

Canada's Role in Supporting African Women in Peace Processes

Speaking notes for S. Wijeyaratne.

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Good afternoon – my name is Surendrini Wijeyaratne, I'm CCIC's policy analyst in peace-building and humanitarian response.

Sylvie asked me to speak about Canada's role in supporting African women in peace processes. Unpacking precisely what Canada has done to support peace processes, let alone African women to participate in PP is challenging due to very diffuse information out there.

So, to do this, I'll structure by comments in four parts.

- First, a little background on women in peace processes generally
- Second, a brief look at Canada's experience and mechanisms
- Third some specific lessons from Uganda, DR Congo and Sudan regarding donor support to women in peace processes – to help get us to how Canada should support African women in PP
- And fourth, some forward looking suggestions for Canada's role

First, by way of Background....

As many of you know, in 2000 the United Nations (UN) Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.¹ The Resolution was the first of its kind in the Security Council to explicitly call on Member States to include women's rights, gender equality and women's participation in peace and security initiatives, including in developing and implementing peace agreements.

Last year we saw the adoption of resolution 1820 on sexual violence, and more recently 1888 also on sexual violence but more specifically looking at peacekeeping forces and their role in protecting women from sexual violence.

Together these three resolutions provide a substantive basis for donors, the international community, national governments, parties to conflict, and CSO, to ensure women's participation and women's rights are central in all peace initiatives.

Nearing the 10 year anniversary of the first Resolution 1325, we can say generally that it has proven to be a valuable tool in **advocating** for getting women to the negotiating table – it's provided a hook but has not necessarily led to greater results for women's participation.

Women continue to be severely underrepresented in peace talks and negotiation efforts today. This applies to women as facilitators and mediators as well as to women who participate as representatives of parties to conflict, or

representatives of civil society or community groups from conflict-affected countries.

Recent data from UNIFEM reveals modest achievements regarding women in peace processes...

- Only 2.4 percent of signatories to peace agreements are women [1].
- Out of 300 peace agreements for 45 conflict situations in the 20 years since the end of the Cold War, only 18 have addressed sexual violence in 10 conflict situations. (Burundi, Aceh, DRC, Sudan/Nuba Mountains, Sudan/Darfur, Philippines, Nepal, Uganda, Guatemala, and Chiapas).
- Only 6 peace agreements mention sexual violence as a prohibited act, and only 2 include monitors (Nepal and Sudan Juba Mountains).

In a study by UNIFEM of women's participation in 24 major peace processes since 1992, 13 of which were in Africa, we see that

- Kenya and DRC were the only processes that included women mediators.
- Only DRC in two negotiations at Sun City in 2003 and Goma in 2008 included women as signatories to peace agreements.
- And only five African peace processes in Burundi, DRC, Darfur, Uganda and Kenya had women in negotiating teams, and this ranges from a participation rate of 2% in Burundi to 25% in the 2008 Coalition government negotiations in Kenya.¹

The data (though limited) show that there is clearly a need to support African women in peace processes. Anecdotally, I should also mention that perhaps with the exception of Latin and South America, Africa has relatively high rates for women's participation globally.

The failure to include women in peace negotiations means that issues such as sexual violence, women's rights, and women's inclusion in development and political processes are often neglected in peace-agreements and therefore in post-conflict rebuilding efforts.

Regarding Canada's Role....

Support to African peace processes has often taken the form of financial, political, and technical support to mediation, facilitation, and negotiation teams. This has also included sending observers for examples to the Darfur talks in Abuja and the Uganda process mediated by the Government of South Sudan in Juba.

¹ United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM): *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence* (research in progress – September 2009).

Canada has also funded civil society, however, securing funding to support broader dialogue processes and community peace-building which can enable the participation of a wider range of actors including women has been more difficult due to short term funding.

The main pocket for funding peace processes is the Global Peace and Security Fund (GPSF) managed by the Department of Foreign Affairs, Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force. Up to now, the GPSF has faced significant hurdles in releasing funding in a timely manner, and this has resulted in very short term program support on the ground.

The GPSF funds a limited amount of countries. The list at present includes Afghanistan, Sudan, Haiti, Guatemala, Colombia, DR Congo/Uganda. DR Congo was added back to the list recently after some two years being ineligible for GPSF funds. So right now there are really only two (three including Uganda) African countries on the GPSF list. Its also possible that some funds for support to peace processes come from CIDA or are channeled through multilateral institutions like the UN, AU or regional bodies.

Presently, there is one officer responsible for mediation support within START. The officer sits within the policy section and is supposed to also be responsible for the women, peace and security file. It is not clear how much funds this position will be in charge of managing. The position was newly created over the summer, previously mediation-support was a part-time task of desk officers. So the mediation work at START is very much in early phases.

Assessing Canada's support for African women in peace processes is challenging, because there is a lack of clear policy in support of peace processes generally, as well as more specifically for the women, peace and security agenda.

What we can say, is that in 2006 Canada drafted an Action Plan on implementing Resolution 1325 in response to a request by the UN Secretary General for donor countries to develop implementation plans. However, the document hit barriers for approval within DFAIT. At present, there is no policy or action plan to pull together Canada various types of support for women in peace processes.

We know that Canada has funded peace talks in Darfur-Sudan, Uganda, DR Congo, and Kenya – to mention just a few recent examples. For the Abuja peace talks on Darfur, Canada was a considerable advocate for women's participation in the talks.

