security such that the possibility of a reversion to organised and large scale violence is minimised. In other words, sustainable peace at the societal level is dependent on the experience of heightened levels of individual (and hence communal) freedom from want and fear, such that the post-war peace grows ever-deeper, from the surface level of a ceasefire to more profound forms of co-existence and mutuality between the different sectors of society (Rigby, 2006). Peacebuilding is generally associated with the promotion of positive harmony, though the precise definition remains unclear. Initially, peacebuilding was defined as a process consisting of sustained, cooperative work, dealing with underlying economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian concerns toward durable peace. However, the measures cited as earlier components of peacebuilding often focus on the short and medium term rather than the long term. Such components include disarmament, weapon destruction, refugee repatriation, security force training, elections monitoring, and institutional reform (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003).

Peacebuilding is the responsibility of many different actors: governments, religious organizations, civil societies, traditional structures and their leaders, the media, and the business community at large. It takes place at all levels of society, in the towers of academia and government, in schools, businesses, and community centres in every village and town (Schirch, 2004). Peacebuilding seeks to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence of all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest. At the same time, it empowers people to foster relationships at all levels that sustain people and their environment. The process of building peace supports the development of networks of relationships at all levels of society: between individuals, and/or within families, communities, organizations, businesses, governments, institution and movements, be it cultural, religious, economic, or political (Schirch and Sewak, 2005).It may begin while the conflict is on-going, and the transitional period of negative peace—or an absence of violence—may last for many years until positive peace—or a condition of enduring stability—is reached. Because successful peacebuilding engages with a broad set of challenges, ranging from ending the physical fighting and disarming the warring factions to establishing economic stability and building a sense of community, there exists a vast literature on the topic (McCarthy, 2011).

Sustainable peacebuilding implies a complete re-constitution of the state and the society, which includes socio-economic reforms, to overcome the "profound causes" of the war and broad political and institutional reforms meant to democratize the country and establish a new political system and a representative governing institution, legitimate, effective and capable of channelling social tensions and allowing for peaceful resolution. As such, the building process makes stable and lasting peace possible (Peinado, n.d:2).The concept of sustainable peacebuilding is not limited to physical infrastructure or the re-launching of the economy, as it addresses national reconciliation and the establishment of a new institutional and political framework to resolve conflicts peacefully and to definitively break the cycle of violence (Peinado, n.d:2).

III. The Interplay of Women, Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

There are numerous typologies and ways to categorize CSO actors in peacebuilding. More important than finding the right classification, however, is recognizing the roles performed by various segments of civil societies. A literature lists as the roles of civil societies in

peacebuilding: (i) promoting reconciliation; (ii) engaging in non-violent forms of conflict management and transformation; (iii) directly preventing violence; (iv) building bridges, trust and interdependence between groups; and (v) monitoring and advocating in favour of peace, and against human rights violations and social injustices (Douma and Klem, 2004; Barnes, 2005; van Tongerene at al., 2005; Harpviken and Kjellman, 2004 cited in World Bank, 2006:9).The extent to which a civil society is able to fulfil these functions depends on a range of internal and external factors which define the enabling environment in which it must operate, as well as the internal characteristics and capacities of civil society (World Bank, 2003).

Although civil society cannot fulfill all roles that a state plays in a post-conflict setting, the leaders and the organizations provide an important perspective that sheds light on a particular community's needs and cultural characteristics. Studies have found that civil society involvement is one of the most important factors in determining whether post-conflict initiatives will be successful and sustainable (Parver, and Wolf, 2008). Civil societies can make unique contributions to peacebuilding during all phases of conflict, with or without external support. Peacebuilding research has shown that civil society involvement in peace negotiations is directly proportional to the sustainability of peace agreements (Wanis-St. John and Kew, 2006). Civil societies and women groups also have been increasingly active in conflict prevention, peace-making and peacebuilding. For example, they are engaged in early warning activities, preventive diplomacy, through third-party intervention, facilitation of dialogue workshops, mediations, negotiations, networking and initiatives for cross-cultural understanding and relationship-building (Fischer, 2011:290). In general, women are the most prominent actors in civil societies where they contribute to the vibrancy and post-conflict growth through the proliferation of women's organizations committed to serving the needs of the population and promoting peace. By providing social and economic services, contributing to reconciliation efforts and pressuring political leaders to maintain peace and create a more responsive government, the involved women combat the underlying causes of conflict and raise the costs of returning to war—reinforcing reconstruction efforts and the likelihood that peace will prevail (McCarthy, 2011:42).

