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## **HARNESSING FEMINIST PROGRAMMING AND RESEARCH METHODS: A RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS**

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### ABSTRACT

Women's involvement in peace processes is a poorly realised component in implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Between 1990 and 2017, women represented 2 per cent of mediators, 8 per cent of negotiators and 5 per cent of witnesses and signatories to peace agreements (UNSG, 2018). 4.9 per cent of USD 19.5 billion bilateral aid for gender equality in conflict-affected contexts per-annum for 2016-2017 supported projects dedicated to improve gender equality and women's empowerment, while only 0.2 percent supported women's organizations (GENDERNET, 2020). Under-funded women's projects may not achieve much for women's empowerment when policy and decision making on women's participation are gender blind. Women's exclusion from critical decision-making forums where power, wealth-sharing patterns, social development priorities and approaches to justice are determined has devastating consequences for achieving the sustainable development goals. Based on a qualitative reflection of the author's experiences in facilitating a women-led peace and mediation community project, this article demonstrates how utilisation of gender sensitive process design and feminist research methodologies enhanced gender sensitive peace education programming in rural communities, further increasing women's participation in peace processes. The study provides a model of practical means for promoting implementation of UNSCR 1325 on WPS in peace, security and recovery processes.

**The first page should be used only for Title/ Keyword/ Abstract section. The main paper will start from second page.**

<sup>1</sup>The WPS agenda is provided in United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) (2000) and the subsequent resolutions on WP, including resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2008), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015) 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019).

## Introduction and background

Conflict is inevitable, and is a reality in any given family, community and society. Furthermore, conflict and violence are experienced in gendered ways globally and worse in highly patriarchal societies where women's rights are not a priority for peace and security policy and practice. Women-led community peacebuilding and peacemaking programmes which many times go unrecognized help build meaningful community capacity which in turn transforms conflict dynamics and patterns. The practice of mediation for example provides a safe space to resolve conflicts outside of the adjudicative processes, at a lower cost, and sometimes at no monetary cost at all. A good example can be drawn from the Liberian Peace Huts, a women-led community mediation and peacebuilding initiative. The Liberian Peace Huts are modeled after the traditional *Palava* hut, a space where local male leaders resolved community disputes. Traditionally women were only allowed to give a yes or no answer from outside the hut, as the hut remained a secluded space for men. The women-led Peace Huts have now been transformed into safe community spaces where individual women leaders and women's groups come together and lead processes to resolve community conflicts or disputes, including those related to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), try to find solutions to violence against women (VAW) as well as empower women economically. In the words of Leymah Gbowee, women in Liberia are deconstructing patriarchy and the violence it breeds through the inclusive manner on which they run their affairs.<sup>2</sup> Although the Peace Huts are run by women, men are welcome into the space, making it a democratic environment where all voices count. The Peace Hut model suits (Felstiner, 1974) postulation that the dispute processing practices in any society are a 'product of its values, its psychological imperatives, its history and its economic, political and social organization.'

Modern women's rights activism has added more value to the practice of traditional mediation by opening up spaces where both women and men can come together for conflict resolution, and in the process learn and share the importance of group rights in conflict resolution. Placing people together for conflict resolution is ordinarily good, but strategically placing women and men in one space with the single intention of working through the mediation process together has more potential to yield the most equitable and most transformative results possible. Community mediation processes can be egalitarian if gender sensitive due process is followed in designing them because they emphasise on individual self-determination, community self-reliance and equal community ownership of processes. Moreso, most women-led community mediation processes, like the Liberian Peace Hut model, also tackle many other issues such as women's economic empowerment and capacity building of women in peace and mediation processes, as part of mediation process design, and as tools to confront the root causes of conflict. Women's efforts successfully straddle the triple nexus approach<sup>3</sup>, an formula that seeks to close the silo gaps that often exist between humanitarian action, development work and peacebuilding. Women's efforts seek to close the silo gaps through engaging and enhancing women's leadership and participation in conflict prevention, economic recovery and peacebuilding, and also through collaboration and coordination with various actors, including CSOs, development partners and local communities.

