

# Nurturing Sustainable Peace: Unveiling the Integral Role of Women in Rwanda's Peacebuilding Endeavors

NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability  
2023, Vol. 6(2) Pages 31-45



njips.nust.edu.pk

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.37540/njips.v6i2.150>

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## Abstract

The salient prominence of women's potential in contributing to peacebuilding initiatives has garnered notable recognition at national, regional, and international echelons. The discernment of pivotal concerns germane to women, peace, and security has equally captivated the focal point of interventions within international development. This resonance emanates from the stark reality that women continue to bear the brunt of conflict's impact, particularly pronounced in the most perilous conflict-ravaged zones. This paper examines the pivotal role women assumed in Rwanda's peacebuilding endeavors, elucidating the profound impact of their engagement on the nation's enduring stability. To comprehensively grasp the challenges confronting women in their pursuit of peacebuilding initiatives, this study accounts for national, regional, and institutional agreements and an extensive array of pertinent reports. It contends that intense conflict, exemplified in Rwanda and the wider Great Lakes region, has raised women's awareness of the need for decisive conflict resolution and amplified recognition of their key role in fostering enduring peace. The study unearths those barriers that impede women's agency in advancing peace, often manifesting as male counterparts obstructing their participation in peacebuilding. Central to the fabric of this investigation is an underscored emphasis on women's empowerment, positioning them as indispensable stakeholders in the orchestration of peacebuilding endeavors.

## Keywords

Peacebuilding, Reconciliation, Women, Peace and Security, Rwanda

## Introduction

When conflicts, violence, genocides, and wars occur in any community, women and children are the most exposed and vulnerable majority amongst the populations, even

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**Received** 16 September 2022; **Revised** 13 May 2023; **Accepted** 17 May 2023; **Published online** 25 May 2023

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though their contribution towards the aggravation or cause of the conflict is minimal. In most cases, women bear the brunt of the violence and societal fragmentation in war-torn countries (Mzvondiwa, 2007). Despite being the primary victims of war, women are rarely recognized as stakeholders in conflict resolution agreements. They rarely participate in peace discussions because it is frequently perceived as a male-gender-dominated task. According to a United Nations assessment, women made up only 2% of conflict mediators and 8% of peace negotiators globally between 1990 and 2017, indicating that when finding ways to resolve disputes amicably, they are put in the background (CFR, 2017). It can be attributed that violent conflicts harm women excessively, and conflict resolution mechanisms unfairly exclude them, thus indicating little to no contribution of women towards peace initiatives (Iloh et al., 2019).

Contrary to popular belief, women have proven their strength in resolving disputes and fostering peace when allowed to contribute. Following the 1991 violent clashes in Wajir, Kenya, Wajir women created the Wajir Peace and Development Committee (WPDC), which was important in restoring peace in Kenya. In addition, post-apartheid South Africa witnessed the emergence of the Harambe Women's Forum, which played a crucial role in facilitating transformation despite enduring hardship, trauma, and violence. The forum contributed to reconstructing their devastated communities and actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts. During the Liberian conflict, women from Liberia called for a ceasefire through the 'Mass Action for Peace' campaign as part of their tireless pursuit of peace promotion.

In the context of the Liberian crisis, both the government and the United Nations acknowledged the invaluable contributions made by women to security, development, and peace (Issifu, 2015). The international community's commitment to addressing post-conflict challenges by promoting women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives is emphasized by *United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325* and the Beijing Platform for Action on Women and Armed Conflict (UNSC, 2000; Declaration, 1995). Conflict zones invariably affect both men and women in diverse ways. Women and children constitute the majority (80%) of those compelled to flee their homes due to conflict, while men actively engage in conflicts on various sides (Murungi, 2014).