However, in Africa, women remain largely marginalised from participating in mediation in conflicts, though their participation increases the inclusiveness, relevance, implementation and indeed the sustainability of such agreements, subsequent peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction of the country. Women's representation within mediation teams and

the number and frequency of consultations between mediation teams and women's groups have at least been increasing at grassroots levels. What is needed is active and equitable participation in peace processes at much higher levels (Braude, 2015). Over the past two decades there has been increasing acknowledgements of the different ways violent conflict and building peace impact on men and women, as well as a growing understanding of the roles, identities and relationships that influence how they are engaged in and influence these processes.

Similarly, within peace keeping, the emerging view is that the inclusion of gender perspectives is central to the continued credibility of the operations, and by extension, the achievement of sustainable peace and security. Thanks to the extensive efforts of many stakeholders over recent years, the relevance of addressing gender issues in peacekeeping is no longer in question. It is increasingly the norm for planners to include gender dimensions in peacekeeping operations whether civilian, military or police. Some studies have attempted to highlight the benefits of women as uniformed peacekeepers (Braude, 2015).Women play important roles in the process of peace building, first as activists and advocates for peace, women wage conflict non-violently by pursuing democracy and human rights. Secondly, as peace keepers and relief aid workers, women contribute to reducing direct violence. Thirdly, as mediators, trauma healing counsellors, and policymakers, women work to 'transform relationships' and address the root of violence. Lastly, as educators and participants in the development process, women build the capacity of their communities and nations to prevent violent conflicts. This is made possible as a result of socialization processes and the historical experience of unequal relations and values that women bring to the process of peace building (Lisa & Manjrika, 2005). By being included in prevention and response strategies, women can play an active role towards sustainable peace. A start would be to engage with women at the very beginning of peace processes. Studies have shown that gender mainstreaming can only be effective when accompanied by strong empowerment structures – where women have greater voices in the public sphere, and resources are allocated to human development priorities (Kumalo, 2015).

Key priorities for post-conflict state and peace building include establishing political governance, ensuring security, justice and the rule of law, and building the administrative institutions of the state. Many argue that early attention needs to be given to gender equality and the increasing women's voice in political, social, and economic development in fragile and post-

conflict settings (Kangas et al, 2014). Gender has long been recognised as a key factor in both violent conflict and peacebuilding: men, women and gender minorities are both differently involved in and affected by the processes. It has also become commonplace in peacebuilding to stress that gender does not equal 'women' and that gender needs to be seen in relation to other identity markers, such as age or class, and to social power dynamics. In practice, however, gender in peacebuilding often is reduced to focusing on women only – or, even more narrowly, exclusively on violence-affected women and girls (VAWG) (Myrttinen et al, 2014).Women and men play different roles as social actors and also have different needs and interests. In the three phases of a conflict (before, during and after), women can play different roles and work proactively to secure peace. The various conflict phases, however, often overlap, which makes peace-making measures very complex. Very often too, the activities of women span various phases. As rightly captured by the Austrian Development Agency (2009):

> In the pre-conflict phase the latent and structural causes of conflicts already exist: they include lack of participation in political life, suppression, discrimination and exclusion of all kinds, violation of human rights, little access to land and resources, and the absence of security. Women can encourage societies and political groups to take early preventive measures. During an armed conflict the threat of violence is extremely high: fear and insecurity, the destruction of livelihoods, expulsion, loss of family and death are just some examples of the problems to be confronted. The proactive role of women to ensure survival and settlement of the conflict could not be more challenging.In the post-conflict phase women play a particularly important role both during the peace process and also in the rehabilitation and reintegration phase. Of particular significance here is that pre-conflict and post-conflict phases above all share marked parallels. The requisite measures are often similar, since peacebuilding and conflict prevention are essential before and after a conflict.

