

# **The Consequences of Women's Marginalization and Exclusion from Peace Processes on Sustainable Peacebuilding in Africa: An Examination of the Sierra Leone case**

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## **Abstract**

Although there has been repeated calls by the international community backed up by UN resolutions (1325, 1820, etc.) for the total involvement of women in peace and peacebuilding processes in lieu of lessons learnt, these calls are yet to yield much, much dividend as majority of grass root women still continue to be absent at formal peace negotiation tables; especially in Africa. The grass root women of Sierra Leone, despite their tremendous and relentless efforts and contributions (e.g. organizing matches, sending delegates to meet with various conflicting parties, and rallying for peace both in the communities and at the national level) to ending the civil carnage in Sierra Leone, were bolted out when it came to the final deliberations at Lome, the capital of Togo, where the decision on how the governance arrangements could be made that was to be a fairly representation of the wishes and aspirations of all stake holders in the Sierra Leone society, an action that completely rendered the process gender insensitive. This article emphatically argues that the exclusion of women from the formal negotiation table, whose potentials are enormous and very essential for sustainable peacebuilding, is an anomaly that has and will continue to pose numerous challenges (misappropriation of resources, unaddressed root causes of war, political isolation, youth unemployment, increased gender-based violence, increased poverty and under development, etc.) that may render the ongoing post war peacebuilding process unsustainable; leading to a resurgence of violence that will impact negatively on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) if frantic and deliberate efforts are not employed to correct the mishap.

## **1. Introduction**

The role of women in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding was overwhelmingly affirmed during the 2005 World Summit, by world leaders who, for the first time accepted the interlinkages between women's development, peace and security and human rights. They therefore called for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1325, which among other things calls for women's place at the peace negotiation table and their total involvement in the post war reconstruction efforts. This new discovery was the core rationale for the creation of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) by the United Nations (UN) Organisation whose mandate, among others, is to ensure that there

is systematic attention and resources for advancing gender equality within transitional recovery periods, reintegration and reconstruction efforts. Many nations, including Sierra Leone have signed resolution 1325, which is a watershed political framework that makes women – and a gender perspective relevant to all aspects of peace processes- from peace agreements through peace support operations and planning for refugee, IDP's and other war affected to post-conflict reconstruction processes and the restoration of the social fabric of a broken society. However, the practical implementation of this ground breaking resolution by UN is unrepentantly minimal. Women still are and continue to be excluded from formal peace negotiations in conflicts that have left majority of them worse off than they were before. The reasons for this exclusion, especially in Africa, cannot be unconnected with traditional beliefs, customs, and the long existing patriarchal norms and practices.

The grass root women of Sierra were very instrumental in the search for a peaceful solution to the Sierra Leone brutal civil war (that engulfed and destroyed the entire financial, social, economic and political fabric of the society) leading to the Lome Peace frameworks (peace agreement), which ended the war in 2002. However, when it came to the final deliberations at Lome, the capital of Togo where the decision on how the governance arrangements could be made that was to be a fair representation of the wishes and aspirations of all stake holders in the Sierra Leone society, the women were bolted out, an action that completely rendered the process gender insensitive. It is important to note that there is need for women to articulate their feminist consciousness (desires, hopes and aspirations) and views in any arrangement that requires the peaceful co-existence of both men and women. But as long as the voices of women are not heard or acknowledged and prioritized in decision – making, then no resources or financial assistance are allocated to them.

This article is an attempt to explore the positive roles the grass root women played in the search for a peaceful solution in Sierra Leone following the brutal civil war and to assess the impacts/ challenges of their exclusion from the 1999 Lome Peace Agreement (that ended the war) on the ongoing peacebuilding process. Significantly though, this assessment is premised on the view that women are not a homogenous group and that their experiences differ widely across geographical and temporal locations. None the less the author is not oblivious of the fact that there is also need to guard against biological foundationalism (which in many cases in Africa leads to women's marginalization in peacebuilding processes) and to ensure a comprehensive approach to sustainable peacebuilding; both of which requires a human-rights approach and a proper gender analyses. Only then will sufficient voice, resources, participation, services, support, reparations, documentation and respect for human rights be ensured - both for women and men. In this regard the article aims at examining the peace process, in a bid bringing out the lessons that could or were learnt - identifying some of the cross cutting issues that might have given rise to the exclusion of women in the peace process amidst their initial and effective participation in the campaigns for a peaceful negotiated settlement, pointing out the foreseeable long term consequences for a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone. This author firmly believes that the 1999 peace process in Sierra Leone merely depicted women as a vulnerable group or victims of conflicts that needs protection, a stand point until recently, of the international community.

Apparently however, this article does not in any way subscribe to the simplistic essentialist view that women are inherent peacemakers and that they are naturally more peaceful than men because they are first and foremost considered caring mothers. But the looming danger is that this approach could also imply that because of the different experience of reality of war by women and men, then women can easily be excluded from the other spheres of influence where they do not belong “naturally”- as they are most often marginalized and prevented from taking part in peace negotiations, which most obviously takes place in the public domain, an environment where it is assumed women do not “fit in”. But worthy of note is the fact that the essentialists fail to realize that women are not naturally inclined to peace than men but that women have been socially conditioned to be good mothers and responsible wives that take care of their children and extended families. With these responsibilities imposed, she obviously has to develop capacities and skills in order

to adjust to these functions through learning and not innate. Hence the actions of men and women in society, their positions and responsibilities are not derivations from nature or inner capacities, but the outcome of societal norms and hierarchy.