The 1994 genocide and civil war in Rwanda brought attention to women's role in resolving disputes and promoting peace. That year, Rwanda was the site of one of the most devastating conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marked by what many consider the deadliest genocide in human history. Rwandan women have played a pivotal role in maintaining the peace process and have also been instrumental in ending the conflict. In Rwanda, the resolution of the conflict was achieved through resolute efforts to address the underlying and fundamental causes of grievances rather than relying solely on the military successes or failures of the involved parties (Iloh et al., 2019). This highlights why the nation's peacebuilding initiatives have not faltered despite enduring years of conflict, and the risk of further violence remains minimal. The government, civil society, development partners, friendly nations, local men and women, and other social groups have all contributed significantly to ensuring the sustainability of these peace efforts and continue to do so. Among these contributors, women have emerged as active participants in Rwanda's endeavors to resolve disputes, promote understanding, and propel the nation's long-term peace process.

This study indicates the role of women in Rwanda's peacebuilding initiatives. Under the peacebuilding theory, the paper analyzes the many strides Rwandan women achieved in promoting peace and their difficulties when participating in peacebuilding initiatives. A review has been conducted on documents created by various

organizations, encompassing regional and international treaties and agreements related to women and peacebuilding. It is becoming increasingly evident that women hold crucial roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding within nations devastated by conflict due to their unique societal positions. In light of this perspective, this study delves into the roles undertaken by Rwandan women in conflict resolution and the restoration of peace within Rwandan society.

With this context in mind, this article aims to explore the involvement of women in post-conflict peacebuilding across Africa, focusing on the experiences of Rwandan women. This study investigates women's experiences in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, aiming to address the question: Why is the promotion of gender equality and women's engagement in peacebuilding of paramount importance?

### **Research Methodology**

The study utilizes secondary research tools, including research papers, journal articles, and other literary pieces centred around peacebuilding. These documents primarily focus on women's roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in a general context, specifically in Rwanda's case. Consequently, secondary materials such as textbooks, journal articles, and other written works obtained from libraries were employed.

The study also draws upon internet sources that contain information about the Rwandan civil war, atrocities committed, and efforts to resolve the conflicts. These records are already accessible in the public domain. The writer's approach involved refining, interpreting, evaluating, and analyzing these existing sources. For empirical research, the study adopts a qualitative technique. This methodology facilitates a deeper comprehension of the underlying causes and components of the Rwandan Civil War, along with its far-reaching impacts on society as a whole and, particularly, women.

Furthermore, it aids in highlighting the roles of women in peacebuilding and articulating how their involvement can contribute to achieving gender equality. Moreover, the study employs both explanatory and descriptive approaches to elucidate the case study of Rwandan women and underscore women's experiences as a pivotal element in global peace initiatives.

### **Conceptualizing Peace Studies and Peacebuilding: A Feminist Perspective**

Different departments, organizations, schools, agencies, and researchers have elucidated peacebuilding through diverse perspectives. For instance, according to Galtung, the Roman 'pax' is the dominant peace idea in contemporary peace theory and practice and serves the interest of the powerful in maintaining the status quo in society. Galtung saw a need for a more comprehensive peace concept that reflected the world's social cosmologies to create peaceful conditions. Peace should be attained through peaceful means and ideas (Galtung, 2010). Relating peace to the nonexistence of all forms of structural violent behavior is a long-term objective that is difficult to achieve, particularly in war zones and situations. However, seeing peace as a series of primarily pessimistic and positive events is insufficient. 'Negative peace' refers to the absence of conflict; 'positive peace,' on the other hand, is a broader notion encompassing individual security. In any event, methods for achieving both gender justice and peace must be considered from the beginning (Galtung, 1996).

Conflict resolution still has the option of military involvement in hegemonic discourses, but feminist talks have generated entirely constructive peace models. They begin their discussions with the need for protection and individual experiences of sadism—in what emerges as their classified sphere. Tickner (1992) discussed the

significance of overcoming social relationships based on dominance and subordination, essential for attaining peace, social justice, and ecological sustainability. Security necessitates not just the nonexistence of conflict but also the abolition of inequitable communal connections and gender inequality. The individual urge for society, harmony, and interdependence should be prioritized. Her explanation of security discusses violent connections at all levels of society (Tickner, 1992), which is a dynamic idea that aspires to create justice rather than order. Replacing warrior-patriots with citizen defenders offers more favourable paradigms for women's equal engagement in international politics. *Peace and Security for All* is a prescriptive claim because traditional security strategies rarely recognize the female half of the population.

