Peace and Security from a Gender Perspective: a Study of Democratic Republic of Congo

Abstract

The women of the DRC have indeed endured many years of gross violations of human rights and their participation in peace-building is therefore critical for the future of the country. Women's leadership and participation in addressing peace and security is both a moral imperative and a right which goes beyond them being considered the unfortunate victims of conflict. It is important to recognize women as agents of change, and as partners in reshaping and rebuilding communities affected by conflict.

This study is about the gendered perspectives that conflict and peace processes have manifested in the conflict that has been going on in the DRC for the longest time. It aims at answering three questions: How women have been impacted by conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ways in which women have contributed to violent conflicts in DRC and the ways in which women have participated in peace building in DRC. The study hopes to bring out the different ways that women participated in the many conflicts in the DRC and how they have been involved in the peace processes. When we talk about gendered perspectives, it is to demystify the stereotypes that have been set by society concerning women in conflict situations.

Introduction

The experiences that women go through during conflicts are different from the men. Women are affected by both the long term and short term effects of war. Exploitation and the use of sexual assault are tools used during war which in most cases leads to trauma, unwanted pregnancies and isolation that is often as a result of victimization.(Introductory & For, 2007) During conflicts, women assume the role of primary caregivers as their husbands are out fighting making them unable to provide for their families. The new role assumed by women as the primary caregivers exposes them to more abuse as they struggle to make ends meet for their families. Despite gender relations improving during such periods, women are still impacted negatively by conflicts. Women's fight to attain peace is usually behind the scenes unlike the men. They should not just be perceived as victims and should not be treated as that for they can do more like taking active roles in both the conflict itself ad finding solutions to end the conflicts. (Series, 2005)

The United Nations (UN) through the Security Council has largely encouraged the participation of women in peace processes. It has done this by coming up with resolution 1325 in the year 2000 and other complimenting resolutions such as resolution 1820 in 2008, 2122 in 2013 with an aim of enhancing the participation of women in peace processes. Resolution 1325 has been very instrumental in adopting gender perspectives while negotiating and influencing the implementation of peace agreements. 1325 has been a basis to which women from all over the world are using to get their voices and opinions heard in negotiating for peace. It has helped women in many warrying regions not only in DRC but also in Sudan, Sierra Leone among others empowering the women at grassroots levels to speak up of injustices that they undergo

during conflict situations. (UN Women, 2012)

Background of the study

The conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has over the years increased the number of interests from different actors, continues to get complicated and the struggle does not seem to end. It is said that the DRC war is one of the deadliest conflicts since World War Two. The Kivu region which include North and South Kivu, has been the part with constant wrangles which is located in the Eastern part of the DRC. (Bjørkhaug & Bøås, 2014)

The United Nations deployed the peacekeeping forces that has come to be known as the largest force which is the United Nations Organization Stabilizing Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). The issue people fail to understand is how the largest peace keeping force in the world of over 20,000 peacekeepers is unable to stop the conflict. (Bjørkhaug & Bøås, 2014)

The DRC is a poor state that is very rich in mineral resources ranging from aluminum, copper, diamonds, gold, natural gas lead, magnesium, uranium, zinc, coal, cobalt and so many others. Many see that the war is as a result of the resources that everyone is trying to have a share of although this is just a small portion of the problem in the country. (Bjørkhaug & Bøås, 2014)

The war has come a long way and the Inter-Congolese Dialogue that took place in 2001 to 2003 helped in formally ending the war in DRC. Women initially faced difficulties in joining the negotiations due to what was termed as attitudes that were negative towards the women and their presence in the negotiations. Despite this, the dialogue was quite inclusive with the participating parties ranging from the civil society, armed conflict parties, unarmed political parties with the armed party dominating the negotiation process.(Series, 2005)

Women were able to actively participate in the conflict with support from international and the regions women organizations. With these support, women managed to come up with strategies that would ensure they not only participated in the process, but also they managed to get the agreement to include provisions on gender. They guarded the signing of the agreement by forming a human chain that blocked all the exits in the room insisting that the men would not leave until the final agreement was signed. This simply showed how women use unconventional means to influence change and they make sure they get it done despite the challenges.(Introductory & For, 2007)

Statement of the problem

The importance of women’s participation has been stressed severally at both the local and International scenes. The United Nations Security Council for example through Resolution 1325 adopted in the year 2000 stressed the need for active participation of women in Conflict Resolution processes through peace negotiations, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction. (Ward & UN Women, 2013)Despite the emphasis being made at national and global levels to encourage Women’s participation in peace processes, there seems to be a disconnect between advocating for the provisions of Resolution 1325 and the implementation of the same. Existing peace structures in different countries tend to ignore the part played by women in peace processes, yet, women contribute in a big way to peace processes particularly

in conflict resolution.(Series, 2005)

In the DRC for example, women have often been excluded from politics and public decision making which are avenues for conflict resolution processes Despite the fact that women participate in different levels in peace processes at the family, community and national levels, such participation often goes unnoticed or unrecognized. Women are often viewed as victims and their contributions are ignored. Therefore, there is need for scholarly investigation on the dimensions of women's participation in conflict resolution in DRC. It is for this reason that this study analyzed the different dimensions at which women's participation drives peace processes so as to offer more insight as to why women's involvement in conflict resolution should be encouraged as opposed to being ignored. (Hendricks, 2011)

Objectives of the study

The overall objective of the study will be to determine how gender impacts peace and peace processes in DRC.