There is greater need to train community women mediators to enhance their skills in various skills of peacebuilding and peacemaking. There is also need to along the way, enhance the skills of traditional leaders in the areas of gender and women's rights, basic

<sup>2</sup>Leymah Gbowee, see <https://justassociates.org/blog/womens-peace-liberia/>

<sup>3</sup>Triple nexus is a term used to capture the inter-linkages between the humanitarian, development and peace sectors." See for example: Nguya, Gloria. Siddiqui, Nadia. *The Triple Nexus (H-D-P) and Implications for Durable Solutions to Internal Displacement*. IDRP, University of London: 2020: [https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/idrp\\_hlp\\_submission\\_ws3\\_triple\\_nexus.pdf](https://www.un.org/internal-displacement-panel/sites/www.un.org.internal-displacement-panel/files/idrp_hlp_submission_ws3_triple_nexus.pdf). The approach refers to taking into account the inter-linkages and continuums between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding processes in policy and practice. See also: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICVA\\_Nexus\\_briefing\\_paper%20%28Low%20Res%29.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ICVA_Nexus_briefing_paper%20%28Low%20Res%29.pdf)

human rights law, interpretation and application of formal laws and policies to the adjudication process and drafting of legally binding agreements may achieve a lot for gender, peace, security and women's rights. Time invested in outreach and community building programmes that include women, traditional leaders, men, boys and girls helps to increase trust, confidence, knowledge and willingness to participate in mediation, as well as to strengthen community relations, especially between women and men. When community relations are strengthened, violence against women decreases and a better peace is created. Such programming also aids a general understanding of the nation States as sites for women's non-violent struggles to foster the women's emancipation agenda, a strategy for equalizing gender relations and eliminating the consequences of unequal power relations that often manifest through incidents of SGBV, VAW and domestic violence (DV).

Pursuant to the goal of genderising peace processes, this article demonstrates how the utilisation of gender sensitive process design and feminist research methodologies to inform gender sensitive peace education in their communities has been a successful strategy to foster women's increased participation for transformative peace processes, despite the existing financial and policy set-backs. The study provides a model of practical means for promoting implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related WPS resolutions in peace, security and recovery processes. Conceptualised within the broader framework of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325), the report exhibits how two women mediation facilitators worked together cross-regionally between Zimbabwe and the Fiji Islands to support a research process for developing suitable community peacebuilding and mediation curricula that can be used by various organisations and professional peacebuilders in building the capacities of women community leaders, girls, traditional authorities, government practitioners and related stakeholders in mediation process design and practice. The report is based on findings that came directly from the six communities in which the two mediation facilitators conducted the work step by step to produce the data for the intended curricula. The stages involved working together online to plan the process design, working together online to produce the research tools, field work to undertake a conflict analysis and a needs assessment exercise, running training workshops for the women and traditional leaders in the research communities and working together online to analyse the data and draft the curricula.

The work was supported by the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth's (WMC), a network hosted by Conciliation Resources, which connects women with a broad range of mediation knowledge and experience through the Peer-to-peer learning initiative. Peer to peer learning is an internal network activity that supports members of the network to connect across nations and regions, sharing in-depth knowledge, experience and mediation skills.

### **Contextual background**

Zimbabwe has conceded to several local, regional and global instruments that promote women's active participation in peace processes, a true affirmation of the leadership's commitment towards the WPS agenda at all levels.

Zimbabwe is party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict and post-conflict situations, which supports the women's organisations' aspirations to end impunity for gender crimes committed during and beyond political upheavals.

Zimbabwe has also ratified the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325). Set against the background of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which strongly affirmed the need for a resolution on women, peace and security, UNSCR1325 was approved by the United Nations Security Council in October 2000, in response to active lobbying by global women's movements and other civil society organisations (CSOs). UNSCR1325 is founded on three pillars of protection, prevention and participation, and acknowledges the dual reality that despite the important roles that they play in conflict prevention and peace processes – including peacekeeping, negotiations and peacebuilding, women are disproportionately affected by violence during conflict. The Resolution emphasises the nexus between women, peace and security, further authorizing State parties to ensure the inclusion of women as key actors in all peace and security processes at national level. This call alone makes UNSCR1325 an advocacy tool for mainstreaming gender in peace processes, and for raising the profiles of women for engagement with peacebuilding processes. Zimbabwe is also in the process of developing a national action plan (NAP) to guide the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

At the African Union (AU) 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Governments held in Durban, South Africa (July 2002), the African Heads of State declared that policies on gender mainstreaming are binding and should be realised at all levels. The AU's normative framework on WPS is guided by the Protocol on Women's Rights in Africa and the AU Gender Policy, among other policy initiatives. Zimbabwe is also amongst the countries that have, through their regional economic commissions, adopted a number of instruments and protocols on gender mainstreaming; which include the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003 during the Second Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the AU in Maputo and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which was adopted in 2008. Furthermore, the African Union and the SADC have both ratified and are implementing UNSCR1325.

