

Gender and Conflict in Nigeria: An Analysis of Chibok Women and Children

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ABSTRACT

Any peace process that ignores the needs and roles of women is unnatural, and therefore inherently unstable. During post-conflict transitions, the empowerment of women is crucial to re-launching social and economic development. The focus is on women at the receiving end of men's senseless war, women, like men, are victims and actors in wars and armed conflicts but usually in different ways and different fields. During wars, women participate in new activities and assume new roles, often taking on more responsibilities. Despite these changes, women are often marginalized in post-conflict peace building, both in the societies and emerging from conflict, and in the formulation and implementation of peace and peace-building strategies by international peace operatives. (Norwegian institute of international Affairs, 2001). The CHIBOK SCHOOL GIRLS abducted and taken as hostages, have the support of the Federal Government and the sympathy of the international community, but as they have been released from custody, little is heard about their welfare and school and empowerment, little is also heard about how resolved is the government in educating women in general in Borno, and Nigeria, majority of women in the North have been burdened by domestic work from childhood, marrying as not so literate adults bearing children and thus, their schooling have been crippled and becoming poorer than their parent, .in this 21st century. The methodology is understanding Poverty in Africa that has gender dimension in educational imbalance and often this has also been demonstrated in war, conflicts and insurgencies across Africa, in Somalia, Nigeria and other flash points where women have been disadvantaged in furthering their education but used as sex slaves or cheap political and religious bargain, years after the Beijing Affirmative action. This paper discussed the gender conflict and crisis in Nigeria in analysis to the Chibok school girls and women, vis a vis poverty and underdevelopment. The recommendations are far reaching, very practical and multi-dimensional.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the concept of gender is discussed in the context of related issues like feminist theory, sex, gender and women studies. There is a contention that African feminism is quiet distinct from western feminism because of the peculiar circumstance of the former. The social context and dialectical existence of the African women make the difference. In spite of the Beijing declaration on affirmative action, women in Africa are not yet in the mainstream in the political, social, economic, as well as peace and conflict related issues. A strong case therefore is made for gender equity on the continent, especially in peace

and conflict resolution sector. This is because the vast majority affected by any armed conflict including refugee and internally displaced persons (IDP) are women and children. Besides women represents more than half of the world population. Armed conflict today is more likely to occur within states than across national borders. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of intrastate conflict has proliferated worldwide. This escalation in the number of intrastate conflict is even more pronounced in Africa due to level of poverty and weak political institution as a result of long the military rule in most of these countries. Economic integration, political upheaval and competition for scarce resources have opened a Pandora's Box of long-suppressed ethnic religious and regional tension that has erupted into violent conflicts.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Before looking at gender with respect to conflict and peace, it is important to define the term "gender" because often times the term gender is misconstrued to mean "women"

Gender

Gender refers to social attributes that are acquired or learned during socialization and define activities, responsibility, and needs connected to being male or female and not to biological identity associated with masculinity and femininity. Such learned or acquired attributes are expressed as power, roles, resources and privileges of men and women. Gender is thus a socially constructed identity through which roles are assigned at different levels and which can differ accordingly to culture and can be changed by circumstances such as conflict. Gender is also defined as the qualities associates with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes the way in which societies differentiates appropriate behavior and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relation tends to include a strong element of inequality between women and men are strongly influenced by ideology. (United Nation Development Report 1986.258). Gender is often seen as loosely synonymous with sex and lazily synonymous with women. However following the argument of Joan Scott (1986) we see gender not only as a constitutive element of social relationship based on perceived differences between the sexes but also as a primary way of signifying relationships of power. There are two major perspectives that cannot be ignored, feminist theory and gender studies. "feminist theory could be defined as the theorization of women's oppression and gender studies could be define as investigation into the ways sex and sexuality become power relation in society. Here sex means male and female and sexuality as in sexual behavior. No doubt these are somewhat idiosyncratic and less than completely informative definitions. They are nonetheless useful, though not necessarily all will be considered.

Conflict

According to Wikipedia, conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group.

Conflict can arise between members of the same group known as intra group conflict or it can occur between two or more groups and involve violence, interpersonal discord and psychological tension known as intergroup conflict.

Gender Conflict

Hence “gender conflict” as defined by Magda Healey refers to the idea that males and females in a society often have conflicting interests, in which men and women, competes for resources and power. Studying gender via the prism of gender conflict theory emphasizes inequalities between men and women, and the fact that in the majority of societies’ males are the privileged groups that controls and often oppresses females.