The conceptual basis for taking a gendered approach to peacebuilding is fraught, and the confusions inherent in it spill over into its practical application in peacebuilding. Not only is gender a complex, multi-layered and contested concept which is poorly understood, it is also to some extent "imposed", through donor conditionality – a combination of factors which effectively excludes a high proportion of peacebuilding actors from having confidence in using the approach. Barriers exist between those who understand and accept the need in principle to distinguish the impacts of policies on men and on women, and those few remaining dinosaurs who do not, or who simply pay lip-service to it as a policy demand (El-Bushra, 2012). But equally, they exist between those for whom "gender mainstreaming" is an area of professional competence and those who consider it is a passionately fought campaign for women's rights. It

also subsists evenly between those for whom women's advancement takes precedence over all other policy goals, and those who see gender as a concept that informs exclusion and marginalisation more broadly. Further distinctions can be made between activists, policymakers, peacebuilding practitioners and academics, each of whom have their own gender discourses, as well as shared understandings, professional structures and career paths (El-Bushra, 2012).

Taking up a gender perspective in crisis prevention and conflict management recognises that only through changing social relations and institutional practices can gender equality emerge. The strategy of gender mainstreaming comprises the following aspects: (1) the integration of a gender perspective into the analyses and formulation of all policies, programmes and projects, and (2) initiatives to enable women, as well as men formulate and express their views and to participate in decision-making processes. Therefore, it encompasses interventions on the micro (the individual), meso (cultural norms and values) and macro (social institutions and organisations) levels, which are necessary to overcome the structural causes of gender-specific discrimination and to achieve gender equality. This in turn is necessary in order to achieve sustainable development and social justice (Reimann, 2001).Women are thought to undertake peace initiatives on behalf of their communities, rather than for personal gain; this perception of neutrality and their willingness to engage with both sides allow women the opportunity to monitor warring factions on the ground and to engage them in meaningful dialogue, helping to reduce fears and uncertainty.   While working towards a cessation in violence and even afterwards, the presence of women at negotiations may also facilitate more productive, less aggressive interactions. Unlike the competing sides, women have fewer reasons to view negotiations as a zero-sum game; their presence may therefore, temper hostility and promote a focus on the opportunity to better society, rather than on amassing the maximum amount of power (Anderlini, 2007).

IV. Gender, Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in West Africa

Gender mainstreaming is very vital for peacebuilding and conflict management in any society. This is because both male and female members of the society have roles to play before, during and after conflicts or wars.   However, in West African societies, patriarchy orders the activity of the people, and hence affects gender relations in the pursuance and maintenance of

peace. In other words, the patriarchal socio-cultural attributes of women as victims of conflicts in most West African societies have limited the involvement of women in the formal peacebuilding process. The fact that men are always at the forefront of peace campaigns does not totally erase the long history of African women's involvement. Women in pre-colonial times are known for their vibrancy in various societal roles. For instance in Nigerian history, women like Queen Amina of ZauZau, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Moremi of Ife, and Margret Ekpo of Calabar during their lifetime were notable for preventing conflict and securing peace in the society (Ogege, 2009). Despite making history, their numeric strength is relegated to the background when it comes to leadership roles.