On the other hand, bringing peace and security to women and men, boys and girls, in their various situations is a huge undertaking. Feminist peace notions seek to face this challenge: Judith Ann Tickner's vision of peace based on gender impartiality urges that the standards of women's privileges and international ruling be strengthened and that the emphasis be shifted from intensification to impediment. Therefore, a transition in philosophy from a rigidly defined security strategy to a peace strategy is necessary. Feminists frequently challenge military concepts and institutions. This has also sparked debates over women serving in the military in feminist discourse (Tickner, 1992).

Feminist peace concepts are founded on the equal participation of men and women at all levels and processes, particularly the integration of gender perspectives across all security, peace, and development policy domains. Since the start of the 1990s, women's advocates have gained increased communal recognition in the West thanks to their demands. The transnational women's movement changed its tactics in response to the World Conferences on Women, which greatly aided this accomplishment. The self-perception of many feminist NGOs has changed from opposing criticism and monitoring to lobbying and impacting international UN conferences. Christa Wichterich, for instance, noted the convergence of topics at NGO and UN debates as a political novelty at the 1994 Cairo UN International Conference on Population. Instead of simply opposing UN policies, most feminist NGOs today work to influence them actively. However, this was not unopposed within feminist organizations.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is one of the most comprehensive programs for expanding women's rights and gender equality globally, particularly in peace and security, adopted in 1995 (Declaration, 1995). While there have been significant improvements, inequality still prevails. In critical peace negotiations between 1992 and 2018, women represented only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators, and 4% of signings. The Beijing Platform of Action was approved at the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women due to the work of numerous women's NGOs. This platform requires institutional systems to foster women's equality. States were advised to support mainstreaming a gender justice perspective in all policy sectors and levels of government. Consequently, gender mainstreaming was brought into worldwide policymaking to bring gender equality into organizations' activities (UNSC, 2000).

While women are effecting transformative changes in justice, peace, and security, formal peace processes continue to represent their contributions inadequately. Research indicates that peace agreements brokered by women exhibit a 20% higher probability of lasting a minimum of two years and a 35% elevated likelihood of enduring for at least 15 years. These findings stem from a study conducted by the International Peace Institute, which scrutinized the role of women as representatives,

peacekeepers, and stakeholders in 182 ratified peace accords spanning the period from 1989 to 2011 (Iloh et al., 2019)

The commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of *UNSC Resolution 1325* (2000) centered on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) underscores significant progress. Nonetheless, women's rights and leadership in peacebuilding remain insufficiently addressed (Issifu, 2015)—the trajectory of UNSC Resolutions after *1325* culminated in the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Framework. Yet, despite its global recognition, persistent challenges persist. Patriarchy, inequities, militarized masculinities, and discriminatory power structures curtail women's participation in conflict resolution and peacekeeping. Approaches to monitoring and evaluating the implementation of gender-centric agendas in post-conflict contexts frequently fall short in integrating women's perspectives. Subsequently, women's representation in peace initiatives remains limited. For instance, a mere 10% of negotiators in the Afghan peace talks were women. Recent peace dialogues in Yemen and Libya lacked women negotiators, with only 20% female participation in political negotiations in Libya (CRF, 2022).

Women in peace processes prioritize economic growth, transitional justice, education, and reconciliation. Their advocacy frequently encompasses marginalized communities and the prerequisites for addressing the root causes of conflict. Women's reach extends to the entire population, unlike men, whose accessibility to combat zones might be hindered by the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence (Fearon, 2021).