Conflict Theory as Applied to Gender

The notion gender conflict is part of a wider approach that perceives a society as an arena in which members struggle for resources and dominance. The roots of conflict theory lie in classic Marxist thinking which focuses on class conflict. Friedrich Engels pointed out analogies between the status of working class at work and that of women in the family environment. Modern conflict theory proposes that groups other than social classes- such as men and women also have genuinely conflicting interests. Even if gender roles originally came about by functional consensus, which is still debatable, males ended up as dominant group that controls most resources and attempt to maintain their privileged status by controlling and restricting females. While gender conflict goes a long way in explaining women’s historical and contemporary roles, it often ignores factors like race and class status and also impact gender relations.

Conflict and Gender Relations

We have mentioned earlier in this paper that gender studies are usually inaccurately equated to women’s studies. In almost all societies, least of all African countries, the female gender is usually referred to as the other gender or the weaker gender. On the basis of this classification, women have been given the crumbs from the masters table. Who are these masters? These masters are the men, who have appropriated the position of leadership of the society. Such appropriation has led to unequal treatment of both genders.

Women and gender relation could be examined under three broad categories which are-

- i. Social and psychological
 - ii. Economic
 - iii. Political.
- i. Social and psychological:**
Physical security in post conflict societies is a critical issue for women. Formal peace agreements end over hostilities between combatants but do little to contain the overflow of violence into communities. Women are especially vulnerable to low-level violence during the early stages of post-conflict transition. Fear of violence and sexual abuse traps women in their homes and prevents them from engaging in

important economic activities. This stress exacerbates the trauma experienced by women during conflict.

Recent conflict has highlighted the use of rape as a tool of warfare. In Rwanda, women were raped as means of ethnic cleansing, serving not only to terrorize individual victims but also to inflict collective terror on an ethnic group. (USAID 2000) In some countries, such as Angola and Mozambique, combatants kidnapped women to use as sex slaves – a tactic for terrorizing and dehumanizing young women from particular ethnic groups. The social and psychological impact of conflict has transformed gender relation both during and after conflict. In the face of extreme hardship, traditional roles are adapted to meet the new realities imposed by conflict.

ii. Economic:

Women assume greater economic responsibilities as heads of households.

Women take on the responsibility of caring for the many children left orphaned or abandoned during conflict. Domestic Violence against women increases as a result of the stress, trauma, and social disorder that emerge during and after conflict. Ethnically mixed families experience especially difficult problems as ethnic cleansing forces people to make untenable choices for survival. The economic impact of intrastate conflict on women is severe. Compounding the general poverty and hardship caused by war is the women's lack of access to the means of production, particularly land. In Rwanda, for example, women have no right to the lands owned by their dead husbands or parents. In countries where women are to have access to land, they often lack the resources needed to farm them.

The consequences of the post-conflict economic collapse are predictably worse for women, given the cultural, social and economic context of gender relations, especially in Africa. Women-headed households, women refugee returnees, and socially vulnerable women all experience marked economic decline during post conflict transition.

iii. Political:

The impact of conflict many times actually creates opportunities for women to increase their public roles and responsibilities. In the absence of men women take on leadership roles in both civic and political institutions. Women take on exceptionally active and visible roles in peace processes and reconciliation efforts.

In spite of the fact that conflict has a high level of impact on the lives of women, it is disheartening to not that they are not fully involved in the peace-building process because the playing field is not level for both genders. Something then needs to be done to rectify this anomaly in favor of the female gender. We need to mainstream gender in all areas of human development including the peace sector.

The Effect of War are Felt Hardest by Women and Children

May 10, 2013: Tadize Madzima-Basha argues that women and children are often the worst affected by conflict. Therefore, it is vital that women play a central role in peace

process and post-conflict reconstructions. There is no doubt that war affects women and men differently. Whenever there has been conflict, women and children have been known to receive the hard end of the stick. Women and children are often the most vulnerable and prone to being hit hardest. Throughout history, we see examples of terrible abuses against women and children from the 1.1million children killed during the Holocaust. To the many women and raped or killed during the Rwandan Genocide. Women who survive these atrocities often have to live with the wound and terrifying images of rape, war and death for the rest of their lives. Women also suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, stigmatization and sometimes unwanted pregnancies. They are faced with the daunting task of keeping families together after displacement, providing food, clothing and shelter in what in most instances, destroyed infrastructure, for their children and their families. The current conflict situation in Somalia is another example of the crimes committed against women and children during war times. According to Human Rights Watch, internally displaced people in Somalia are suffering sexual violence in the form of gang rape and other forms of abuse in Mogadishu refugee camps. Human Rights Watch reports that the abuse takes place at the hands of armed groups, including government forces. The rape is gruesome and degrading. Another typical example of current conflict situation and abuse of women and children lead us back home to the Chibok women and children in Nigeria which is our main focus in this paper. It highlights and examines the gender rights violations dimensions of the current insurgency in Nigeria.