At the national level, the Zimbabwe Constitution [Act: 2013 Chapter 12] has put in place a National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), among other Independent Commissions. Section 9 of the NPRC Act [10:32] calls for mainstreaming gender considerations in all programming activities of the Commission, and is based on the tenets of UNSCR1325. Zimbabwe has a progressive constitution whose Bill of Rights makes men and women equal before the law. Likewise, country has progressive laws and policies that promote the gender equality agenda.

Women constitute 52% of Zimbabwe's population. In addition to a background of patriarchy and colonisation, harmful practices and traditions assign different roles and power identities to women and men, further contributing to these inequalities. Gender ascribed roles and gender discrimination which have become systemic and normalised in some spaces tilt power relations between women and men, giving men power over women, and leaving asymmetrical patterns of access and control over resources and decision-making processes between the male and female species, and also between the powerful and the less powerful in society. As a result women are lowly represented in economic and political leadership positions at the local and national level. The rate of gender-based violence in Zimbabwe remains a serious epidemic, with two in three women having experienced gender violence in their lifetime. In addition to being a serious human rights violation, violence against women and girls has negative ramifications for both the security of citizens and community, and state stability.

The country's Gender inequality Index is 0.535, putting the country in the low human development category at 156 out of 189 countries and territories (UN, 2019). The CEDAW recommendations following Zimbabwe's 2019 CEDAW Report flag Zimbabwe as facing challenges specifically related to violation of SGBV/HPs/SRHR, which have not been matched by efforts to address the said challenges. This has prompted a requirement for GoZ to present a second report to the CEDAW Committee, on issues largely related to SGBV/HPs/SRHR in two years, prior to the next reporting session for all countries scheduled to take place in four years' time (UN, 2019). The main observation and argument remains that without broadening the understanding of conflict, the experiences of marginalised citizens, especially women and children fall through the cracks and escape the attention of policy makers. Chinkin and Kaldor (2013) postulation on the distinction between "new wars" and "old wars" is ideal in buttressing the need for a shift from state-centricism towards a human security framework which is more embracing and more relevant to the needs of citizens in society.

Positively, despite the scourge of violence, initiatives that actively engage women in conflict resolution and decision-making practice at the community level have had far-reaching benefits for the community, successfully contributing to meaningful violence prevention and response, particularly in cases of gender-based violence. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Zimbabwe have initiated programmes using a variety of methods to positively influence relational conflicts in several rural communities. Their work focuses on specific issues affecting women, young people, disadvantaged populations and other marginalized groups and was found to reduce gender-based violence. In addition to addressing relational conflicts in the communities, the initiatives of Zimbabwe NGOs have contributed to the participation, voice and power of women and their communities in decision-making regarding gender sensitive service delivery. These initiatives have been well received and contributed to a positive change within local communities, converging the interests of women activists, the youths, traditional elders, faith leaders and social welfare volunteers.

Village heads, faith leaders and district Chiefs have been recognized as community institutions that offer various forms of facilitated practice in conflict resolution at the community level. Their work enables non-crime related conflicts to be openly discussed, arbitrated and even adjudicated formally within their communities without taking issues to the formal courts. Working hand in hand with the police and the Department of Social Welfare, traditional leaders, faith leaders, voluntary community health care workers, voluntary case care workers, adolescent peer educators and community peacebuilders further assist in providing a referral pathway for crime related conflicts that affect women and girls in communities to be referred to the police, and finally to the formal courts.

Likewise, church leaders have mechanisms for addressing conflicts using various methods, depending on their beliefs and institutional organisation. Encouraging faith leaders and traditional leaders to work together with voluntary community health care workers, voluntary case care workers, the police, adolescent peer educators and women peacebuilders in partnership with the police and the Department of Social Welfare may catalyse the transformation of mindsets and bring a solution to end harmful practices that promote SGBV in the country. The project further increases spaces of dialogue for peace between civilians and the police, as well as intergenerational interaction between adolescent peer educators and the elderly. For this reason, implementation of UNSCR1325 remains an opportunity to influence increased participation of women and girls in peacebuilding processes. The assumption of this analysis is that massively engendering the UNSCR1325 agenda in a country like Zimbabwe has potential to transform the wider society's understanding of gender and women's rights, in the end reducing cases of VAW and SGBV, most of which emanate from a misunderstanding of the rights and roles of women in development in the social, environmental, economic and political spheres.