### **History: Understanding the Rwandan Conflict**

The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebellious group, and the Rwandan Armed Forces, the nation's government, were involved in a prolonged civil war in Rwanda from 1<sup>st</sup> October 1990 to 18<sup>th</sup> July 1994 (Iloh et al., 2019). The long-running conflict among the Rwandan people between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes escalated the war. More than 336,000 Tutsis were compelled to pursue refuge in neighboring nations after the 1959-1962 uprising that substituted the Tutsi kingdom with a Hutu-led republic. These expatriates established the RPF in Uganda, and under the direction of Fred Rwigyema and Paul Kagame, it settled into a fully operational army by the late 1980s (Murungi, 2014).

The Rwandan Civil War began in 1990 when the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), a rebel group chiefly of Tutsi refugees, stormed northern Rwanda from their stronghold in Uganda. In the ensuing three years, no party could secure a clear edge. On 4<sup>th</sup> August 1993, the Rwandan government under Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana signed the Arusha Accord with the RPF (Issifu, 2015). Although many historians argue that the extermination of the Tutsis had been planned for several years, the killing of Habyarimana on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1994, which left a power vacuum and brokered peace agreements, served as the spark. The following day, troops, police, and militia, composed primarily of Hutus, executed senior Tutsi and moderate Hutu military and political leaders. Most academics estimate that between 500,000 and 662,000 Tutsis died during this roughly 100-day period due to armed militias massacring associates of the Tutsi marginal ethnic cluster and approximately reasonable Hutu and Twa (Balikungeri & Ingabire, 2012).

Following the 1994 war and genocide in Rwanda, which claimed a million lives, nearly 3 million people fled to refugee camps in the neighboring DRC, while tens of thousands remained internally displaced. Women were targeted due to both their gender and their ethnic heritage. A third of women between the ages of 13 and 35 who

experienced sexual assault tested positive for HIV, adding to their already existing physical and psychological suffering. According to current estimates, 16,000 female genocide survivors who are HIV-positive have been forced to leave because of gender-based violence (Hamilton, 2000).

### **Rwanda: Women's Participation in Conflict Resolution & Peacekeeping**

In contemporary conflicts, women endure disproportionate physical suffering and property loss and are often subjected to sexual violence perpetrated by militia groups. Despite these realities, their perspectives remain marginalized in peace negotiations. Irrespective of contrary evidence, women are continuously and glaringly excluded from the peacebuilding process despite suffering the most significant harm from conflict and despite evidence to the contrary. The International Peace Institute (IPI) has done research that shows that when women participate in peace processes, the ensuing peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. This research reveals that women prioritize transitional justice, economic growth, reconciliation, and education—all pivotal elements for establishing robust and enduring peace – over the presumed spoils of warfare (O'Reilly et al., 2015).

Women frequently use different strategies and play different roles in promoting peace than would be expected in more formal peace negotiations in high-level state security discussions, such as bridging gaps, serving as trustworthy middlemen, expanding the scope of the peace talk agenda, and supporting post-conflict recovery.

Women are more likely to achieve enduring peace agreements through their ability to broaden the scope of peace processes. When deliberating on the requisites for fostering societal reconciliation and reconstruction, women consistently address more substantial societal challenges than men. Their focus centers on pressing issues such as societal reforms, economic revitalization initiatives, and transitional justice mechanisms instead of merely power-sharing, territorial gains, or military strategies. This emphasis significantly enhances the prospects of establishing sustainable peace. Including women in post-conflict rebuilding contributes to heightened stability within post-conflict regions.

Studies conducted by the IPI highlight the effectiveness of commissions entrusted with executing specific provisions of peace agreements—such as overseeing demobilization and disarmament, instituting truth-and-reconciliation processes, or formulating constitutions—when women assume leadership roles within these processes. The reconstruction of public institutions and the provision of essential services crucial for long-term stability, including healthcare and education programs, as well as necessities like access to food and clean water (all of which women tend to prioritize), culminating in a more resilient post-conflict society (Balikungeri & Ingabire, 2012). In Rwanda, women were initially more involved in domestic matters. Women worked on home farms to provide food for the family while caring for their children, the sick, and the elderly. They were occupied with a range of tasks. Women were entirely dependent on their husbands. They lacked legal rights to the proceeds from the land or had limited independence. They were not permitted to open bank accounts without their husband's consent, and as a result, they could not obtain finance to launch a business without the help of a male relative or their spouse. Being a patriarchal society, Rwanda, like many other countries, did not grant women the ability to possess land or property. Women's rights decreased due to their inability to sustain their families when their husbands passed away (Murungi, 2014).

