



GENDER, PEACE & SECURITY IN BRIEF #6

How can inclusive, local peacebuilding initiatives contribute to the prevention and response to violence against women in Zimbabwe?

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INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the liberation struggle in the late 1970s and its colonial independence, Zimbabwe has lived through times of prosperity, but also times of economic decay, exorbitant inflation, international sanctions and political instability, including occasional violent conflicts. The status of women in Zimbabwe has also deteriorated as a consequence of the social, political and economic upheaval.

The United Nations Development Programme's Gender Inequality Index for Zimbabwe is 0.534, with a rank of 128 out of 160 countries.¹ Harmful practices and traditions that assign different roles and power identities to women and men contribute to these inequalities. Socialisation processes often assign more power to men over women and leave women with different and unequal access and control over resources and decision-making processes. Gender discrimination and women's unequal access to decision-making are exemplified in their low representation in economic and political leadership positions at the local and national level.

The rate of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe remains high, with chronic under-reporting. Two in every three women have experienced gender

1 UNDP, "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update Briefing note for countries on the 2018 Statistical Update Zimbabwe," Available at: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/ZWE.pdf.

violence in their lifetime.² Thirty percent of women aged 15-49 report having experienced some form of physical violence since the age of 15, while 33 percent of females aged 18-24 have experienced some form of sexual violence before reaching the age of 18 years.³ An additional manifestation of violence is the pandemic of child marriage. The rate of girls married by the age of 18 is 32 percent in Zimbabwe,⁴ compared to the global rate of 20.8 percent.⁵ In addition to being a serious human rights violation, violence against women and girls has negative ramifications for both the security of citizens and state stability.

In Zimbabwe, initiatives that actively involve women in conflict resolution and decision-making processes at the community level have had far-reaching benefits for the community as a whole, and have proven successful in contributing to meaningful violence prevention and response, particularly in cases of gender-based violence. These initiatives should receive greater recognition and funding for scale-up considering their potential to contribute to transformative gender relations and a more sustainable peace and security for all.

2 Mercilene Machisa and Kevin Chiramba, "Peace Begins @ Home: Violence against Women (VAW) Baseline Study Zimbabwe" (Zimbabwe: MWAGCD and Gender Links, 2013):12.

3 Zimbabwe Statistical Agency, "National Baseline Survey on Life Experiences of Adolescents (NBSLEA)," (Harare, 2011): 21.

4 UNICEF, "The 2017 State of the World's Children," (December 2017). Available at: <https://data.unicef.org/re-sources/state-worlds-children-2017-statistical-tables/>

5 UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2019-2020: Families in a Changing World," (UN Women, 2019): 52. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women>.

STATE OF THE ART

Zimbabwe is guided by a history of international and regional commitments to women's participation in decision-making and peace and conflict resolution such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁶ The country is also guided by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and its subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security, which highlight the need for women's participation in all elements of peacemaking, especially in conflict-resolution and peace negotiations and the mainstreaming of gender into all aspects of peace processes. UNSCR 1889 further highlights the need for women to participate in post-conflict recovery institutions, particularly in political and economic decision-making in the early stages of peace building.

In addition to the African Union Protocol, which promotes women's participation and calls for 50/50 representation of genders in all decision-making bodies, Zimbabwe is party to the regional peacebuilding mechanism of the African Union Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction. Article 28 of the South African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol also commits States Parties to ensure women have equal

6 Zimbabwe ratified CEDAW in 1991; the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development in 2009 and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2008.

representation and participation in key decision-making positions in conflict resolution and peacebuilding process in line with UNSCR 1325.⁷

In Zimbabwe, UNSCR 1325 serves to strengthen the resolve of Zimbabwean women to contribute to their own peace building agenda. Although Zimbabwe has not yet adopted a national action plan (NAP) to implement UNSCR 1325 (See **In Brief #3** by Mirsad Jacevic), the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (MWAGCD) adopted an implementation strategy focusing on 4Ps (Prevention, Protection, Participation and Programmes) in 2000. This has enabled implementation of relevant aspects of UNSCR 1325.

The Government of Zimbabwe has also committed to combating gender-based violence in line with several international, regional, sub-regional and local human rights instruments that promote women's rights. The Ministry of Women and Youth Affairs⁸ coordinates gender mainstreaming across all sectors with a strong legal and policy framework for addressing gender inequality, including the Domestic Violence Act (2007)⁹ and the National Gender-Based Violence Strategy (2012-2015).¹⁰ The justice

7 Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, "The National Gender Policy (2013-2017)," Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/education/edurights/media/docs/43bd848326f7d0235674ad9ffc9ec101dba2673.pdf>.

8 This Ministry is the former Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development (MWAGCD).

9 Domestic Violence Act [Chapter 5:16] Act 14/2006. Accessed on 14 September 2019 at: https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/eoir/legacy/2013/11/08/domestic_violence.pdf.