In many places, especially in Africa, women's peace activism most often faces the risk of being regarded as a harmless and meaningless movement, which squarely reflects the stereotyped definition of women as nurturers of peace as clearly rooted in their biology. In her book "Women, war & Peace" Ferris (2004) draws our attention to Ann Ticker's writings that says:

*Many contemporary feminists see dangers in the condition of these essentializing myths that can only result in the perpetuation of women's subordination and reinforce dualism that serves to make men more powerful. The association of femininity with peace lends support to an idealized masculinity that depends on constructing women as positive victims in need of protection".<sup>1</sup>*

Women have always organized as mothers as a way of promoting peace around the world. Hence their actions have tried to build legitimacy through the assumptions about the roles they play in society. But in this respect, Connell (2000) reiterates Cynthia Cockburn's warning that:

*Identification as mothers can enlist generous feelings of care and love that powerfully contradict violence. But it skirts dangerously close to patriarchal definitions of women's role, and can be co-opted by nationalisms propagating that very ideology.<sup>2</sup>*

The essentialist phenomenon sees gender roles as static; an entity that does not evolve and therefore creates limited room for change, an idea that is a direct opposite of the present day context. Although post war peacebuilding periods are normally fresh periods, meant to offer opportunities for the creation of a more gender sensitive and peaceful community, it is however sad to note that at the time of official peace negotiations, women's voices are rarely heard. All their activism at the grassroots in their yearning for a violent free and a peaceful society is relegated to the annals of history, reverting them to the status quo of traditional role functionaries, once the conflict is over; irrespective of the newly and well administered roles and responsibilities they took over during the conflict. In the words of Ferris (2004) "We also don't know much about what happens to women's groups in the long run. There is some evidence that those which emerge to meet a specific situation simply fade away once that situation changes".<sup>3</sup> Ferris (2004) also refers to Maria del Carmen Feijoo's writing about the role the Argentinean women in the fight against the dictatorship of former General Pinochet in confirmation of the above assertion by saying "the Argentine experience may confirm the generalization that women mobilize to meet the demands of a crisis, but this mobilization is fragile, and women often return home when the crisis is past".<sup>4</sup>

## **2. The Sierra Leone rebel conflict and the Lome Peace Agreement**

As a small country on the West coast of Africa, Sierra Leone shares borders with Guinea and Liberia. It's a former British colony with an estimated post war population of five and half million (5.5m), which comprises of sixteen ethnic groups. English is the official language and Krio, largely based on the English vocabulary but with its own grammar is the lingua-franca (the common language).

After gaining independence in 1961 from the British, Sierra Leone was ruled from time to time by a series of governments most of which were plagued by corruption. The conflict in Sierra reached its violent climax in the early

1990s. Following the long single party dictatorship rule by President Siaka Stevens (1971-1985) of the All People's Congress (APC) party, Sierra Leoneans became conscious of their rights and were ever determined to have a multi-party democracy afterwards. However, Major General Joseph Momoh who succeeded in 1985 in a referendum that was staged managed, opposed the multi-party expression, which led to the start of a wave of unrests in Sierra Leone. The worsened state of affairs relating to undemocratic governance, human right violations, greed, economic mismanagement, social exclusion and marginalization, unemployment and social decadence were among the major causes for the outbreak of the 1991 civil war; which was initiated by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) under the leadership of retired army corporal Foday Sankoh.<sup>5</sup> With various interventionist approaches ranging from hired private military/security firms to coups, and the setting up of a multinational force, the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) – a military wing of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), democratic governance was revitalised and Armed Tejan Kabba as elected president in 1996. Two months after his election, talks were brokered between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) led government and the RUF in Yamoussoukro, which led to the signing of the Abidjan Peace Accord, on November 30, 1996, after which a ceasefire agreement known as the Conakry Peace Plan on October 23, 1997<sup>6</sup>, was negotiated with the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), a military junta led by retired Major Johnny Paul Koroma that seized power on May 25, 1997 (represented by Col Abdul Karim Sesay – Secretary General and Alimamy Pallo Bangura – Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs) by the Committee of five of ECOWAS on Sierra Leone and was witnessed by representatives of the United Nations (Prof. Ibrahima Fall Asst. Secretary-General UN) and the Organisation of African Unity – OAU (Ms. Adwoa Coleman).<sup>7</sup> After a clear manifestation of non-compliance to the six months grace period agreed upon for a return of power by the AFRC to the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabba, the junta administration faced a very tough resistance from the West African intervention force ECOMOG, aided by the local civil militia group known as 'The Kamajors' (a pro Kabba group consisting of mainly mende huntsmen from the south-east of the country) and a British Company called Sandline International (hired by President Kabba) that offered logistics help to ECOMOG. A Thai businessman, Rakesh Saxena, agreed to pay \$10 million to finance Sandline's role, in exchange for mining rights in Sierra Leone but he was only able to deliver \$1.5 million for Sandline before he was arrested on the orders of the Thai Government.<sup>8</sup> With the support from Sandline, ECOMOG and the pro Kabba Kamajor militia were able to reinstall President Ahmad Tejan Kabba back to power. The West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG comprises of units of national armed forces of member states. It is a non-standing military force consisting of land, sea and air components that were set up by the sixteen member states of ECOWAS to deal with the security problem that followed the collapse of the formal state structure in the Republic of Liberia in 1990 and any other subsequent ones like the one that occurred in Sierra Leone.

In June 1998 the UN Security Council sent an observer mission UNOMSIL to Sierra Leone with a mandate to help monitor the war and disarm the fighters. This process culminated in the signing of the Lome Peace agreement of July 7, 1999 that brought the war to an end. In the aftermath of the peace agreement, the ECOMOG forces departed and UN subsequently established a peacekeeping mission – the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) comprising initially of six thousand (6,000) troops in October 1999. This peacekeeping force was later increased to seventeen thousand five hundred (17,500) troops, including two hundred and sixty (260) military observers by March 2001; making it the largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world at that time.<sup>11</sup> In 2000, the rebel leader Foday Sankoh was captured following a violent and fatal attack on peaceful women demonstrators by his rebel forces in Freetown. By May 2001, UNAMSIL commenced the disarmament of the rebel forces, a process that was followed by the establishment of a UN backed special court to try those that were accused of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The accused persons included members of RUF and Civil Defense Forces (CDF – Kamajors). Since the end of hostilities, two successful democratic elections (2002 and 2007) have been held up to date as the peacebuilding process is still ongoing.

### 3. Coming face to face with the unexpected reality in the Sierra Leone peace process.

The genesis of the war in Sierra Leone coincided with the initial preparation of women the world over for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. With the determination to be included in the governance mechanisms and peace processes of their countries, women, especially in Africa and Sierra Leone in particular, the Sierra Leonean University Women (SLAUW) started their preparation by creating a network that was later named the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF). At the same time, other women's organizations also formed the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP); whose main motive was to show their disgust for the war and to launch a campaign to raise the awareness of fellow women nationwide on their rights.

