

GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA  
**1** IN A SERIES OF OCCASIONAL PAPERS

# Introduction to the Series of Occasional Papers on Gender and Peacebuilding in Africa

Awino Okech



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# 1 Introduction to the Series of Occasional Papers on *Gender and Peacebuilding in Africa*

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The nature of the tool (i.e. training) and the thinking behind the tool are not being questioned. Why is 'training' commonly seen as the main way to increase gender awareness, change practice and strengthen skills. What does this tell us about the dominant epistemologies of mainstream development? (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 15)

This occasional paper series was initially framed by an interest in interrogating gender training as a tool for transformation within peacekeeping and peace support operations. The focus on peacekeepers and peace support operations is informed by the central role they play in conflict and post-conflict environments. They are often the first on the scene in conflict areas where the security situation is unstable and in many regions today, military forces are on the spot to secure or maintain peace by force. As a result, they have played a part prior to, during and after conflicts.

The second impetus for a focus on training was informed by the move of the African Union Commission through its Women, Gender and Development Directorate to develop a *Gender Training Manual for African Union Peace Support Operations*. The manual is designed to be a resource for the African Standby Force and other hybrid operations as well as trainers in forces in states which send troops. Gender training for peacekeepers is aimed at military, civilian police and civilian personnel deployed to African Union (AU) and AU/UN hybrid missions. Some of the contributors to this series, who were also part of a policy dialogue Fahamu co-convened with the African Security Sector Network (ASSN) in Addis Ababa in 2011, were curious about the genesis of this project on the one hand and keen to establish whether the AU had deployed different techniques to conceptualising gender training given the multiple methodological questions that have been raised since the advent of gender and development projects. Some of us might argue they did not.

Training has thus far been emphasised as an opportunity to integrate a 'gender perspective' into the functional areas of peacekeeping by responding to the special needs of women and supporting measures for preventing and responding to gender-based violence (UNDPKO 2005). It has been argued that when male personnel are conscious of the importance of gender aspects (for which read women) in peace support missions, it has a positive effect on the mission (UNDPKO 2005). There is 'evidence' to support these assertions but alongside the evidence are critiques that raise questions about the nature (epistemological) of the training and the assumptions behind the connection between training, compliance and transformation, particularly in situations where the manipulation of masculinities and femininities towards the ends of conflict occurs in a non-linear way.

Despite feminist caution about reliance on universalisms and the advocacy of difference, gender training has depended on several stereotypical constructs of womanhood and indeed of man–woman relationships (Whitehead 1979, Kabeer 1994). ‘Gender training, in fact all forms of training, reflects a certain understanding of the nature of knowledge, knowledge production and power’ (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 17). I am cognisant of the fact that training if conducted pedagogically soundly allows us to move towards a better understanding of power and knowledge within development efforts to promote gender equality such as gender mainstreaming. However, as Mukhopadhyay and Wong suggest:

There has been little critical analysis of the thinking behind gender training, especially the epistemological assumptions underlying what is and is not being trained and how training is being thought about, from the perspectives of trainers, trainees and organisations subscribing to training. (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 13)

The basic assumption on which all training rests is that: ‘this is a powerful “transforming” tool through which people learn new attitudes, knowledge or skills. Once acquired, this will make them become more effective at what they do’ (Anderson 1991, cited by Moser 1993: 177). These positions rely on a linear understanding of ‘knowledge’. The assumption, as Akihire (2007: 35) points out, is that ‘once people acquire the skills on gender analysis and gender responsiveness, they will automatically apply those skills to bring about gender equity and/or train others to do so’.

Nonetheless, the focus of this series subsequently expanded to include a critical analysis of the dominant paths through which gender has been integrated into discourses on security. As a result, training, the integration of women into the military, the role of autonomous women’s movements in post-conflict reconstruction and an interrogation of masculinities have become the range of approaches that are discussed by the authors in this series.

The authors bravely take on multiple routes (intellectual, practical and ideological) to engage a subject that has been at the centre of feminist analysis – the meaning of gendered transformation. The conflict and immediate post-conflict environment is deemed as essential to this interrogation given the potential it holds for transformation because gender norms are loosened (El Bushra 2008, Meintjes 2004, Valji 2007). Turshen (2001: 83) notes that power and resources are reasigned in the post-conflict peacebuilding process, which means that the ‘potential’ exists for the new order to transform gender relations and dismantle gender hierarchies or reinstate and/or even exacerbate existing gender inequalities.

The authors foreground their analysis in a normative reality where gender is recognised in policy, practice and research arenas as highly interrelated and critical to just and sustainable development. However, the parallel evolution of African peace, security and gender, women’s rights frameworks and mechanisms (including in relation to their implementation and operationalisation) points to a disjuncture between the normative and practical interpretations of gender

mainstreaming. The ad hoc and/or isolated gender reform methods that are employed within security operations and structures across the continent include delivery of gender training to personnel, institutionalisation of quotas for recruitment of women, inclusion of gender sensitive language in security policy formulation, and institution-specific gender policies and/or codes of conduct. While these are crucial change elements, they often lack the depth and breadth required to radically alter gendered power hierarchies. For an African security sector that, due to its historical context, structural evolution and institutional culture, is fundamentally masculinist, militarised and enforcing of existing gender stereotypes, the expectation of transformation rather than reform is higher.

Each of the papers in this series takes a contextual approach, thereby enabling the authors to explore both the evident peculiarities and gains. Analytically, some of the authors proceed from a strong feminist standpoint by locating the histories of feminist knowledge that have interrogated power, security, well being and the nature of organisational structures that are required to alter gendered hierarchies. Ecoma Alaga and Emma Birikorang (paper 2) situate the ECOWAS sub region, through an understanding of the nature of training at the Kofi Annan International Peace Training Centre. South Africa is grounded in two ways; the first is by Sheila Meintjes (paper 3), who unpacks the period of transition before and after 1994 and the role of autonomous women's movements in this context. The author explodes the notion of building peace in a context that would not have been described as conflict. Cheryl Hendricks (paper 4) offers a critical review of the South African National Defence Forces (SANDF) in a country that has been hailed for the strides it has taken over gender parity in the military. Comfort Lamprey (paper 5) reviews the United Nations gender training in the context of peace support operations. Finally, Kopano Ratele (paper 6) grapples with the production of masculinities in situations of conflict and the opportunities that re-imagining masculinities offers for peacebuilding. Through this series, we hope that we can broadly contribute to advancing women's rights programmatic initiatives on security sector reform and peace and security.

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**Awino Okech** is the series editor and director of Fahamu's research programme – Tuliwaza. She contributes to intellectual and programmatic initiatives on women's rights with a focus on conflict and post-conflict settings. This has occurred through her work as the regional gender and conflict thematic lead for ACORD, as a writer including co-editing with 'Funmi Olonisakin *Women and Security Governance in Africa* (2011) and her contributions to undergraduate teaching at the University of Cape Town's African Gender Institute. Her research interests lie in the area of gendered citizenship, culture and nationalism/s.