### **Delimitation of the study**

The study was delimited to 6 rural communities in 6 different districts of Zimbabwe. The study population included community women peacebuilders, community women mediators, male and female traditional leaders, male and female faith leaders and selected peer educators and social welfare workers. The sample of 62 participants was purposely selected by the lead women peacebuilders in each community, and altogether included 6 traditional leaders, 4 faith leaders, 36 women mediators/peacebuilders, 4 peer educators and 12 social welfare workers.

### **Theoretical framework**

This section presents the theoretical frame of our work. Epistemologically, this theoretical frame is a tool for sharing an understanding of why gender sensitive programming and gender sensitive feminist methodologies are important in informing programming that can influence inclusivity, sustainable development and sustainable peace. To achieve this we used theoretical perspectives on conflict transformation, decolonial peace, decolonial feminist theory and feminist standpoint theory.

### **The theory of conflict transformation**

The theory of conflict transformation was introduced by Paul Lederach's (2003). Its central argument is that as opposed to conflict management and conflict resolution notions, conflict transformation processes allow solutions to conflict to naturally evolve in patterns overtime, to be inclusive of all parties concerned and to create natural solutions which are relevant to the conflict situations. Conflict transformation includes change initiatives that go beyond just resolving conflicts, while ensuring that the continuum of peace becomes stable and sustainable (Lederach, 2003). The theory of conflict transformation provides adequate basis for analysing conflicts, and for devising appropriate responses to them as well as evaluating the effects of the said responses (Miali, 2004). Conflict transformation concerns itself more with transforming relations and interests, by virtue of the fact that they are driven by human beings and human interests. Furthermore, the theory of conflict transformation suggest a comprehensive and wide ranging approach emphasising support for various groups and stakeholders within the society in conflict, further recognising that conflicts are transformed gradually not instantly (Sawade, 2014)

### **Theory of Decolonial Peace**

Decolonial peace implies pursuing peace in a manner that reverses colonial continuities (Grosoguel, 2011), emphasising on relevant, home grown and gender sensitive normative frameworks that are supported by a viable, influential, autonomous, inclusive, transformative system. Espousing the theory of decolonial peace, Ndhlovu-Gatsheni (2013) establishes that Africa has suffered an incomplete transition from colonial to post-colonial, leading to 'neo-colonised postcolonial' conditions where peace and development remain elusive, where coloniality constrains the transition to sustainable peace in Africa and where paradigms of war, violence and the postcolonial political economy continue to haunt post-colonial African society. Decolonising governance and peace processes in Africa entails influencing a gender sensitive and gender inclusive conflict transformation and peacebuilding ethos that has potential to eliminate grievances, suspicions and hate while building sustainable peace.

### **Decolonial Feminist theory**

The tenet of decolonial feminism (Kusnierkiewicz, 2016) like the tenets of decolonial peace are to confront and transform the colonial axis or the colonial matrix of power that originates from the history of colonial domination (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). From an

African feminist standpoint, decolonial feminism further identifies the negative effects of the coloniality of power that has been perpetuated by the global super powers under the guise of the liberal peace agenda since the end of the Cold War. This axis of power continues to dictate relations between states and citizens at different levels of society. Thus the women's peace agenda is more embracing and more inclusive, rising above class agendas for capital accumulation towards a human security agenda (Campbell, 2003).

### **Feminist Standpoint Theory**

Feminist standpoint theory as a type of critical theory aims to empower the oppressed through creating and acknowledging a multiplicity of voices with which they can claim for themselves the value of their own experiences (Harding, 2007). This 'epistemic advantage' allows the marginalised groups to both create and consume up to date knowledge about their own context as well as the worlds of their oppressors (Hartsock, 2018). The assumption is that such knowledge will further lead them to critical insights and perspectives regarding how to curve a suitable trajectory for their liberation. A feminism impetus for developing a research design, data gathering and data analysis tools should be underpinned by the feminist peace researchers' ethos of 'intentionally imaging peace' (Lazarus, 2000). A vein of feminist stand-point theory, the concept of 'intentionally imaging peace' entails a process of intentionally questioning pedagogic processes, deconstructing mainstream notions of doing research to enable a new visioning for peace and global security that can free itself from the stranglehold of '*realpolitik* academic ideology' (Lazarus, 2000), a wrong assumption that academic research and writing can only be carried out in strictly specific forms and processes, devoid of creative exploration that is rooted in the quest for transforming old methods of knowledge construction towards re-building new and befitting ones (Lazarus, 2000).