Being fully convinced that their active but non-violent participation was the only card that could earn them a seat on the peace table, women in Sierra Leone embarked on awareness rising on their rights, through radio discussions and non-violent campaigns to stop the war. Demonstrating this determination, women became very influential and effective, among other things, in the Bintumani 1 and 2 conferences that called for peace and pressured the military junta of 1992 to back down and conduct the 1996 elections that brought Ahmad Tejan Kabba to power. Unfortunately however, irrespective of their positive contributions and preparedness to fully participate in the peace negotiations, the women of Sierra Leone experienced the greatest shock of their lives as they were not considered worthy and therefore not invited to sit at the table. As Jeannette Reno (2000) remarked "men from both sides of the conflict were not willing to include women in a meaningful way as they realized it would mean relinquishing some power".<sup>12</sup> Worst still, it was even more shocking that there was only one sentence in the final peace agreement concerning the women which read:

*Given that women have been particularly victimized during the war, special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials in formulating and implementing national rehabilitation, reconstruction, and development programmes, to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.*<sup>13</sup>

In summarizing this anomaly, Yasmin Jusu-Sherriff (2000) the current President of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) had this to say:

*Initially the women brought nothing to the peace process but idealistic appeals that carried no weight to the belligerents. ... Women believed that their hard work in the democratization process would be rewarded by places at the negotiation table, but politicians recognized that the ideas and attitudes thrown up by the women's movement had the potential of destabilizing traditional politics, so they discouraged further participation of women in leadership.*<sup>14</sup>

There are two possible inferences that could be drawn from the 'deliberate' marginalization of women in the peace process. Firstly, it was clear that the organizers of the peace negotiation, the drafters of the peace accord and even the international community; including USA and Britain who were the sponsors of the programme, completely relented on what they claim to stand for (gender justice, equality and human rights) by failing the women of Sierra Leone; despite the UN's repeated calls for equal gender participation in peace and peacebuilding processes. Secondly, it was also an indication that the women's movement was not strong enough to secure a place at the table in order to have their concerns and aspirations integrated into the document, not just as victims but also as vectors and agents of change for peace. However, irrespective of the weakness on the part of the women's movement, the crux of the matter is that

everyone experiences conflict and war differently. Therefore, any peace and peacebuilding process that would lead to a sustainable and peaceful coexistence has to embody the main concerns, wishes and aspirations of both victims and perpetrators alike.

None the less, despite these initial setbacks to their relentless efforts to participate in the events that were to bring not only an end to the war but provide an avowed and lasting solution to the problems in Sierra Leone, a coalition of women's civil society groups and associations comprising of students, police women, market women, petty traders, nurses etc in a nationwide march for peace on the streets of Freetown, which was organized and sponsored by UNAMSIL, the women again rekindled their determination to achieve lasting peace in Sierra Leone. During a prayer session which climaxed the day's event at the national stadium in Freetown, the spokesperson of UNAMSIL in a speech reiterated UN's recognition of the importance of women's participation in any peace and peacebuilding activity in a post-conflict situation by saying:

*We of the United Nations believe that women are a strong force for peace, because women have the ability to come together in their numbers, to work towards a common goal. [...] women are also the ones who bring the children up, and who can instill in children values, peace, tolerance and cooperation. So for us women are very, very important in building peace.<sup>15</sup>*

But disappointingly however, by August 2003 UNAMSIL did not have women among its military contingents totaling 12,311 troops including military observers also. To say the least, UN itself has never given serious consideration to practicalizing gender mainstreaming and equality in all of its existence. Ambassador Nancy Rubin (1999) in her speech delivered at the United States Institute of Peace Conference Perspective Peacebuilding titled "The Roles of Women in War and Peace" squarely laid the blame on the shoulders of UN (headquarters) for the continuous neglect by governments and organizations to implement gender equality by saying:

*But the UN cannot effectively encourage nations to further bring women into the decision making, peacemaking and political process if the UN itself does not make women more involved in its own peacemaking efforts. As of January 1999, of 14 special representatives, envoys, or deputies appointed by the Secretary General, only two were women. That's gender inequality- women should be at the core of all United Nations activities, dealing with conflict and reconstruction.<sup>16</sup>*

This failure by the UN to fully implemented what it claims to represent in its own backyard, might perhaps be one of the reasons why most governments, NGOs and development practitioners around the world are not taking gender issues and the attainment of equality through gender mainstreaming seriously in their drive to improving the humanitarian/ living conditions and the peaceful co-existence of the world's people.

#### **4. Lessons learnt but quickly forgotten or ignored?**

It has been reasonably proven through various research findings that women make a great and meaningful difference where ever they have been fully allowed onboard peace and peacebuilding ventures. Women's practical experiences in conflict prevention and peacebuilding at all levels (home, community, national or internal) around the world and as was clearly demonstrated in the Sierra Leone by women's civil society organizations before and during the war, have offered the following lessons and practices for organizations, groups, governments, associations, etc to

follow for peaceful co-existence and development of mankind. But from all indications, it seems that in Sierra Leone these lessons were learned but quickly ignored and forgotten as the Lome Peace Agreement lacked a gender perspective that has led to the designing and implementation of gender insensitive peacebuilding programmes and projects. Below are some of the lessons that have been learned from analysis of conflict situations, especially in Africa.