After 1994, women headed 34% of the homes in Rwanda, and 62.15% of those households—which included over 21.5% of adult women—lived below the poverty line. About 70% of the women in the country were abysmal. In the entire nation, there were reportedly 110,000 child-headed households (CHH). Conversely, many males, including former soldiers, also experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. War and genocide in 1994 left behind psychological wounds that need time and additional care. Families have disintegrated, and a confrontational operating style has damaged the Rwandan people's trust. In a time when prostitution, domestic violence, drunkenness, and drug misuse were on the rise, society experienced trauma and psychosocial degeneration that may still be seen today. Despite the circumstances, women made a significant decision that helped bring peace to one of the world's most vulnerable nations (Murungi, 2014).

The Rwandan genocide and civil war in 1994 highlighted women's contributions to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. One of the worst conflicts of the 20th century occurred in Rwanda in that particular year. It was the scene of the worst genocide in recorded human history. The fundamental task before the new Rwandan administration in the immediate aftermath of the 1994 genocide was to reestablish and preserve security, law, and order and launch the national healing and reconciliation process. Since ignoring any group could cause the process to falter or be undermined, achieving these goals requires the contributions of every section of society.

Realizing peace calls explicitly for the participation of all parties involved in the conflict, whether they are the perpetrators or the victims. All citizens must create a long-term peace supporting post-war financial, partisan, and communal development. Early on, the Rwandan government became aware of this and made a concerted effort to include women in the post-conflict peacebuilding and rebuilding process. The male population also decreased significantly due to the genocide since many males were slaughtered, some were imprisoned, many fled Rwanda to seek asylum in neighboring nations, and others joined the resistance in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The only alternative left to the women was to actively participate in the reconstruction of their nation and the pursuit of long-term peace. Because of the government's strong support, they were present at every phase of the peacebuilding and rebuilding efforts (Iloh et al., 2019).

The Rwandan government also learned that women were the driving force behind the uprising and insurgency after the genocide ended. They communicated intelligence from the woods and trenches to the rebels engaged in combat with the government forces. As a result, the conflict would continue as usual as long as women joined the insurgency. The government recognized that if women were not persuaded to stop supporting the rebels, efforts to end the war would fail. Therefore, attempts were made to educate women about the risks of supporting the rebels and the effects of a long, drawn-out war, particularly on them and their offspring. Women understood that they suffered the most consequences due to being uprooted from their homes and communities each time there was a conflict between government forces and the insurgents. Women gradually started to favor the government instead of the insurgents since it ensured their safety and protection. Once they became convinced that this posture was required to reserve their sanctuary and that of their children, they began a campaign to persuade their husbands and family members to disentangle themselves from the insurgency and return peaceably to their homes. This aided in the early defeat of the uprising. Therefore, the initial steps in involving women in ending the fighting and establishing the peace procedure in Rwanda were to persuade them to support the government (Issifu, 2015).

Facilitating the cessation of hostilities among their spouses and family members marked a pivotal turning point in quelling the insurgency and expediting the peace process. Arguably, the most noteworthy contribution by women in resolving the Rwandan conflict lies herein. This endeavor was undertaken in the face of grave personal peril, as they emerged as primary targets for the insurgents. The insurgents' ranks were gradually thinning due to men aligning themselves with government forces and reuniting with their families. Women adroitly employed diverse strategies, among which collaborating with government forces to broker a peaceful surrender stood out. This negotiation hinged upon the precondition that those who had already surrendered, including husbands and other kin, would be spared punitive measures.