Chibok – Brief History

Chibok is a Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. It is located in the Southern part of the State and occupies a land mass of 1.350km². With a population of 66,105 (according to 2006 Census), the town of Chibok is primarily a Christian village with Muslim minority. Most of the people speak the Kibaku language. It is one of the sixteen Local Government Areas that constitute the Borno Emirate, a traditional State located in Borno State, Nigeria (Wikipedia).

Abduction of Chibok Girls

In this same town, on the 14th of April, 2014, two hundred (200) Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram members till date. The female students were kidnapped from Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigeria. Responsibility for the kidnappings was claimed by Boko Haram, and Islamic Jihadist and terrorist organization based in North-Eastern, Nigeria. Boko Haram operates on the obnoxious philosophy that western education is forbidden and the group's adherents appeared to be thoroughly indoctrinated. Therefore, while the group has attacked a variety of public spaces, schools are highly vulnerable as witnessed in Chibok, Borno State.

Participation of Women in Peace and Security

In the initial stages, the Nigerian government did not believe the abduction had taken place. So it took the effort of women in raising awareness of the incident by sending out the message *Bring Back Our Girls*#. This grew into a global campaign which spread to

the streets of Nigeria with demonstrations led by women's organizations. United States First Lady, Michelle Obama, and many others joined the global online campaign for the release of the girls. Members of the international community sent solidarity messages and pledges of support to the Nigerian government. It took over two weeks after the incident, before the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, finally confirmed the seizure of the girls. This paper also argues that women who took charge of the campaign sought to fulfill the vision of United Nations Security Council (UNSCR 1325) to increase women representation at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. It highlighted and placed the case of school girls in a remote area of Nigeria on the global agenda for peace and security. The resolution places the responsibility to "ensure" women's meaningful participation in such spaces on governments. But in Nigeria, action that sought to seek Chibok girls release were interpreted in the context of the on-going political impasse between the North-South presidential rotation and counter accusations of Boko Haram for political gain.

Violence against Girls

Following the president's confirmation of the abduction, the Nigerian government and security services began providing details on the girls. But there was one problem about the actual number of school girls abducted which kept changing. It ranged from 100 to almost 300, with similar confusion regarding the escapees. In May 2014, a police commissioner explained the confusion as due to the conveying of girls from different schools. The official number was only confirmed in June 2014 by a presidential Fact-finding Commission; almost two months after the abduction. On May 5 2014, a Boko Haram video highlighted another problem which extended beyond the crises: the exploitation of children as brides. In the video, its leader, Abubakar Shekau, threatened to sell the girls as well as "marry of a woman at the age of 12" (a nine year old was described as a girl, however). His definition of a woman goes against international law, which considers anyone below the age of 18 a child. Such act is a violation of their human rights and unlawful which is typical example of the gender based violence (GBV) which is the dimension the insurgency has now assumed.

Gender Based Violence is defined by the UN as 'physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life' (World Health Organization). Such violence often doubly impacts women first, through the experience of violence and its aftermath, secondly through the reaction of their families, particularly men to their status as survivors of sexual crime. The Bama abduction, like the abduction of 200 Chibok girls and recent increase in the number of female suicide bombers are typical examples of the gender based violence.

Consequences of Boko Haram Terrorism on Women

1. Abduction of Women and Girls:

The activity of Boko Haram insurgency has various implications on women and girls, most of these women and girls abducted by Boko Haram in the northern areas of Nigeria experience sexual violence including rape, torture and murder.

2. **Arbitrary Arrest of Women by Government Security Agents:**

Boko Haram is not the only culprit in the abuse of women in the conflict. From the government side, women have been arbitrarily arrested by government security agents for the simple reasons that their relatives are suspected members of Boko Haram. A critical examination of this situation shows that women are caught in the middle of the conflict. It is affirmed that all the women targeted by government security agents are for instrumental purposes, mostly to extract information from them. This is an outright infringement on women's fundamental human rights.

3. **Use of Women as Pawns in their Activities:**

Scholars and researchers have documented that Boko Haram's cycle of abduction, detention and increased violence against women and girls are for tactical reasons. In June 2013, an AK-47, a pistol and improved explosive devices (IEDs) were found in the garments of two shivering veiled women in Maiduguri. It is inhuman and quite disgusting that women are regarded as a mere pawn in the chess game of social conflict.