- a) The effects and experiences of conflict by both women and men are remarkably different. Quite apart from the usual effects of war such as killings, maiming, torture and displacements on both men and women, the suffering for women goes beyond the above mentioned as their bodies are used as theatres of war. In other words, women's sexuality is always targeted leading to rape, which results in most cases to reproductive health problems like fistulae, STDs and HIV/AIDS. On the other hand women also experience forced marriages and are made to bear children with no identifiable fathers, all of which have left many women in Sierra Leone still suffering from psychological trauma. If there should be any meaningful and sustainable peace after war, then there is need to redefine peace and security in the peace deal that will incorporate both concerns of women and men, which will consequently serve as the basis for the designing of peacebuilding programmes that will bring a just, peaceful and lasting co-existence between women and men.
- b) The vital roles women play in peacebuilding such as the creation of civil society alliances using multi track approaches right across conflict domains offers them an opportunity for a holistic understanding of peace and security, which are vital and essential ingredients for sustainable peace. Similarly, women are generally known to have a memorable and steady track record of enhancing positive turnarounds in negotiating or conceptualising agreements in conflict scenarios that are inclusive, community-based and more likely to be successful and sustainable in the long run. During the conflict in Sierra Leone women were able to transcend religious, ethnic, class and socio-economic boundaries to enhance cross community and multitrack interaction in their quest for peace.
- c) Instituting gender training programmes for entire organizations, institutions, peacebuilders, etc empowers everyone to be involved in gender mainstreaming. Having gender trained personnel as advisers for all peacebuilding organizations, combined with gender training and opportunities for gender analysis by other staff can greatly help to foster an institutionalized and shared responsibility that will further enhance continuous gender analysis of all programmes. This forms the basis for a more successful, peaceful and sustainable peace. Great evidence abounds in places such as Cambodia that gender awareness training leads to changes in programming and better strategies for addressing gendered issues.
- d) Conflicts create a social transition that alters traditional gender roles of men (providers and protectors) and women (child bearers and care givers), offering new opportunities. The cases of women becoming leaders of fighting groups, heads of households, providers for their families etc in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Rwanda, Sudan, etc. and taking leadership roles and emerging in the public sphere (e.g. Liberia, Pakistan, Israel, etc); are all food for thought.
- e) Addressing trauma is central to peacebuilding. Undertaking the rebuilding of physical structures and making governance arrangements etc in the name of building peace without dealing with one of the most significant but yet rarely acknowledged consequences of war or violent conflict, which is deep rooted trauma, leaves the entire process hanging in a balance. Therefore many women's groups have taken the lead in addressing this menace. In Sierra Leone, very little attention was and still being paid (if at all) to this issue although recommendation for its address in the TRC report is vivid.

## **5. Critical barriers to women's inclusion or effective involvement in peace processes**

A close examination of the peace agreements for Sierra Leone and other countries in Africa, such as Liberia,

Burundi, and DR Congo that ended long years of civil conflict, shows that these peace accords, which are the handy works of men negotiating on behalf of women, failed to recognize women as actors or change agents. Rather they are generally regarded as victims or members of vulnerable groups bundled together with children, handicapped and the elderly in a broad categorization of “women and children”<sup>17</sup>. This use of this nomenclature in itself completely deprives the women from gaining the political space required by them to fully exercise their human rights by contributing to the peacebuilding process, not as mothers or dependants on male relatives but as partners in development. From the above case studies, the following obstacles have been identified, which may in the long run become a stumbling block in the ongoing peace process and the governance mechanism in Sierra Leone if adequate measures are not taken to address the anomalies.

**a) Lack of political strength and political vision**

In most cases women often lack the ideological framework (e.g. limited in scope and life span) and often times suffer from “political illiteracy”, the opposite (political know-how) of which is a requirement for effective engagement in a political activity<sup>18</sup>, that would put them in a better stead in their resolve as a collective women’s movement that remains loosely structured with a fluctuating membership, and reluctant to plan beyond the immediate situation towards solidifying their organizational base.<sup>19</sup> The de-emphasis on formal political structures is an added phenomenon in making women’s political participation ineffective.

**b) Religious pacifism and ideas of non-violence and the adherence to religious orders by women (Africa)**

In many parts of the world and mainly in African societies, religious pacifism, adherence to cultural/ traditional norms and ideas of non-violent means of responding to issues has in many cases acted as barriers to their political aspirations. In Sierra Leone, culture and tradition have always taught and impressed on women to be passive in their relationship with men, thus according men the opportunity to take decisions on their behalf. This offer has always resulted in marginalization and abuse as men have had continuous disregard for women’s issues.

**c) Lack of resources (material and financial)**

In most cases women lack the resources, both material and financial to make their actions effective. Since they mostly work on voluntary bases at the grass root levels and not belong to the main fundraising channels and networks (safe for support from some international organizations), the personal meager resources of women put together cannot for instance give them access to even the media networks in order to enhance their peacebuilding campaigns.

**d) Lack of visibility**

Women’s conflict resolution activities mostly make use of informal means and very often at the periphery of official peace negotiations. But more importantly, even if they contribute to the promotion of peace, these contributions are often ignored once formal peace negotiations start. Women’s peace enthusiasm was mobilized and utilized in Sierra Leone for the march to Lome but their representation at the negotiations table was ignored when the talks materialized.

**e) Sustainability of women’s participation in the main political realm is lacking**

Although women (few) are sometimes brought into the political fray in order to give colour to the group, like it happened in the Liberian peace process, it must be known that representation does not mean meaningful and recognized participation that enhances substantial inputs in peace agreements. On the other hand, some scholars argue that women are more concerned with networking around a specific issue of interest and therefore have not been able to solidify their organizational base in order to fully participate in political transitions. As Ferris (Ferris, 2004) has opined “... women’s groups tend to be less hierarchical and more concerned with networking than with developing a “territorial” sense of a power base. In general, it appears that women’s groups are less concerned than other groups with structures, formal membership, constitutions, and formal leadership. The friendship and solidarity which women experience in these groups may be as important as the political causes they espouse”.<sup>20</sup>

**f) Women’s mode of communication (peaceful matches, lobbying, plays, poems, stripping naked etc) is**



### **problematic**

The above named strategies are confined to the marginalized feminine realm that is without a strong political strategy. Though some can be given recognition in reference to adopting more peaceful non-violent approaches to conflict, yet they create no major impact on long term strategies for securing a seat at formal and official peace negotiations.

#### **g) Lack of experience, exposure and skills in negotiation, advocacy and lobbying strategies**

Although most women have been trained, yet the habitual and perpetual exclusion of them from the “public” (political) arena and spheres of decision making; most often hinders their effectiveness in articulating a secured political platform of action that will also harness a confident peacebuilding process.

