



Role of Women Organisations of Cameroon in Peacemaking: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT

In a world characterized by violence and conflicts from the individual level to the community level, we must strive to make peace with one another. Among those seriously affected in conflict situations are women. Though women are considered the most vulnerable in times of conflict and turn out to be the most ignored, women's role in peacemaking and conflict resolution cannot be underestimated. The ongoing socio-economic and political crisis in Cameroon has affected women in many ways. To end the conflict, women organizations have been carrying out peacemaking activities. This paper will explore the different measures and actions taken by women's organizations in the Cameroon Peace process.

Keywords: Women, Organisation, and Peacemaking

Cameroon, like some other countries, is threatened by numerous problems. These problems include, among others, conflict, sexism, pollution, worker exploitation, global warming, crime, political corruption, energy shortage, illiteracy, inadequate health care, unemployment, poverty, gender inequality, marginalization, gross economic disparities, and violence. The culmination of these problems has eventually led to armed conflict. The ongoing Anglophone conflict which erupted some five years ago due to Anglophone marginalization has caused untold suffering to several persons. Among those seriously affected are women and girls. A woman is an adult female human. In the present conflict situation, they gave birth in the bush; they were forced into prostitution, were unable to go to school, struggled to take care of the family, among other factors. Though seriously affected in this conflict, women are excluded or

ignored in the peace-making process. With the escalation of violence and conflict everywhere, there is a great need for women and women's organizations to be included in peace-making and peace building processes. The first reason is that women constitute half of Cameroon's population, and the difficult task of making peace must be made by men and women in partnership. Secondly, Women are the central caretakers, caregivers, and homemakers of families, and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peacemaking. Women are also advocates of peace, as a peacekeeper, relief workers, and mediators. Women provide 60 percent of the labor force in society.

However, efforts to foster the perspectives of women

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in peace processes and to prevent gender-based violence have met with limited success. Women's participation in conflict resolution and peace-building is limited by a number of factors. These factors include rape and sexual assault, primary careers, cultural pressures, lack of resources, such as a lack of access to employment opportunities and productive assets such as land, capital, health services, and training and education. Though women's roles were not recognized, Cameroonian women have used traditional organizations to gain collective power during the political and economic crisis. The mawu traditional women society in Manyu Division "serves as uniting bond where women meet and take decisions for their welfare. Another traditional women organization is the Takumbeng. These women used traditional forms of protest and transnational networks to foster political solidarity, inclusion, and nationalist aspirations. Through their activities, they gave orders, made decisions, and enforced obedience. As discussed above, women's efforts in peacemaking processes are important and should never be ignored because women make a significant part of the population. Overwhelmed by women's actions and their continuous demand for gender equality. In response to women's cries, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325(2000) recognizes the unique impact of conflict on women's lives and highlights their often-overlooked contributions to resolving and preventing conflict.. It also calls on the international community to involve women fully in every aspect of work for peace and security. Women's role in conflict resolution and peacemaking has long been underestimated, especially in Cameroon, where patriarchy is practiced. What is patriarchy? The Anglophone crisis in the North West and southwest regions of Cameroon that erupted about five years ago has caused enormous loss of lives and property and has affected women the most. The effects of displacement on women are particularly pronounced in some United Nations documents. The United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) estimates that about 50% of people who were forced to flee their homes as a result of conflicts are women and children.

For example, in 2019 400000 thousand women and children were displaced internally (UNICEF, 2019). The increased growth of violence and conflicts has severe consequences on the socio-economic and political developments of Cameroon. Women caught in conflict are now suffering from a wide range of psychological and physical health problems, including a weakened immune system, depression, alcoholism, and eating disorders.

Though the role of women has continuously been undermined, some women's organizations have continued to push and press for their voices to be heard. This is because they believe they too have a say in the socio-economic and political organization of the state and especially in the peace-making process.

The ongoing Anglophone conflict has produced gendered outcomes with a particular shift enabling Cameroonian women organizations to be directly involved in peacemaking activities. In the backdrop of increasing hostilities, we find peacemaking by women organizations an essential component for peace building

Objective and Approach

This study aims to examine the role of women's organizations in the peace-making process in the World and Cameroon in particular. Another objective is to examine the challenges Women organizations face in the peacemaking process. The overall objective of this study is to explore the different dimensions that Women organizations are involved in trying to mitigate for peace.

The approach to this study is based on social constructivism, as well as prominent empirical studies. It is a work in progress. This study is limited only to women and women organizations in Cameroon.

Role of Women's organisations in Peacemaking

Conflicts affect everyone. They can occur anywhere, anytime. Cameroon is rubbed today by many conflicting situations because many people are unequipped to handle conflict situations. In

Cameroon, one can identify four important types of conflicts. (1) Controversy, (b) Conceptual conflict. (c) conflict of interest, (d) Development conflict. According to Johnson (2003), these conflicts are a barrier to the development and progress of every country. When the Anglophone crisis erupted some five years ago, many took it to be a trivial issue that could be tackled in two weeks. Five years have come and gone, and the situation has deteriorated. In the Anglophone regions, for example, 800.000 children are out of school, and one of the three of the four million people is in need of aid. This conflict has resulted in the burning of villages, hospitals, killings of thousands of persons, kidnappings, displacements of persons, extra judicial killings, and so on. HRW, (2020) The Post 2018-electoral violence orchestrated by the Cameroon Renaissance Party (CMR) has instead made matters worse. The human rights situation, as observed by International Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2019) has deteriorated. On February 27, 2020, HRW Reported at least 21 people were killed in an attack on Ngarbuh village by the Rapid Intervention Battalion. HRW, (2020). Most of these victims were women and children In line with Ngarbuh massacre, and six school children were killed by gum men in a school in Kumba a town in the South West Region. All the above cases are indices of a lack of peace in the country. The above types of conflict can be addressed if all the agents, individuals, corporate nationals are given opportunities to make peace.

