



## **REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA**

### **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE BUILDING AND MECHANISM FOR THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION, PEACE PROMOTION AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE**

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### **1.0 Introduction**

As you may all be aware, the great lakes region has been plagued by conflicts, which have had a negative impact on the socio-economic and cultural development in the region. While the conflicts in the region may have an effect on the entire region, the impacts at community level have a differential impact on men, women, boys and girls. In a broader sense, the impact of the conflicts in the great lakes region have had ripple effect in the entire region and have had varying impacts which include among others, the following:

- The depreciation of the value of human life resulting from decades of brutalisation of populations, widespread slaughter and genocide. This has led to family disintegration as a result of people fleeing the combat areas. Women have had to bear the highest burden as they strive to keep their families together and are often the direct victims as they also struggle to fend for their little children.
- It has resulted into a destruction of physical capital and production facilities. The disintegration of power plants, transport systems, communication networks have disadvantaged the peoples of the great lakes region and it will take a lot of time and effort to put this infrastructure into place. This means that resources that should have gone to the empowerment of the vulnerable groups, the majority of whom are women, get diverted to other non-priority areas such as the procurement of arms and other equipment needed to maintaining the warring groups in power.
- It has also led into the di-skilling of society, as large populations can no longer stay in a society in which the future is not known. In addition, the majority of the

skilled populations have migrated to other "safe heavens" the majority of whom are men, leaving behind their wives, mothers, and the young to fend for themselves. Due to its geographical position and socio-economic interaction with the countries of the Great Lakes Region these telling effects of conflict in the Great Lakes Region have not spared the people of Zambia.

Therefore, Zambia has a critical role to play in ensuring stability within the region. The objective of this paper is to discuss and bring to the fore the importance of women's participation and providing mechanisms for their involvement in conflict resolution; peace promotion; and humanitarian assistance in the region.

## **2.0 Women's participation peace promotion and humanitarian assistance**

### **2. Peaces and Security**

We all recall that the conflicts in Great Lakes Region (GLR) started in the 1990s in Rwanda and Burundi and later spread to the Democratic Republic of Congo. In terms of peace and security the implications for Zambia has been the following:

- Proliferation of small arms and crime perpetuated by ex-combatants
- Increase in the refugee population
- Insecurity in the country
- Spread of communicable diseases
- Destruction of infrastructure and natural resources
- Resistance or mistrust and tension between countries
- Illegal export of natural resources

With regard to the implication on women there are six major issues of concerned. These included (i) domestic and gender based violence; (ii) sexual harassment/violence and rape; (iii) poverty; (iv) internally displaced people and refugees; and (v) proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons.

On domestic violence and gender based violence there is need to:

- Empower women through the provision of education and literacy classes so that they can read and write. This would enable them to get the right information, which is usually available in writing and never disseminated in the electronic media.
- Sensitise women and men on the effects of domestic and gender based violence to ensure that it is discouraged and eliminated.
- Discourage and eliminate negative cultural practices in all countries of the Great Lake Region.
- Sensitise law enforcement officers so that they appreciate the vulnerability of women.
- Put in place laws to protect the married Refugee Women who are abandoned by their husbands and leave them without maintenance.
- Put in place laws punish Agents of violence. On issues related to poverty, we need to put in place:
- Laws that will ensure that women have access to and control over land.
- Gender responsive policies to ensure that women farmers access agriculture inputs, markets and capital.

On Internally Displaced Persons and refugees there is need to ensure that

- When the situation has been stabilized in their country of origin, the refugees must be repatriated and counselled.
- IDPs are relocated or repatriated to a new place with the help of the government and international communities.
- The refugees must be psychologically prepared before being reintegrated into their countries of origin.
- Government and International Community should ensure that modalities for social amenities are put in place to lessen the burdens on the gender roles on women during the time of repatriation and relocating.
- Empowerment process must not only concentrate on the returnees but also include the citizens who had remained within the country so that there is harmonization in community development.

Regarding the issue of proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons the following should be considered:

- Governments should encourage all the citizens to hand over illegal weapons. Amnesty should be given to all those that return illegal fire arms but that for those who do not voluntarily return these the law should take its course.
- Women should be sensitised on the danger of owning weapons and that they should report the existence of these weapons because they are the ones that bear the brunt of civil unrest.