In summary, despite these shortcomings, involving women in peacebuilding, it is very much essential for the reconstituting of political, legal, cultural socio-economic and social structures so that they (women) are able to deliver on gender equality goals in order to build a sustainable peace. Gender equality brings to peace-building new degrees of democratic inclusiveness, faster and more durable economic growth and human and social capital recovery.<sup>21</sup> As Nadine (Nadine, 2004) puts it, “... peacebuilding may well offer the single greatest opportunity to redress gender inequalities and injustices in the past whilst setting new precedents for the future”<sup>22</sup>. But most importantly, these opportunities can be enhanced significantly or hampered by how the authorities set their priorities for recovery and uses the available resources for peacebuilding. From available evidence and reports, the Sierra Leone peacebuilding process reveals that the above-mentioned lessons, if learnt at all, are still yet to be reflected practically as the peacebuilding programme priorities. Many ongoing programmes are not gender sensitive or mainstreamed for just, equitable and sustainable development and peaceful co-existence. Below are some of the gender gaps of immense concern even as Sierra Leone is no longer considered for example by Department for International Development (DFID) as “classic” post-conflict country, but as a country in its early development stage “although the lines between the two phases are somewhat blurred”.<sup>23</sup>

## **6. Involving women in peace and peacebuilding processes: A pre-requisite for sustainability**

It has been said and re-echoed over and again by gender experts that women and men experience conflicts different and therefore often take up or are interested in the same issues (e.g. peace and development) but their interests in these issues are gendered. For example, women have gender specific needs around security and peace that may be quite different from men. Similarly so, even among women, different groups have different requirements and priorities at different stages of their life cycle with regards these issues. But on the contrary, despite the wide spread awareness raising campaigns on and international support, including UN resolutions (1325, 1820 etc.) on the roles women play in conflict and the need to involve them in conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes, there is still yet a huge resistance to this intentional inclusion. But it is important to know that bringing women into the mainstream of public office and its bureaucracy is a vital ingredient in engendering governance for development and a sustainable peacebuilding process although it is no guarantee that the interests of women will be fully represented.<sup>24</sup> But as Ms Jennifer Klot, Senior Adviser on HIV/AIDS, Gender and Security, Social Science Research Council espoused:

*Challenges in the area of women and peacebuilding include, but are not limited to, women's participation. There is a need to: (1) get women to the table; (2) strengthen the capacity of women's organizations; and (3) ensure gender issues are in every part of the substantive agenda. After so many rhetorical calls for women's participation, we still need to get women to the table – and to all parts of the table....<sup>25</sup>*

There are various, undeniable and compelling reasons asserting the importance of women's involvement in peacebuilding. These include:

- a) Women in every society are the central caretakers of their families including men and children. In the African context and especially in Sierra Leone, women are central players in the nurturing and the enhancement of peace, which translates into development in their families, communities and nation. In this regard therefore everyone suffers when women are oppressed, victimized, and excluded from the complex act of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.
- b) Women have the capacity (numbers), to instigate violence or peaceful solutions to conflicts. In many parts of the world women are actively engaged in agitating and perpetuating violent solutions to conflicts as was seen in both the Liberian and Sierra Leone conflicts. Similarly so, they can also serve as important role models, which may permit and inspire other women to be involved in the development continuum (e.g. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf). More importantly, through the cultural socialization processes in many cultures in Africa, especially in the Sub-Saharan, a vaunt legacy that has and continues to teach women to foster relationships and avoid violence; they have been able to prove themselves to be effective change agents. Hence, their recognized roles as mothers. Giving therefore their role as mothers, wives, caregivers, etc. coupled with their experiences not only with conflicts at all levels but also their special relationships with the environments in which they live; women can bring unique insights and values to the peacebuilding process.
- c) Both women and men have different experiences of violence and peace, therefore each party must be encouraged and giving adequate opportunities to bring their unique insights and qualities to the peacebuilding process. This will help enhance gender equity and hence a peaceful coexistence that will promote growth and development.
- d) Fourthly, the peacebuilding should be seen as a process that encompasses an inherent empowerment for women because issues of racism, classism, sexism and ethnic and religious discrimination most often emanate from the same belief (patriarchal) that some people are "better" than others. Similarly so, the sexist sees the life of women as less valuable than that of men, which in many cases leads to or fuels violence against women. So their effective involvement in peace and peacebuilding poses not only a challenge to these sexist beliefs (women as less valuable than that of men, patriarchy – men been better etc) and all other structures that discriminate against women but renders them invalid and untrue.
- e) Lastly, based on the abounding existing evidence, women have proven track records as successful peacebuilders everywhere they have been giving the opportunity. Employing strategies such as inclusivity and collaboration, and using the methodology of multitrack approaches to peacebuilding, women in organizations such as: Jerusalem Link and women in black - Israel/Palestine, Women's Initiative for Peace in South East Asia (WIPSA), Women's Mass Action for Peace (Liberia), MARWOPNET, Women's Forum, 50/50 Group etc. (Sierra Leone) to mention but a few, have shown that women's groups conceptualize strategies and produce peacebuilding outcomes that are broad-based and sustainable. Hence, they have been able to cut across regional, tribal, racial, class, and political affiliations and barriers (issues that men usually find difficulty with) for the general good of all concerned.

In summary, in order to effectively involve women in peacebuilding, it is very much essential for the reconstituting of the political, legal, cultural, socio-economic and social structures so that they (women) are able to fully participate and deliver on gender equality goals for the betterment and happiness of all concerned. As Nadine Puts it, "... peacebuilding may well offer the single greatest opportunity to redress gender inequalities and injustices in the past whilst setting new precedents for the future"<sup>26</sup>. From available evidence and reports, the Sierra Leone peacebuilding process reveals that the above mentioned lessons, if learnt at all, are still yet to be reflected practically as the ongoing peacebuilding programme priorities set by NGOs and the UN Peacebuilding Commission are not gender sensitive or mainstreamed for just, equitable and sustainable development and peaceful co-existence.