Furthermore, the rebels encountered an arduous challenge in coordinating their actions, as women ceased furnishing them with intelligence on government troops' movements. In a remarkable shift, women transitioned to notifying government soldiers, adept community combatants, and other tactical deployments about the insurgents' whereabouts and optimal moments for engagement. This recalibration substantially streamlined conflict resolution, thus making the peacebuilding process more manageable.

### **Rwandese Women's Approaches to Conflict Resolution & Reconciliation**

Over the past few decades, the field of conflict and peacebuilding has witnessed a growing surge in feminist studies. There have been appeals to incorporate previously marginalized feminist and women's perspectives into peacebuilding efforts and critically examine the mechanisms perpetuating these exclusions. Feminists argue that women's daily struggles and experiences enable them to offer unique insights into peacebuilding, challenging the predominantly male discourse on conflict and peacebuilding. Moreover, black and African feminist scholars advocate exploring the diverse and intricate range of women's experiences, particularly those encountered during and after conflicts. Adequate progress is less likely if peacebuilding processes only involve one gender; thus, including both genders in peacebuilding initiatives is essential for enhanced efficacy (Högberg, 2019).

Hudson employs diverse methodologies to construct the theoretical framework for her research concerning African conflicts, explicitly focusing on African feminist theory. Within this framework, African feminists employ the term 'womanist' to signify the harmonization of the pragmatic reality of African women's lives, their intersecting identities, empowerment dynamics, and strategic emancipatory objectives (Högberg, 2019). The tenets of African feminist theory assert that the feminist peacebuilding approach should encompass both genders throughout all stages. Demonstrated successes of women's involvement in formal and informal processes, including negotiations, support this contention. Nevertheless, despite these positive outcomes, data indicates a persistently low representation of women in formal processes, whereas women's engagement tends to concentrate more on NGOs at the grassroots level.

Rwandese women actively participated in programs to promote national healing and reconciliation alongside men. Cooperatives, where village members work together for communal growth, were among these programs. These people, who were both genocide victims and offenders, now live together and collaborate to speed up the process of healing and reconciliation. The *Ndiumunyarwanda* (I am Rwandan) Program is one of the programs in question. Others include the Umuganda Program and the *Umugorobaw'ababyeyi* (Parents' Evening), where parents from a similar community discuss various themes, including politics and social issues. These events occur once a



month (Herath, 2018). Many people think that Rwanda's cooperative arrangements have helped the country's direct victims and genocide perpetrators come to genuine peace. More significantly, women enthusiastically engaged in these programs, which helped promote national healing and harmony.

The acknowledgement of Rwandan women, who constituted a majority before and during the genocide, is an illustrative case study of the overarching pattern wherein women become victims during periods of violence and conflict while remaining underrepresented in political spheres. This is predominantly a consequence of the systemic utilization of sexual exploitation and violence against the female populace. However, a significant segment of the female population has faced allegations of actively participating in the Rwandan genocide, thereby transgressing entrenched violent patriarchal norms. Moreover, as some argue, Rwandan women have played a substantial role in post-violence endeavors to reconstruct the nation and foster peace.

Women have made inroads into the realm of politics and grassroots activism. Collaborative efforts among women have been instrumental in fostering solidarity and cohesiveness, showcasing gendered insight and leadership capabilities. An example of such endeavors is the Unity Club, which operates as a platform for prominent women leaders and spouses of high-ranking government officials. Its purpose lies in cultivating harmony among its members and spreading the message of unity and reconciliation throughout communities. Through the Unity Club, women from diverse backgrounds have united to identify the necessity for socio-economic reforms, advocate for these causes, and ultimately wield influence over legislation enacting legislation that comprehensively safeguards and propels women's rights.

### **Breaking Barriers: Women as Leaders and Gender Equality**

Women's latent potential, talents, and leadership abilities are increasingly recognized. The percentage of women in national parliaments worldwide has gradually climbed over the past 20 years, from 11.8% in 1998 to 17.8% in 2008 to 23.5% in 2018. In some nations, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, which grew from 11 to 23.6% during the previous 20 years, and the Arab States region, which rose from 3.1% to 17.5%, the proportion of women in parliaments has expanded considerably. In addition to falling short of women's representation as half of the world's population, total global representation is still far below the benchmark of 30% that is frequently cited as the required level of representation to achieve a 'critical mass'—a considerable marginal of all legislators with noteworthy influence rather than a symbolic few people (Pepera, 2018).