In recent decades, West African societies have also experienced women's involvement in peacebuilding processes that eventually established the required peace. For 14 good years, Liberia experienced armed conflict. During this period, some women groups like the Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) and Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign, and Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) emerged to help bring peace to Liberia after the protracted conflict (Shulika, 2016). Also in Sierra Leone, as Badmus (2009) construes, West African women's roles in peace processes involve their agitation in the context of war weariness. Such women include Zainab Bangura, Amy Smythe, Elizabeth Lavalie and Kadi Sesay who planned workshops and conferences with the sole objective of promoting democratic ideas and calling for peace. Likewise the role of women in bringing an end to conflict in Cote d'Ivoire cannot be underestimated. Women mobilised themselves for a peaceful demonstration protest at the French and American embassies in Abidjan in 2003 to express their disapproval of the Linas-Marcoussis Accord that was assumed to have conceded too much to the rebels.

Despite prominent featuring of women in conflict management in West African societies, women are not fully represented like their male folks when it comes to decision making processes towards the establishment of peace. The society at large does perceive the role of women as passive even when their social roles compliment those of their male counterparts. As passive as the society perceives the role of women, their stereotyped peaceful nature has no doubt helped in engineering peace and order in warring communities and countries (Shulika, 2016).

It is important to note that in recent times, nationally and internationally, various opportunities have availed men and women room to demonstrate their involvement in peacebuilding process; this shows the integral link between gender and peacebuilding as well as

conflict management. However, in spite of recognition of the gender differentials in peace process, women need to play more active part in all relevant aspects to make for more lasting effects.

V. Combining the Gender Networking and Institutional Legal Framework: How Effective?

Women's roles in peacebuilding no doubt in contemporary times have gain increased legitimacy by means of popular activism, instrumental frameworks and research, as well as the he UNSCR 1325 policy that emphasizes the focus of women's unbiased participation and involvement in the resolution of conflicts and the negotiation and consolidation of peace at all levels (Shalika, 2016). In spite of women being absent at most formal decision making processes of peacebuilding, they have used grassroots associations such as market women groups, age grades and inter-marriage networks to achieve success stories in peacebuilding at various levels. This success achieved at the local level prompted civil societies to join in the advocacy for women networking in engendering peace.

This advocacy brought about noteworthy gains for women at both governmental and nongovernmental levels. At the governmental level, it resulted in the participation of women as observers in the peace talks at Sierra Leone, Lome and the Ivory Coast; the nomination of Ruth Sando Perry as President of the transitional government in Liberia, and the establishment of a gender framework in ECOWAS. At the civil society level, a number of intervention programmes for women involvement in peacebuilding were designed (mostly capacity building programmes), all of which inspired women to ensured to "see that the guns are laid down" (Alaga, 2010)

It is of utmost concern that despite the mobilization in West African Societies, women are still demanding to be included in the formal settings of peacebuilding, and as such many are still rapt in their traditional roles which do not allow them to be visible in the public sphere (Agbalojobi, 2009). Also, the efforts of women networking in peace building processes were not structured thus, their initiatives were usually short-lived. This can be attributed to a number of factors that are instrumental to their weak involvement such as institutional constraints, ethnic and religious differences, and the patriarchal nature of the concerned societies.

At various levels in the society, women possess the emancipatory identity to build peace in the society that is sometimes backed by government policies. The implementations of these

policies are hindered or sabotaged along the line. Therefore, it is important for women to put in place long lasting structures that will elevate them from the traditional supporting roles to those of leadership in contemporary peace keeping processes.

VI. Surmounting the Socio-Cultural and Institutional Obstacles: Policy Options for Stakeholders

Considering the effort women are making as actors in bringing back peace to warring societies in West African states, a number of obstacles must be overcome in order to recognise the hidden skills women possess in participating in public spheres. Patriarchy is a socio-cultural inhibitor of women in the peace process. It is worthy of note that even when women by virtue of hard work assume positions of authority, the recognition of male dominance that discriminates against female also hinders their full participation in politics and decision making, either in private or public spheres. For example, Badmus (2009) argues that only a woman participated in Cote d'Ivoire Linas Marcoussis peace process, while in Sierra Leone, women were completely excluded from the official peace processes, although later, Sierra Leone women got to participate in the peace processes through lobbying which is not so for their male counterpart.