In Uganda, Canada was among the top financial contributors to the Juba peace talks between the Lords Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. But its not clear, if, and how much funds, were allocated specifically for women's

participation in peace processes. The same can be said of support to DR Congo and Kenya.

In DR Congo, we know Canada has been one of the main funders for the UN Joint Initiative Against Sexual Violence. But, has this translated to actual funding, technical or other support to address sexual violence in any of the recent peace talks. Did Canada use its experience with, or support to, the sexual violence initiative for ensuring issues of sexual violence were addressed in recent peace talks in DR Congo? These questions indicate that Canada's support to women in peace processes, including African women, has been ad-hoc.

To illustrate why such an ad-hoc approach is insufficient and problematic I'd like to highlight some common challenges faced by women in peace processes from Uganda, Sudan and DR Congo...

These lessons are demonstrative of issues that continue to impede the full effectiveness of African women's in participation in peace processes.

The Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) and Juba talks can both be described as successes in women's participation because women participated actively (not just as observers), although in much more limited numbers than men in talks.

However, both processes also demonstrate that getting to the negotiating table is not enough. Having influence to make change is the ultimate goal. Here, six areas emerge that I'd like to briefly highlight.

1. Numbers Matter...

One woman, or even a few women, on negotiating teams is not enough to ensure gender issues are examined in peace agreements. This is seemingly obvious, yet the experiences from Uganda and the DRC demonstrate that too often women are not initially included in the negotiating teams of parties to conflict. The minimum standard of 30% should be the goal for women's participation.

2. Seniority matters...

Women in political negotiations must be at a sufficiently senior level in terms of position and authority - on par with male counter parts in order to have influence.

3. Gender Advisors on mediation and facilitation teams provide invaluable legal and technical advice to mediators, facilitators, and, parties to conflict.

4. Content Experts are required ...

The Women's Caucus format from the Inter-Congolese Dialogue is a good model where civil society experts assisted women delegates in deepening gender analyses and women's rights content during the negotiations.

5. Recognize the realistic limits of Women's Solidarity...

This is a lesson from Sudan's Abuja talks as well as from the ICD and Juba talks. Bringing women to the table is not enough, they need to be well organized and prepared and external supporters should expect that women from different factions may not necessarily be able to agree on a common agenda.

Pressure on women to represent party or group positions can sometimes conflict with women advocating for a common agenda on peace and women's rights. Bridges built during 'women's only' pre-negotiations or capacity building workshops are precarious when women enter the tough political environment.

In the case of the Juba Peace Talks, the vastly different experience of women in southern Uganda who had more access to jobs and education than women living in the displaced camps in the north created tensions for women to work together as well as negative stereotyping of one another.

6. Negotiating with Men

In both the DRC and Uganda, women said that they found it difficult to negotiate in front of, and with, men. The difficulty applied to men on their negotiating teams and men from the other parties to the conflict. The women were trained and empowered more among other women than with men, and therefore found it challenging to translate both the skills and gender issues agreed on for negotiations, into the peace talks with men.

In closing, keeping in mind the challenges I just mentioned, I'd like to turn briefly to what Canada should do to support African women in peace process...

In June, CCIC organized a seminar on Canada and Peace Processes. One of the central themes was women's participation. In break out groups tasked with developing suggestions for the Canadian government and civil society on how to strengthen support to women in peace processes, the following recommendations were put forward:

Make sustainable, inclusive peace a priority in Canadian Foreign, Development, and Defense policy by:

1. Prioritizing women's role in peace processes as a first step towards the full realization of their rights, including a commitment to reinvesting in CIDA, and Foreign Affairs with significant, sustained and flexible funding.
2. Supporting and strengthen civil society particularly southern women's groups to engage in peace processes.
3. Developing, making public and implementing an National Action Plan on Resolution 1325, including the commitments in 1820, 1888, through

comprehensive transparent consultation with civil society throughout the process.

The Action Plan could for example, take into account the lessons just mentioned and include relevant African women's groups that have been engaged in peace advocacy, negotiations, and women's empowerment.

The lessons I previously mentioned reveal that a much more strategic and systematic approach to supporting women in peace processes is required in order to really see advances in the women's rights.

Another underlying theme from the day was the need for Canada to re-commit to supporting development and peace in Africa. For example, at present the 2-3 countries for support on the GPSF list makes capacity building for peace processes, from a preventive component, difficult. There needs to be clarity from DFAIT on if/what can be done to support early peace processes in non-GPSF countries and to support the capacity of women early before crisis and conflicts explode.

At present the Senate Committee on Human Rights is holding hearings for a Study on 1325 and 1820. It will be interesting to see what the study findings will suggest. In terms of CSO asks, a big one has been for GoC to consult with Canadian CSO and conflict affected women in developing a 1325 Action Plan.

One of the recommendations that CCIC put forward to the senate was:

That Canada should increase its capacity to support peace processes including by developing a policy framework and clear funding pocket for overall program support to peace talks. This should include developing and making public an Action Plan to implement Resolutions 1325, 1820 and 1888. The overall policy framework should make clear in initiatives supported by the Canadian government, a priority will be in including women in peace processes.

Thank you....

ⁱ United Nations Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed July 27, 2009).