## 7. Foreseeable impacts of women's exclusion on sustainable peacebuilding in Sierra Leone

### Preamble:

The complex histories of conflict Sierra Leone posed and continue to pose extremely difficult challenges to the reconstruction processes after the guns became silent both for internal and external players or actors. In the nutshell, reconstruction “had to deal with much more than just physical infrastructure”.<sup>27</sup> It involved the resettling of thousands of displaced people, the integration of soldiers and ex-combatants into society, the reconciliation of communities, the strengthening of local civil society structures and the creation and transformation of state institutions, all of which are ingredients for a sustainable peacebuilding. In Sierra Leone, the rural area's local governance structures were severely weakened, malfunctioning and therefore were unaccountable and nontransparent. Endemic corruption, whose reduction became a primary objective of the reconstruction process,<sup>28</sup> coupled with the persistent post independent physical, economic, and political challenges in the country the “social fabric” of Sierra Leone's society was torn and trust in the state had to be re-built. But this could only be achieved with the full involvement of all stakeholders (men, women and children alike) and the international backers such as World Bank, DFID, UN (who provided funds for DDR, security sector reform and the conduct of elections and now the UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBC/ PBF) that was instituted in 2006, UNIFEM and some International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). But although these bodies are trying to graft women into the ongoing peacebuilding process through for example a National Consultation for Enhancing Women's Engagement with UN's Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone in January 2007 (that helped establish a national peacebuilding agenda for women and support in other areas), yet women's exclusion from the formal negotiation table has and will continue to pose challenges for the ongoing post war peacebuilding that requires the mainstreaming of gender in all the processes. The marginalization of women from equal participation in peace negotiations denies half the population equal access to the political process and denies all people the benefits of having a female perspective in political decision-making. It is therefore not enough to have some “token women”, however capable, at the highest levels of decision-making. In essence more women need to be included at all levels of decision-making as women with a comprehension of social justice and gender equality can make peace negotiations more effective.<sup>29</sup> In a launching ceremony of an assessment report on the impact of armed conflict on women and their role in peacebuilding in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers said that women can play a stronger role in conflict resolution as they tend to approach conflict resolution in a practical way. Further commending women, the High Commissioner said “The way women address conflict is different because women find a practical way to resolve conflicts”.<sup>30</sup> In an interview with the Newsletter *Equal Time*<sup>31</sup>, the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for MONUC, Lena Sundh in talking about the importance of women's involvement in formal peace talks said:

*...[Not] only are the peace negotiations a good place for former belligerents to close the chapter of war and discuss the future of the country, but they also serve as a springboard for selecting the future cadres of the post-war society. If women are not included at a preliminary stage of the negotiations, then it may be too late to bring them later, once the stakeholders have already shared tasks and responsibilities in the reconstruction of the country.*<sup>32</sup>

As this was exactly the case in 1999 at Lome, there are already some foreseeing implications or bottle necks in the Sierra Leone peacebuilding process that are ominous threats and challenges that need to be addressed if the enabling environment for sustainable peace and development are to be ensured. Below are some of the challenges that are

beginning to surface.

**a) Lack of gender sensitive programmes and unaddressed root causes of war, misplaced priorities and the worsening state of events in the country that may lead to a re-occurrence of violence**

The absence of women from the Lome Peace negotiation table has rendered almost all peacebuilding programmes by both the government of Sierra Leone and the PBC/PBF gender insensitive. However, I must hasten to state here that irrespective of this ‘anomaly’, women are still contributing immensely to the ongoing peacebuilding processes, which is clearly evident by the existence and operations of MARWOPNET, WIPNET and the 50/50 Group. As Biersteker puts it even “[t]he resolutions that created the Peacebuilding Commission, like most UN resolutions, contain ambiguities and compromise language. There is no definition of peacebuilding itself”.<sup>33</sup> At the theoretical level or conceptual level there is a lack of an agreed definition, which can even trigger the question of the practical meaning of peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. There seems to be no clear consensus about the term in the field. Stakeholders in the ground have often related peacebuilding activities to those immediately after the war end including activities such as DDR, resettlement of refugees, reconciliation and the holding of elections.<sup>34</sup> In contrast to this narrow definition, the PBC states several times that peacebuilding is about addressing the deeper root causes of conflict and finding long term solutions in the areas of youth employment, justice, good governance and capacity building. The lack of a gender perspective in the Lome agreement coupled with this expanded definition of peacebuilding by the PBC has even raised another concern among development experts working in Sierra Leone as to “whether peacebuilding has become just a new label for development”.<sup>35</sup> The lack of consensus among stakeholders, leading to misguided priorities in the peacebuilding process in Sierra Leone was clearly demonstrated in the energy sector soon after the 2007 elections. The new government that took power insisted on the addition of energy (electricity) supply as priority into the PBC/PBF compact, with an allocated amount of \$ 9 million for a future pipeline project, a move that raised the question as to whether the energy sector constitutes a peacebuilding priority activity. It is an undisputed fact that electricity is essential for development but with only seven (7%) percent of the population accessing electricity the question that comes to a rational mind is for whose benefit was electricity prioritized as a peacebuilding activity?, if not for those in Freetown who overwhelmingly swayed the 2007 elections in favour of the current government. One commentator simply put it thus “[T]he PBF tries to build peace by bringing light to the people of Freetown”.<sup>36</sup> Majority of the population in Sierra Leone are of the opinion that some other more important peacebuilding issues such as reconciliation, reparation or food security etc (all in the now abandoned Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations) should have been giving more attention for effective peacebuilding. Commenting on this issue in comparison with one of the most important but neglected issue of food security, one interviewee said “Now we have light, but we are hungry”.<sup>37</sup>

**b) Further entrenchment of patriarchal practices, increased in Gender-Based Violence (GBV) especially in the traditional settings leading to increased human right abuses**

Sierra Leone has been and still remains a highly patriarchal society, robed in institutionalized gender inequalities and armed with discriminatory laws and customs that limit women’s rights in areas such as marriage, property rights, and sexual offences. Sierra Leone’s history has for ever been marred with prevalent gender inequality, with women mostly discriminated against and heavily underrepresented in, politics, socio-economic and decision making structures as stake holders, which was clearly demonstrated by their failure to reach the negotiation table in Lome, amidst frantic efforts. The persistence in gender based violence (GBV) for example, is inextricably linked to gender norms and the unequal power relations that obtain in any society, and the inequalities often manifest itself in violence against women particularly by men who are in positions of power or authority such as the police, teachers, army officers, humanitarian workers, community leaders and heads of households.<sup>38</sup> These unequal structures and their unprecedented and unequal proportional access to resources and opportunities, have often than not contributed to the higher percentage of illiteracy, extreme poverty and the frequent violation of women’s rights – one of the root causes of the war. The minimal or the

faded attention by all efforts to address the building of sustainable peace in Sierra Leone to address these issues, should be a glaring early warning sign to any peace loving Sierra Leonean that the peace trail remains fragile.