In applying the four theoretical stand-points discussed above, this analysis notes that an effective community programme design for peace education cannot preclude incorporation of a gender lens to promote women's increased participation in governance, decision making and peacebuilding processes. In the bigger picture, an effective shift from state to human security cannot negate the pivotal roles women play at the local and international levels in advocating for positive peace. Gender sensitive peace education promotes a shift from the security of the state towards the security of citizens. It promotes a shift of responsibility and power of influence in security policy from hegemonic state politics to inclusive governance processes where women and men participate as equal citizens. Gender sensitive peace education informs theories of change for sustainable peace through systematic and reform-based knowledge solutions that promote positive personal agency, establishment of vibrant and inclusive home-grown institutions which support eradication of violence, poverty and exclusion, while strengthening women's capacities for effective and equal participation in peace processes.

Effective peace education is not possible without addressing gender and women's rights, and without designing knowledge programmes that permit women's participation in governance and peacebuilding processes. von Staehr (1974:296) defines peace education as, "The initiation of learning processes aiming at the actualization and rational resolution of conflicts regarding man as subject of action." This definition risks pointing only to man, (as in human beings of a male gender) as agents for peace, while negating the role that women also play on a daily basis to create peace. Mushakoji (1974:3), a Japanese peace educator, states that peace education is concerned with peace-less situations. While this is rightly so, peace education also finds meaning even beyond conflict times to in peace times. Just as conflict is never static, so is peace, and for peace to be sustainable, it has to be continuously nurtured and treasured. Salomon (2002) highlights that conflict is unavoidable part of humanity, and that it evolves differently per con-

text, and as such there are also many and different possible paths to peace. Salomon further argues that peace education programs should thus take varied designs, in response to the wide variety of conflicts that plague human existence. Salomon further argues that each different form of violent conflict requires a unique peace education strategy to resolve it.

Peace education, for purposes of this paper, refers to any form of education, both formal and informal, that incorporates a gender perspective to ascertain how conflicts affect women and men differently, in turn inferring recommended solutions for the creation of a democratic society where both women and men participate freely as equal citizens in all development processes.

### **Methodological design**

Participatory action research was used to promote a dialogue to analyse the root causes of conflict as well as assess the training needs of the communities. The following methods were employed;

#### **Virtual meetings**

Conceptualisation of this study started with a number of virtual meetings virtual meetings between me and the various stakeholders who were party to this project. The first meeting was with my fellow mediation facilitator, who is a member of the WMC like me, who resides in Fiji Islands. Based on her previous work in developing context specific curricula for community peacebuilders and mediators, I relied on her guidance on how to design curricula based on people's context specific conflict and peace dynamics. We had a number of mini workshops in which I listened to her previous engagements with similar work in the Fiji Islands. Together we designed a plan for how I was going to carry out field work to do a conflict analysis and training needs assessment of the selected communities, as the basis upon which curricula would be developed. The second virtual meeting was between me and the lead community peacebuilders who lead community programming initiatives in their respective communities. A conversation with these women entailed seeking their consent to work with them and their community members on this project as well as to seek guidance on how to approach the community authorities for clearance.

These conversations gave me a firsthand appreciation of the women within the programme and the community protocols to be followed upon entering the villages. The women also enlightened me on the need to seek police clearances in each district of entry, since the research process would include focus group discussions that required gathering people together during the time when the Covid 19 pandemic was at peak. After getting the acknowledgements for doing the research from the women, and following a feedback virtual meeting with my fellow mediation facilitator in the Fiji Islands, I proceeded to seek for police clearance for entering the community research sites. This process involved drafting the necessary concept note and letter of request and submitting the documents at the Police Headquarters. Authority to enter the research sites was granted in written form at the Police General Headquarters, and the letter had to be availed for stamping as authorisation at each district police station, prior to engaging the community people.