The meaningful inclusion of women in leadership roles at the national, local, and community levels is thus a crucial area of focus for international development policy. However, some may question the significance of whether or not women enter politics, civil society, or other leadership positions. Why is it critical that women participate more in politics on a global scale? Women's political participation positively impacts democracy by improving public opinion, fostering cross-party and cross-ethnic collaboration, and ensuring a more sustainable future. Women's involvement in politics advances gender equality and influences the range of policy issues considered and the solutions proposed. A legislator's gender has a considerable impact on their legislative priorities, according to studies. Strong evidence indicates a proportional rise in policies prioritizing the quality of life and taking family, women, and ethnic and racial minorities' priorities into account as more women are elected to office (Kattou, 2013).

Additionally, Rwandan women have demonstrated that they can be admirable leaders at the community and policy levels. The Government of National Unity made

it easier for women to participate actively in post-genocide politics and society by establishing the ministry in charge of Family and Women's Affairs. This was done to acknowledge the change and the crucial role that women have played in Rwandan society. Different Rwandan women in positions of leadership played a vital part in bringing women and the community as a whole together to work together to find answers to their nation's challenges. Their participation in the peacebuilding process has changed their position and opened up new opportunities for them to influence national policy. The international community has acknowledged the sheer number of women in parliament. With 56.3% of its lower house members being female, Rwanda's parliament is the most welcoming to women worldwide, according to the International Parliamentary Union at the end of 2011 (ibid.).

It could be argued that the active participation and presence of Rwandan women in society signify positive changes and advancements toward a more peaceful and gender-equitable societal framework. Their significant contributions underscore the imperative of adopting and solidifying a gender-sensitive approach within peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction contexts. The Rwandan context serves as a compelling case study, exemplifying the constructive role women can play in fostering peace and yielding broader socio-economic impacts on the nation. Rwanda's notable level of female representation and its effective reconciliation process following the 1994 genocide have positioned it as a regional and global 'model' for gender equality and conflict resolution (Madsen, 2020).

However, beneath the veneer of the 'politics of numbers', a predominant framework among men often leaves little to no space for feminist perspectives or women's influence. Rwanda has ratified *UNSC Resolution 1325*, offering policy recommendations for dismantling gender barriers in the historically patriarchal security sector.

### **Social Transformation and Restorative Justice in the Traditional Gacaca Court**

In civilizations transitioning from protracted periods of violence, instability, and persecution and moving toward a post-conflict, more peaceful era, truth-seeking procedures, international criminal law innovations, and other types of transitional justice have become commonplace. Top-down and bottom-up transitional justice methods are being explored legally and informally in South Africa, Liberia, Peru, Chile, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Sierra Leone, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and Northern Ireland. These advancements have been the subject of several studies, articles, conferences, and discussions that have generally elaborated on notions linked to transitional justice. However, a feminist perspective has not typically been used to analyze and criticize these processes. Generally speaking, women's positions, particularly their unique victimhood, have not been considered systematically. Rarely do critics expressly consider whether recently developed peace- and reconciliation-promoting measures will truly improve the status of women in a society emerging from oppression or conflict (Fineman & Zinsstag, 2013).

Post-conflict nations are uniquely positioned to establish norms that would permit and guarantee the vigorous contribution of the whole populace, including women, to renovate a more steady, reasonable, and self-governing polity because they must rebuild. This book provides insights into feminist and women's viewpoints on provisional justice, often called 'justice in transition'. By extending the scope and vision of the viable answers, feminism can be introduced into the discussion to increase the potential for a transformative justice method during conflict or uncertainty.