**c) Lack of gender mainstreaming and awareness in national institutions and processes, which will read to further political isolation and increased poverty for women**

Although some improvements have been made in institutional reforms (law, police, governance etc. reforms) provides women with some opportunities for improvement in their low status in society, there still remains a number of challenges. The passing of the three gender bills into law by June the 2007 was a significant mile stone but remains to be widely and effectively disseminated and digested by the citizenry not only in the cities (Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Port Loko etc.) through radio discussion programmes as usual but reaching the locals in the villages through grass root sensitization using village assemblies, tribal authorities, informal means etc., as majority of those vulnerable to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) do not reside in big towns but the suburbs. GBV is one major area that would have been addressed at the peace negotiation table provided women were granted to opportunity to participate. More disheartening is the fact that the social cost of GBV is most often under-estimated and ignored and therefore not treated as a security issue per se that has broader political or economic implications consequences.<sup>39</sup> The TRC issued strong recommendations in lieu of this issue but these are yet to be implemented if not shelved already as other documents such as the most recent Governments white Paper (a combination of some issues in the TRC report and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper - PRSP) now seems to have gained supremacy in the race for peace and development in the country. Compounding the challenge further is the weakness and the inability of the gender affairs Ministry to perform effectively, especially in the area of GBV, due to the lack of sufficient funds available to it.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that the existence of the Family Support Unit (FSU) of the police, various reports on the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, policy frame works by the Peacebuilding Commission, PRSP, the Peace and Consolidation Strategy etc all are not only taking onboard GBV for example but are also serving as bench marks for the monitoring of governments progress in handling GBV, yet failure to fully engage women's organizations in the security sector reform process and the lukewarm sensitivity of the police and army to gender issues is proof that this issue remains to be effectively grafted into the broader political, economic and security apparatus and strategies.

**d) Political manipulation of projects, underrepresentation of Civil Society groups in peacebuilding structures, and no monitoring mechanism, which will lead to misappropriation and underdevelopment**

Emerging from a ten year civil war that left the country's economy in shambles and the task of rebuilding squarely resting on the shoulders of donors, coupled with international and local pressure to implement the peace agreement with the fear of preventing another conflict, presents a gloomy picture of any financial support by the government for civil society and or gender programmes; especially when international financial support for the peacebuilding process has dwindled remarkably. The gender ministry is one of if not the least funded ministries in Sierra Leone. The government, stakeholders like UNDP and development agencies are accused of neglecting the country side as there has been no PBC project implemented outside of Freetown even as it has been stressed that Freetown is not Sierra Leone. Hence, widening of the gender inequality gaps and increased poverty. Interms of representation of civil society organizations in PBC/ PBF, there are only two – WANEP and MARWOPNET. Although it is argued that these two organizations are among the few that have the experience, capacity and the network and chosen in agreement with government to represent civil society in the PBC/PBF process, yet critics argue that they are not truly representative of grass-root people<sup>41</sup> and therefore cannot effectively relay their wishes.

**e) The continued existence of some out dated customary practices and discriminatory laws may increase abuse of women's human rights and promote impunity**

The existence of a complex web of the legal environment in Sierra Leone, which combines three legal systems – general law, which constitutes an inherited statutory and codified law from British colonial rule; customary law,

which embodies unwritten traditional codes and practices and Islamic law, which differentiates statutes that are related to marriage, divorce and inheritance law from those within the customary law. Defined as “the rules of law by which customs are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone”, eighty (80) percent of the population of Sierra Leone that live outside of the capital Freetown, fall within the jurisdictions of the local courts and the diverse customary law systems and their implications. The important challenge here is that although women in Sierra Leone have certain rights accorded them by the general law, yet jurisdiction over a greater majority of the population is by the customary system, which can be influenced and manipulated at will by men with power. This system is popularly used by families because it’s more easily accessible, requires lower costs, and coupled with traditional views that crimes like GBV; which is something that occurs within the private sphere should be resolved informally.<sup>42</sup> Under this informal system, where decisions are most times made by chiefs or other traditional rulers with the mandate to preside over such matters of customary law, and not the local court authorities; makes discrimination against women more pervasive<sup>43</sup> because of their patriarchal and traditional beliefs that woman should be subordinate. As reported by Amnesty International (AI) “not only do chiefs act outside their jurisdiction, at times they collude with men in the community to forcibly evict women and children from their homes or subject them to arbitrary detention and other forms of gender based violence”.<sup>44</sup>

**f) Increased Gender-based violence and economic/ human insecurity for women, which will serve a threat to development**

In addition to physical security, which is still of immense concern as GBV continues against women in Sierra Leone, there is every tendency of increase in poverty amongst women, a further erosion of their social networks and coping strategies, increasing limits of their options to employment and hence livelihood generation and a continued exclusion from political and decision-making structures. GBV has the tendency of preventing victims (mainly women) from taking advantage of educational and employment opportunities that has a correlation with the low productivity of labour and its efficient allocation in both the household and the economy since women account for sixty – eighty (60-80) percent of the work force in Agricultural production in Sierra Leone,<sup>45</sup> create an unequal distribution of resources, which subsequently also produces the non-monetary aspects of poverty – lack of human security and low quality of life for all in society. In the nut shell, all of these negative vices, if not addressed, will impact on the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

## **8. Conclusion**

Building a sustainable peace requires more than just putting an end to a conflict. For women in general, peacebuilding involves a wholesome support for the rule of law (revision of national laws that encourage discriminate against women), a thorough reform of the constitution that will empower them (women) and instituting equality for the sexes, judicial reforms (protection of women against gender-based violence and provision of legal assistance); electoral participation (the right to vote freely and to be voted for) as well as access to and control of economic resources, education and learning. The women of Sierra Leone, especially at the grass roots level remained extremely active even when in 1997; several male members fled the country for their lives. Through their relentless efforts in organizing matches, sending delegates to meet with various conflicting parties, and rallying for peace both in the communities and at the national level, women played and continue to play remarkable roles in the search for a durable solution to the crises (though without formal recognition) and the building of a sustainable peace.