## **2.2. Humanitarian and Social Issues**

Zambia's interest in peace and security in the Great Lakes Regional is to ensure that there was economic, social and political independence not only in Zambia but also in the sub-region as a whole. Since independence Zambia has hosted refugees this has had social and economic costs.

Some of the implications have been the dislocation of the local population to give way to refugee settlements. In addition, spontaneously settled refugees have also exerted pressure on the host communities. HIV/AIDS andemic; cultural changes; proliferation of small arms; and other vices are some of the socio economic costs incurred by the country.

Humanitarian and social issues are based on the understanding of issues related to human rights, addressing them with the aim to restore, promote, and curb violence. They suggested that in order to ensure sustainable peace gender considerations must be taken into account and more so that women's issues need to be given priority.

Experiences in peace building the lessons learned and challenges show that women have been in the forefront in the search for peace. This demonstrates clearly that women suffer most, as they still have to provide for their families, both economically and emotionally, and in some places completely taking over all the parental responsibilities.

The following areas need urgent attention

**Poverty:** there is need for governments should provide basics and essential needs such as clean water, proper sanitation, and electricity especially in rural areas. Agriculture inputs should also be provided, especially to women, to ensure food

security. In addition there is need for government in the Great Lakes Region to introduce appropriate and women-friendly technology in order to alleviate the hardships of the rural women

**Land ownership:** There is an urgent need for advocating for land ownership by women especially in countries emerging from war. Since most of the refugees are women, when peace returns they are repatriated to their home countries but because of the way in which land ownership is governed, it becomes difficult for those returning to have easy access to it more so for women.

**Education:** there is need for strengthening of adult literacy programmes and girl child education. Support of the "Student Mother" through counselling should also be encouraged. Countries in the region should review and introduce school curricula that includes and promote peace building leadership, and HIV/AIDS.

**Refugees' settlement:** with regard to spontaneously settled refugees and street children, there is need to strengthen laws against spontaneously settled refugees and that repatriation should be encouraged.

**HIV/AIDS:** there is need for intensive sensitisation on STI, Malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS in the rural areas; Refugee Camps and the hosting communities. Governments should

t Refugee Act in Zambia is too friendly and that most refugee seekers have taken advantage of the situation. Unlike in other countries where people seeking refuge are put in restricted places before they are granted refugee status or not, in Zambia, people are not put in restricted places.

encourage VCT and provide or facilitate free access to ARVs for refugees and host communities. There is also need for the harmonisation of international frameworks with the national frameworks with regards to reproductive health and VCT.

**Issue of marriage:** there is need for the strengthening of existing mechanisms by governments in order to ensure the protection of surviving spouses especially after the conflicts. It also recommended that the UNHCR in collaboration with governments in the region should facilitate the unification of families through sharing of information on refugees.

**Power and decision-making:** Women should be recognised as equal partners in decision-making positions. Grass-root women's efforts and full integration in all participation should be encouraged. Mechanisms to bridge the gaps between the rural and the urban community, the rich and the poor should be strengthened. The role of female focal points should be redefined in all institutions.

### **3.0 Conclusion**

It must be recognised that bringing peace to the Great Lakes Region cannot take place without the involvement of women as active players. While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and sex. The impact of violence against women and violation of the human rights of women and children in such situations is felt by

women and children of all ages, who suffer displacement, loss of home and property, poverty and family separation and disintegration.

It is clear from the discussion here that

- Women and girls have paid a heavy cost as a result of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region.
- HIV and AIDS has taken a heavy toll on women and girls as combatants use them as tools of torture or amusement.
- There has been increasing poverty in the region affecting the entire populations and more so the women and the elderly as they are the ones left with the sole responsibility of looking after children.

It also is clear that despite that above issues I would want to note here that there has been:

- The lack of concrete solidarity by the international community.
- Lack of clear commitment on security among members of the Great Lakes Region.
- Unsystematic inclusion of women in peace building initiatives, resettlement and reconstruction.
- That peace accords have not solved the problems, especially those of women hence the need to evaluate these accords.
- There is lack of strong institutions to support good governance, unaccountable parliaments, judiciary and civil service.

#### **4.0 Recommendations**

Therefore, in wish to make the following recommendations:

- Countries need to evaluate the peace accords and examine why they have not worked.
- Women survivors of war must be given chance to share their life experiences during national consultation and at the international conferences
- The need to involve women in peace and security initiatives at all levels
- Countries of the Grate Lakes region should design programmes aimed at building capacities for women to enhance their participation in governance programmes.