Some of the specific objectives that will be used to achieve this are:

1. To determine the impacts conflicts has had on women and the responses they have on these impacts in DRC
2. The magnitude of women's involvement in war and conflict situations, they roles they assume and their motivation in DRC.
3. Women's contribution to peace building, peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Research questions

In order to achieve the study's objectives, the research will be guided by the following questions.

1. How have women been impacted by conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)?
2. In what ways have women contributed to violent conflicts in DRC?
3. What are the ways in which women participate in peace building in DRC?

Hypothesis

The Study will be based on the on the hypothesis that women play a significant role in conflicts and therefore they should be included in the peace processes as they look at things from a perspective that is different from the men.

Theoretical framework

The Study will use the Feminist constructivism theory and the Critical Feminist theory to understand the gendered perspectives when dealing with conflict in DRC. These theories hope to bring out some of the reasons why it has taken women a long time to get involved in peace processes while they are the main victims of conflict situations.

Feminist Constructivism

It looks at the social explanations of global politics (The idea that women are the weak gender)

The perceptions by international actors shape the behavior of the international system.

The basic female based work is undervalued and the work that takes place in the private sphere is not considered legitimate work and therefore women suffer low wages and poor working conditions.

The theory states how female work should be brought to the international debate and more women should engage in negotiation, mediation and other peace processes.

Critical Feminist

This theory examines gendered identities ad gendered power in global politics.

The ideas held by men and women greatly influence our perception on gender and how policies affect the world. (Sandra Whitworth, 1994)

Scholars like Tickner looks at how physical, structural, sexual violence should be regarded as security threats. She also examines the insecurities women have inside and outside of warzones.

Critical theory wants to understand how to change the world.

Research methodology

So as to determine the role of gender in peace and conflict issues, this study will use the case study research design. The study will focus on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as the central focus of conducting this study. Mix method research will be used to get the information needed to answer the study's questions.

This study was very much a desktop research and it relied on secondary sources such as books, documents from the United Nations, working papers, journals and newspapers articles, reports and other trustworthy organization and online sources will help in making this study a success. It will also rely on interviews and focus groups by talking to some of the victims and participants of the conflict in Congo to understand the context of gender in creating peace in the country. The quantitative method used will be the use of questionnaires and surveys to compliment the data collected form the interviews and the focus group discussions.

Organization of the study

This study will comprise of five chapters outlined.

Chapter One is the introductory part and it covers the background to the study, statement of the research problem, the objectives, research questions, hypothesis, justification of the study and how the study will be carried out which includes the methodology and the theories that will guide

the shape that the study will assume. This is basically the proposal that outlines how the study is intended to be conducted.

Chapter Two will look into how conflict has impacted women in the DRC both negatively and positively acknowledging that conflict is not all negative. It will look at the impact of conflict on families, marriages, the emergence of different kinds of violence against women; sexual and gender based violence and also the ways in which women cope with various losses experienced during conflict periods.

Chapter Three will look at ways that women have contribute to conflicts in the DRC. This could include financing the war, women being used to mobilize and support the male fighters and also women being used as agents of fueling the conflicts.

Chapter Four will focus on the different ways women are contributing to bringing peace in the DRC. By getting involved in the peace processes and utilizing the resolutions passed by the United Nations so as to give women a chance to have a say in the peace processes.

Chapter Five will include the recommendations to the study and the conclusion. It will base this on the study conducted and it will evaluate whether the question has been answered and the objectives attained.

Ethics considerations

When conducting research that involves qualitative research, it means that a researcher is dealing with people and people come with the finding out of people’s experiences and social perceptions. The DRC has for the longest time been known as a country where a majority of their women have undergone a sexual abuse case and these are sensitive issues that cause emotion, and such issues require ethical consideration on the part of the researcher.

One of the consideration in this study is seek consent from the people being interviewed, explaining what the study is all about and that they are willing to give information freely without coercion.

The other consideration the study will take is offering confidentiality and privacy to the people being interviewed. This is by explaining to them how the information will be stored, used, that the study will not disclose more than what they are willing to disclose.

Most important is maintain integrity and produce research that is of quality. As a researcher it is my responsibility to produce a study that is carefully planned, thoughtfully in terms of reasonable standards. Also the security of the researcher is key otherwise the research will never see the liht of day if a researchers life is in danger.