Equally significant is that after the genocide, Rwandese women took on unconventional roles, such as serving as judges in the neighborhood Gacacacourts (outdated conflict settlement courts), which were exclusively male affairs before the genocide. These courts were crucial in deciding cases involving genocide suspects and offenders and addressing disputes among community members. By November 2005, the Gacacacourts' estimated proportion of female judges was 15.7%. 'Aloisea Inyumba' was appointed as the first Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, which was established in March 1999, likely in acknowledgment of the contributions made by women to peacebuilding and conflict resolution in Rwanda, particularly their achievements in the Gacaca courts (Ingelaere, 2008).

Additionally, Rwandese women contributed substantially to the government's rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts by helping build homes in the newly constructed townships. As a result, they assisted in repatriating thousands of displaced persons and offered possibilities for resettlement to those who returned (Issifu, 2015). Additionally, because the genocide and civil war had a detrimental impact on food security and agricultural productivity, women throughout Rwanda resurrected several agricultural enterprises through self-help projects. As a result, women ensured food security by producing food on their farms or through the Food for Work Program for their families and the broader populace. This facilitated national healing because hunger seriously threatened peace and unity in the country.

## Conclusion

Women and children emerge as the most vulnerable segments of society, enduring profound suffering before, during, and in the aftermath of conflicts. Paradoxically, they are not the instigators of wars; nevertheless, they bear the brunt of their devastating consequences. In the contemporary era, rebels and conflict instigators have employed tactics against women akin to those employed by terrorists. Consequently, women find themselves targeted and exploited as instruments of war. A glaring example lies in the DRC, where thousands of women fell victim to rape. Additionally, in the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, approximately 250,000 Rwandan women and girls became victims of sexual violence, with 66% testing positive for HIV/AIDS.

This paper provides an overview of the role of women in Rwanda's peacebuilding endeavors. The study examines the great strides made by Rwandan women in promoting peace through the perspective of peacebuilding theory and the problems they face when participating in peacebuilding projects. Feminist peace concepts are based on men and women participating equally at all levels and in all processes, emphasizing integrating gender perspectives across all areas of security, peace, and development policy. Discrimination against women increases the risk of a state experiencing internal conflict, and according to this article, gender consideration is an essential aspect of an effective peacebuilding process. Evidence from studies of peacebuilding from a feminist perspective, such as in Rwanda, can be utilized to make the peace agenda more inclusive and ethical. The article contends that a culturally contextual gender analysis is a critical instrument in all peace work, both for the feminist theory of peacebuilding and the practice of adopting a gender perspective.

*UNSCR 1325* on WPS recognized the importance of women's conflict experiences to its peace and security mandate. The Council aims to advance women's rights in conflict resolution and peace processes. However, endemic discrimination, marginalization, and sexual violence against women in the face of Resolution 1325 pose serious obstacles to its achievement. Although there is no denying that support for

local women in peacebuilding has grown in the years following *UNSC Resolution 1325's* approval, it is also clear that financing for women's groups and campaigners has decreased over time. Since 2001, international efforts for world peace have changed from supporting women's groups and activists to combating terrorism globally. As a result, support for the global battle against violence against women has drawn very few contributions from women's security movements.

Women possess the potential to actively engage in endeavors aimed at fostering peace. Following numerous conflicts, women consistently constitute the majority of the population, shouldering substantial responsibilities that encompass not only the reconstruction of the nation but also the nurturing of their families. In this capacity, they undertake the complex task of reestablishing community security, ensuring sustenance, and cultivating an atmosphere of peace.

To establish enduring peace, addressing concerns related to women's equitable access to power, education, and resources is paramount at the national and international levels. Governments are tasked with vigilant oversight to ensure the effective execution of these intentions across all sectors and tiers. This approach is the most viable avenue for propelling sustainable development within post-conflict scenarios. Advocacy campaigns centered around education, and awareness are crucial components in this endeavor. When strategically positioned, women can emerge as indispensable pillars in a post-conflict nation's pursuit of peacebuilding initiatives. Their involvement serves as a cornerstone for advancing sustainable development amidst the aftermath of crises.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

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