4. **Inflicting Collective Terror on Women:**

Virtually all conflicts around the world are caused by men and yet women and girls suffer the major consequences. The use of violence and intimidation as well as kidnap, forced marriage and compulsory conversion is a tactical way Boko Haram plays on the psychology of women and children. The rape of women for example, is a means of ethnic cleansing, serving not only to terrorize individual victims but also to inflict collective terror on the group.

Use of Women as Wartime Labour Force:

Women and girls are also used by Boko Haram wartime labour force. They are targeted both for their assets and as "assets" in themselves. Their value is reproductive and productive. Women and girls in captivity are used for cooking, cleaning and other duties that may be assigned to men by their captors. Many may also be forced to bear children that will grow to further the cause of the insurgency.

5. **Demoralize Women Education:**

Boko Haram's misguided ideology that "western education" is sinful has significant negative consequences on the education of women and the girl child in the northern part of Nigeria. For fear of attack by the group, most secondary schools in the affected region (northeast, Chibok schools for example) have closed women education is very crucial for sustainable development because it links them to other areas of life-supplying opportunities like access to quality health, economic freedom, legal and political rights among others.

6. **Livelihood Crisis:**

The implication of the Boko Haram insurgency and the consequent response from government has serious negative effects on livelihood of population most especially the women. It is observed that public security volatility in the northeastern States has hampered normal productive agricultural and commercial activities. It instructive to note that women play active roles in agriculture and rural livelihood, but the fear of attacks by insurgents has often driven them into hiding

7. **Missing Childhood:**

Many children have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the conflict in northeast Nigeria before Boko Haram, military forces and civilian self defense groups. Children are forced to flee violence and as a result have devastating impact on them. The abduction of more than 200 girls in Chibok is only one of the endless tragedies being replicated on an epic scale across Nigeria and the region (Manuel Fontaine, UNICEF Regional Director of Central Africa). These children have the right to get their childhoods back. The hundreds of thousands of children who are missing out of their childhood are still missing their homes like those living in IDP camps, the emotional wounds and suffering they have endured, including seeing their parents and siblings killed, tortured or abducted is a plight that need special care, counseling and psychological support to help them ease the pain of their memories, reduce stress and finally find a way to cope (UNICEF 2013).

CONCLUSION

The effect of war continues for years after fighting ends. Many women are left widowed and many children are orphaned. Women struggle to sustain livelihoods for their children after conflicts. It is therefore of great importance that women began to play a significant role in curbing the effect of violence: not only for themselves, but their families and communities at large. To a great extent, women need to be actively included and involved in the formal aspects of the peace process so that they can stand up for their rights and rally for peace at a national level. The inter linkages between women's development, peace, security and human rights cannot be denied. This is not just a question of equity or fairness; we know that bringing women to the peace table improves the quality of agreements reached and increases the chance of success in implementing, just as involving women in post-conflict governance, reduces the likelihood of returning to war. Reconstruction works best when it involves women as planners, implementers and beneficiaries. The single most productive investment in revitalizing agriculture, restoring health systems, reducing infant mortality and improving other social indicators after conflict is in women and girls education. Further, insisting on full accountability for action against women during conflict is essential for the re-establishment of rule of law. We know these lessons well, but too frequently, in the process of responding to the latest crises, issues related to conflict prevention in general, much of the role of women in this process gets lost

in the struggle. And yet it is precisely in the midst of crises that these issues should take center stage.

RECOMMENDATION

- Rehabilitation and Reconstruction - Trauma counseling is clearly a need for both gender but most especially for women and children. For men, the kind of counseling could involve that of too much exposure to death and even participation in the killings. For women, the counseling could involve countering effects of rape and sometimes gang-rapes, witnessing cleansing of family members such as children; those abducted both women and children may require counseling to heal wounds related to this; fear of soldiers, gun etc.
- Medical care – immediate medical attention should be given to victims of rape in order to prevent or treat sexually transmitted diseases and for the children in cases of exposure to harmful communicable diseases.
- The bitter experiences of women in times of war often make them strong adherents of peace building and constitution making for conflict resolution. However, women's roles in and contributions to conflict resolution are underutilized or wholly ignored in mainstream peace building and constitution making processes. Therefore, women all over the world should be involved in the creative planning and effective strategies to ending wars and building peace.
- Education is bone of critical issue for developing a child and the society, it gives them opportunity to escape from poverty, live healthier and raise the standard of living off their families and community. Hence government should provide education and relevant training for children and women with special needs, the gifted, handicapped, reviving rural women, those in IDP camps, widows etc.

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