In West Africa, education is another factor that interferes with the recognition of the role of women in peace building processes. If women are not empowered through education, they will continue to be relegated to the background when it comes to decision making. In countries like Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone it is a known fact that lack of formal education has continuously hindered women in attaining political equality with men, and in turn has greatly affected the participation of women in peace processes (Badmus, 2009).

Financial constraint is another major inhibitor of women involvement in peacebuilding processes. Civil societies and grassroots women advocacy requires financial and technical support for maximum impact. Without funding, they would not be able to interact with media sources, to channel their efforts appropriately (Ajodo, 2013, and Agbalajobi, 2009). It is also of utmost importance to sensitise men on the importance of gender mainstreaming in decision making processes towards the enthronement of peace. This is because both men and women can be active during and after conflicts. Women and men who are expert consultants should be invited when peace negotiations are ongoing.

Furthermore, training women for advocacy in peace building should take cognisance of the heterogeneous nature of the women folks in order to identify the varying needs among different women groups. Religious beliefs are in most cases used to justify women's positions as second fiddle in the society. Conservative religious interpretations of religious practices do not support women activism in public spheres hence, the need to re-orientate members of the society at large on the importance of women and men actors in peacebuilding, irrespective of their religious backgrounds. Also "Tokenism" of women in peace building process should be avoided to enhance a long-term conflict solution (Nwadinobi & Maiguire, 2013).

When women are not excluded from the wheel of peacebuilding, then a successful process is achievable. In addition as Mossa, Rahmani and Webster (2013) have argued, not only government and international actors, but women themselves neglect their significant contributions to peace building processes. Women themselves must recognize their effective efforts as peace builders by freeing themselves from the traditional structures of inequality in the society. Policy makers would need to take into consideration these aforementioned inhibitors to ensure gender mainstreaming in peace building strategies.

VII. Conclusion

The aim of peacebuilding in post-conflict societies is generally understood as restoring the capacities of governments and communities to rebuild and recover from the ravages of war. Lasting peace requires comprehensive conflict prevention, which ensures all actors have the capacity to participate in and access formal processes that address root drivers and causes of conflict while providing cooperation across political and/or other sectarian boundaries. It can be deduced from the primary arguments in this paper that opportunities for sustainable peacebuilding have been lost — and sustainable peace is at risk — when significant stakeholders in a society's future peace and conflict architecture remain excluded from efforts to heal the wounds of war and build a new state and society. Hence, civil societies are widely assumed to be important actors for peacebuilding. As such, substantive focus has been given towards building and strengthening civil society, especially in countries experiencing or emerging from situations of armed conflict. In such environments, civil societies are understood as playing important roles in reducing violence, and in facilitating the conditions necessary for establishing sustainable

peace. It is also stated that peacebuilding is found in every community and culture, many of which need help to explore and strengthen their capacity to build peace. Men and women in every community are already engaged in building peace, but their tasks are almost always different and must be understood and reinforced in that light

In many conflict settings in West Africa, governments are mistrusted and peace activists tend to steer clear of direct contacts with government or political actors. However, "establishing communication channels and working relations with government officials at the local, district or national level have been found particularly important" (Anderson and Olson, 2003). It is therefore, suggested that the peacebuilding community should continue its emphasis on addressing the root causes of various forms of violence, and on the long-term work on transforming the relationships and social dynamics that cause violence against constructive cooperation. When women meaningfully participate in peace processes, they can help to expand the scope of agreements and improve the prospects for durable peace. The barriers that block women involved in peace building processes as decision-makers should be re-examined and eliminated by eradicating inequalities. Finally, given that women's roles in conflict are complex, there is a need for relevant systematic policy research and analysis, bordering on related to dispute-resolution, access to justice and economic empowerment issues. A lot of research is needed on conflict analysis and a more women-inclusive peacebuilding process. How the interests and needs of women can be incorporated must also be researched.

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