Peacemaking is necessary because of the prevalence of war. It is coined to label and identify activities that work to restore peace in a situation of conflict. It is focused primarily on civil wars and international conflict, although its methods are closely related to counseling models used to restore harmony within families, local communities, and countries. Peacemaking is an active strategy to limit war and violence. Peacemaking processes include mediation, arbitration, and adjudication. Peace-making may involve the process of seeking a resolution to a conflict while the conflict is ongoing. Still, it may also involve some arbitration of issues after armed conflict has ceased. Peacemaking is the deliberate transition from a state of war to peace.

Resolving to help women out of the situation which Cameroon is now facing, a number of women organizations are involved in the peacemaking process. Women zations are an activist organization that promotes equal rights for women. They also take action through intersectional grassroots activism to promote feminist ideals, lead societal change, eliminate discrimination, and achieve and protect the equal rights of all women and girls in all aspects of social, political, and economic life Women have unique opportunities for conflict resolution and peacemaking due to the unique role they play in society. Women and girls are often the worst hit in armed conflicts. They are exposed to all acts of violence that seriously undermine their rights and deny them the opportunities arising from gender inequality. One such organization is the Foundation for Women's Advancement. Considering that unemployment and gender equality are threats to Cameroon's peace, this organization has successfully addressed the problems surrounding Women's lack of access to education and employment. The organization has helped women protect their human dignity and reach a higher standard of living through hard work, education, and professional training. By doing this, this organization is making peace as a means to attain the UN Charters goal" to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

Another organization deeply rooted in peacemaking in Cameroon is Women in Alternative Action (WAA). Women in Alternative Action is a non-profit and non-governmental organization founded in 2004 with a vision to promote communities free from gender-based violence, stigmatization, discrimination, and exclusion of women and youths, and girls in Cameroon and the Central African sub-region. This organization has been building open spaces for youth participation in peacemaking processes. Youths, especially girls, are trained on peacemaking, conflict prevention and resolution, and gender justice. The activities of this organization are in line with the Charter VI of UN Charter, which talks about peacemaking as a non-restrictive list of peaceful diplomatic and judicial means of resolving disputes. The Peace Bus

Association, another women organization, created in 2006 has been teaching peace education in some secondary schools in Doula in the Littoral region of Cameroon. With the increase crime waves in schools in recent years, the Peace Bus Association has been able to educate girls and boys on the need to be tolerant and non-violent. In this program children are taught how to make peace and to resolve conflict. Peace education is essentially about teaching people to make peace with themselves and with others. Women Empowerment Association for Development in Africa (WEADA) is a women-led organization founded in 2015 in Yaounde. WEADA aims to serve and empower women and girls as agents of change by creating access to transformational socio-economic development and empowerment based on the principles of well-being, equality, and social justice. This organization carries out activities such as mediation, conciliation, and judicial settlement of disputes.

As far as the Anglophone conflict is a concerned, women have been forced to organize themselves, protect necessities and carry out activities related to a return to peace in North West and South West region. These activities have a part to play in guaranteeing durable peace, and therefore the government is obligated to ensure that women are included in crucial peace consultation at all levels. With the lingering insecurity situation in the North West and South West region of Cameroon, a group of women organizations has emerged under the auspices of South West and North West Women's Task Force. These women and other women's organizations have been mustering and Campaigning for the return of peace in the two regions. They called for a ceasefire or a total end of the meaningless conflict and meaning participation of women to find sustainable peace in the violent conflict. These women have organized press conferences, radio, and television talks and marched on the streets of major towns and cities in Cameroon. They have equally succeeded to mobilized thousands of women to participate in mourning exercises. This has been to express their extreme discontentment and to draw the attention

of policymakers so that they may go to the dawning board to resolve the disastrous conflict sustainably.

These women have also been active on social media and have kept apprising and supporting each other with WhatsApp messages. They also created a "HearMetoo" campaign. a 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based violence to end violence against women and children.

There have been several calls for cessation of hostilities by women organizations in the country, especially those in crisis-hit regions. These calls are a clear indication of their frustrations with the handling of the crisis. It also demonstrates, the unique roles women have in making peace in the country. Women organizations have been particularly involved in decision making. In the last national Dialogue that took place in Yaounde, women from all works of life have heavily represented as an indication that they could contribute to the economic and social foundations of a stable society and resilient institutions following the five-year conflict. Women are also involved in the peace-making process because it is through this that their grievances can be addressed.

In an effort to find lasting peace in the ongoing Anglophone conflict, Cameroon Women organized the first-ever women peace Convention that took place in the country's capital, Yaounde. For three days, over 1000 women from all corners of the country came together at the Palais des Congress, Yaounde, to raise their voices in unison, demanding an end to violence and calling for peace. A committee consisting of 38 civil society organizations working for peace and women's rights in Cameroon was responsible for the organization of the convention. In attendance were women peace activists and civil society, survivors of war-related violence and displaced women and girls, female traditional and religious leaders, female politicians, among others. The attendees represented all 10 regions in the country.

CONCLUSION

This article tried to explore the importance of women's organizations in peacemaking. It also

tried to argue why women should be included in peace-making processes in contemporary times. It examines the role women play and the obstacles they continue to face in post-conflict resolution and peace-building. The article also explored the different measures and actions taken by women organizations to advocate for a return to peace. As discussed, women's efforts in peacemaking processes are important and should never be ignored because women make a significant part of the population.

REFERENCES

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