As earlier pointed out, women suffer most of the atrocities of war (raped, maimed, killed, take care of war wounded, children, aged, etc. Therefore peace negotiations after conflicts are supposed to offer important and key opportunities for their voices to be heard in order that their needs, desires and aspirations are included in the final deliberations that will produce a fair and acceptable deal to all parties to the conflict and enhance the sustainability

of the peace that will be built. It is important to note however, that although women were not involved or given the opportunity in 1997 when the Lome Peace deal was negotiated and signed, yet they have continued to contribute what they could to the peacebuilding process as women's groups and civil society organizations such as MARWOPNET, WIPNET, 50/50 Group etc. have continued to play key roles in enhancing gender equality and implementing community-based initiatives to address the needs of women in specific and critical areas such as health, income-generation, education, negotiation, legal rights and decision making. Even though these contributions were or are most often undertaken at the grass roots level, yet they have impacted positively by improving the wellbeing of people throughout the country. In this regard, if the capacities of women's organizations are enhanced, fully supported and properly harnessed in conjunction with the above mentioned provisions, rights and reforms, they will be more effective in their collective roles of influencing local conflict dynamics to foster efforts in consolidating a genuine and sustainable reconciliation and peacebuilding, not only within Sierra Leone but within the Mano River sub-region at large.

To achieve peace for Sierra Leone and perhaps even the West African sub-region, there is need to undertake the following:

- a) Support grass root women's networks actively involved in peacebuilding by assisting them in the mobilization of the financial, material, logistics and technical resources to fill in gaps where they exist, which will enhance their effectiveness. The peacebuilding networks by women's groups greatly facilitate a cross-fertilization of ideas, best practices, and lessons learned from different regions of conflict. Similar so, they enhance knowledge about different approaches to conflict prevention and peacebuilding and more importantly, they can also provide a context for the generation of financial and human resources that other women's groups can use to prevent conflict. In most if not all peacebuilding frameworks and poverty reduction strategies, 'pro-poor' investments in human capacity are targeted primarily at the most marginalized through low-skill vocational training, public works employment, micro-credit and primary education. But it is interesting to note that no country has ever developed without investing in the human skills needed to use modern technology and shape intellectual and research agendas.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, strategic consideration must be given to supporting secondary and tertiary education, agricultural research and basic sciences, and the development of information and communications technologies. Similarly so, the PBC for example, which is the main peacebuilding and support organisation in Sierra Leone, can help expand the international community's focus beyond micro credit, to consider socio-economic strategies which build on women's historical successes in market based social entrepreneurship, trading, the fisheries and agriculture including through the provision of substantial loans, support for technical skills upgrades, and removal of gender biases in market access. Short-term programmes like those in Sierra Leone which support expatriate transfers of knowledge should also be explored.<sup>47</sup>
- b) Mainstream and implement gender equity in all peacebuilding programmes and projects. As this process requires the movement beyond an approach that simply includes women in existing peacebuilding programmes or creates special women's projects set apart from other programming, the unique contributions of women based on their experiences of violence is a glaring signal for the need to mainstream gender in all conflict prevention and peacebuilding programmes.
- c) Empower and grant women the required space (political) to fully participate in peacebuilding. Although many women are already empowered and are already contributing by playing roles in the Sierra Leone peacebuilding process, yet many more are not able to contribute meaningfully because they are refused the opportunity to participate or do not see themselves as able to do so. For example national mechanisms and machineries for the advancement of women have been established in Sierra Leone through an affirmative such as the informal and formal quotas system in politics. However, this needs be strengthened (e.g. increasing the quota and granting more

ministerial and senior level management and decision making positions) to ensure women's active participation in public policy formulation and implementation. The current peacebuilding approaches in Sierra Leone there lack visible support for national women's rights machinery and would benefit from 'best practice' guidance on the most effective formulations for women's engagement in post-conflict governance.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, all constraints to women's meaningful engagement in political institutions and public decision making require specific commitments to address factors that inhibit women's ability to campaign for public office or their freedom of choice at the polls should be completely removed. In addition, women's empowerment simply comes through training, networking, and opportunities where women can be effectively involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating peacebuilding programmes.

- d) Promote UN resolutions 1325, 1820 and CEDAW. These resolutions clearly recommend and assert the total inclusion of women in political, socio-economic development, conflict prevention and peacebuilding processes. Although Sierra Leone has signed and ratified CEDAW, adopted 1325 and in the process of doing so for resolution 1820, yet the abysmal level of women's participation in decision making positions and the conspicuous absence of their perspectives in policy and legislation remains one key failure in the full implementation of CEDAW and 1325. Considering the important roles women played in laying the foundation for the Lome Peace settlement, and still continuing to relentlessly contribute the peacebuilding process despite their marginalization, there is need for a complete change and an increase in their positions of authority if the peace every Sierra Leonean is yearning for has to be built sustainably.
- e) Undertake a constitutional review to repeal discriminatory laws as fair and appropriate laws are the basis for growth and recovery for any nation. Increasing women's access to justice requires legal reforms that bring formal and traditional justice systems into conformity with human rights norms and standards. Ending gender discrimination in Sierra Leone therefore requires technical support for enacting constitutional, legislative, electoral, judicial reforms, and the reform of military codes. Although some police stations in Freetown and provincial head-quarter towns in Sierra Leone have the FSU, none the less consideration should be given to establishing special courts to try sexual and gender based crimes in order to relieve the backlog of pending cases, establishment of specialized police stations for women especially in rural Sierra Leone where gender violence is rife, and the establishment of hospital police to track and monitor gender violence and crimes. Increasing women's legal literacy and aid, monitoring and reporting women's human rights violations, ensuring reparations and restitution for women, and training and capacity building for gender justice must also be central to reform efforts. Constructing special courtrooms and prisons for women, and providing necessary office equipment and translation services are necessary starting points.

To conclude, the author is of the firm belief that if the above proposed recommendations are taken seriously and fully and effectively implemented, coupled with other meaningful and positive steps, the ability of women to participate in all processes leading to a sustainable peace in Sierra Leone will be further strengthened, which will translate into equality for all and hence, sustainable and peaceful co-existence and development in Sierra Leone.



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