10 Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, "Zimbabwe National Gender Based Violence Strategy 2012-2015," Accessed 16 August 2019 at: http://www.veritaszim.net/sites/veritas_d/files/Zimbabwe-National-Gender-Based-Violence-Strategy-2012-2015.pdf.

delivery system also provides support for women survivors of violence through the Victim Friendly Courts and Victim Friendly Units at police stations and hospitals.

However, it is the political commitment of national and international actors that has led to the establishment of community-based initiatives that foster the participation of women in decision-making processes within the context of peace and security, which are proving effective in violence reduction and response. In 2011, for example, UN Women Zimbabwe partnered with the Peace-building and Capacity Development Education Foundation (PACDEF), a local non-governmental organisation based in Mutare, to work with local communities, including in the Chief Charumbira area.¹¹ Women in Charumbira, Masvingo have been largely excluded from the traditional governance structures and regularly experience gender inequalities and discrimination in the traditional courts.

The role of the traditional courts is to resolve communal conflicts and any other issues that may affect the peace of the community. However, women reportedly do not receive the same treatment or degree of justice as men in the verdicts delivered by the traditional courts. Their security needs have also gone unanswered. The court has not previously taken any strong actions against men who physically assault women, for instance.

¹¹ For more information on the project, see UN Women, "Catalogue of innovations and good practices on gender resilience in Africa," (2016): 35-40. Available at: https://fsclus-ter.org/sites/default/files/documents/unwomen-fao-igao-ifad_catalogue_of_innovations_and_good_practices_on_gender_and_resilience_in_africa_2016.pdf.

The UN Women and PACDEF project therefore aimed to institutionalize gender-responsive security initiatives and mechanisms in rural communities in Masvingo. Participatory action research was used to promote a culture of dialogue and reconciliation based on an analysis of the root causes of conflict. New forms of women-led social networking groups, commonly known as Women's Peace Committees, were formed to lead this process in the communities. The Women's Peace Committees aim at safeguarding the safety and security interests of all citizens, including the gender-specific needs of women.

The Women's Peace Committees also undertook lobbying and advocacy to raise awareness and increase security and protection mechanisms for women. They also worked to mediate local conflicts together with traditional authorities and community police. All these activities contribute to design locally owned violence prevention and response mechanisms.

In some cases, additional community-level security mechanisms were also established, such as Gender Committees, which include women and men, security guards and a position for a community police woman to work with the national police services. The police woman is selected by the women from the community to help ensure that an effective and human rights focused referral system is followed in police and court cases in the community. The community police woman also serves as the link between the traditional court and the police, as well as with the formal courts.

Like that, the project aimed to strengthen the accountability mechanisms and tools used by local authorities, such as traditional leaders, community police, the national police services and faith leaders, to enable effective gender-responsive service delivery in cases of violence against women. It also further increased the participation, voice and power of women and their communities in decision-making regarding gender-sensitive service delivery.

In addition to PACDEF, other civil society organizations (CSOs) in Zimbabwe have initiated programmes using a variety of methods to positively influence relational conflicts. Search for Common Ground (SFCG), together with Centre for Conflict Management and Transformation (CCMT) and the International Video Fair Trust (IVFT), started conflict transformation work in 2010 in seven districts in Mvurwi, Magunje, Mutoko, Lupane and Shurugwi, as well as in urban centres, Harare and Rusape. Working through the established community peace committees, they have organized community dialogues and used radio, television and community outreach to bring about positive societal change, tolerance and accountability. Their work also focuses on specific issues affecting women, young people, disadvantaged populations and other marginalized groups and was found to reduce gender-based violence.¹²

¹² Leonard Maveneke and Nathan Mhungu, "Search for Common Ground, The Team Project Evaluation Report," (2014). Accessed 12 August, 2019 at: <https://www.sfcg.org/Zimbabwe-The-Team-Evaluation-Report-FINAL>.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the support and credibility of national and international actors, CSOs in Zimbabwe managed to suggest alternative strategies to confront, challenge and transform gender discrimination and accelerate the reduction of violence against women in the communities, thereby improving the quality of life of both rural men and women.

In addition to addressing relational conflicts in the communities, these project initiatives have contributed to the participation, voice and power of women and their communities in decision-making regarding gender-sensitive service delivery. These initiatives have been well received and contributed to a positive change within local communities.

However, these single initiatives need to go beyond mere project implementation and there remains a need to address the fundamental aspects of gender identities and notions of power and to gain a deeper understanding of the norms and dynamics of violence, power and conflict. Sustainable peacebuilding that promotes gender equality and women's participation must be a comprehensive process of social reconstruction, entailing the transformation of social relationships, values, identities, ideologies and institutions under the leadership of the local population.

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