#### **Key informant Interviews**

We carried out key informant interviews with three six lead community women peacebuilders, 6 traditional leaders and 4 faith leaders in all the six selected research sites. Interviews were carried out in vernacular languages of the participants, while translations were done during note taking. Based on the interview guide prepared for the research questions were asked, not in a specific order,



but depending on how each participant allowed the conversation to move. During the interviews I was flexible to add questions related to the respondent's answers and I sometimes probed issues that were not directly linked to the questions in the interview guide, as need arose.

### **Focus group discussions**

Six (6) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in six (6) rural communities. The six (6) communities were chosen based on their geographical positioning to ensure that communities in proximity can work together on project activities. Each FGD comprised of a minimum of 9 members and a maximum of 11 participants in line with the Covid-19 requirements for social distancing. Among the participants for each FDG were at least one traditional leader, one faith leader, 3 women community peacebuilders, one female village health worker, one female case care worker and one adolescent peer educator.

### **Data analysis and preparation of gender sensitisation workshops**

After the workshops, I analysed all the data obtained from the virtual meetings, the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions manually. The first stage entailed analysing the, coding and classifying it into analytic units, categories and themes. Using word processing manual colour codes, I organised the data to develop an initial broad coding strategy to enhance the identification of key emerging themes in line with the various objectives of the research. As such, a three stage process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding was applied to the data, to produce various data sets. Open coding entailed segmenting or dividing the data into similar groupings to form preliminary categories or themes (Blair, 2015).

Axial coding entailed relating data together in order to reveal themes, groups, and sub-groups within participants' voices in the collected data (Blair, 2015) while selective coding involved selecting the most relevant data to the research topic (Blair, 2015). Four category headings were generated from the data, and I made sure that all of the data were accounted for. I then used this broad coding framework to undertake the major thematic across all the data sets, using grounded theory. Grounded theory is concerned with generating social theory which is grounded in evidence of data that has been systematically generated and broken down into themes (Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2021). I assigned codes to the data groupings, according to the emerging themes.

In the next stage I re-organized the codes, to create a catalogue of the final codes, for easy access and also for tracking similar codes in order to see which ones to merge with the others into selected codes and which ones to keep on file for final analysis and theory building in the report write-up, in line with the research topic. I made use of a research journal to generate a memo helped me link up the key codes with the relevant data in the manuscript for easy writing, referencing and quoting. Slowly and in stages, I focused more attention from analysis of the data transcript to analysis of the codes and the relationship between them and the topic under discussion. I converted the data into thematic codes in line with the research objectives. To ensure that all arising issues were taken care of without falling through the cracks during analysis, I applied a system called coding-on, which entails assessing all the coded data to check if double codes were embedded and emerging. In the case where double codes were identified, these were thematically assigned new stand-alone codes. The third stage entailed combining the data sets according to theme codes to produce one manuscript. This was followed by selective coding, where themes were organized and integrated to articulate a coherent case argument in line with the four objectives of the study. Data was finally broken down and analysed to derive meaning, and organised into themes for use during the curriculum development process.

After thematically organising the findings, I held another virtual meeting with my fellow mediator facilitator in the Fiji Islands, to present the findings, to prepare a training module for the community gender sensitisation workshops to be held in the six communities, and also to share tasks on how to write the findings into the desired community curricula handbook. Together we came up with a module for the gender sensitisation workshops. The module was based on the finding from the needs assessment that I carried out as part of the field work. .

### **Gender sensitisation workshops**

After three weeks post fieldwork, I carried out gender sensitisation workshops with the lead women community peacebuilders. The workshops were designed in a training of trainers' model, and the aim was to equip these lead agents with capacities to cascade the trainings to other members of their peacebuilding and mediation groups, as well as to the traditional leaders.

### **Curriculum development**

After writing our analysed data into six curricula modules, we exchanged the modules for peer reviewing, and then compiled them together into a manuscript that is ready for a further peer review and publishing process.

### **Ethical considerations**

As enunciated above, the researcher sought clearance with local government offices, district police authorities and traditional authorities in each district to obtain authority to enter the communities and hold such meetings. In writing this report, all names of districts visited and research participants were withheld for purposes of safeguarding their interests as citizens. In most communities in Africa talking about peace and peace processes connotes war, because peacebuilding work is often misunderstood and in the main remain a preserve of the elite. As such, what is important for this research paper is to share lived experienced for supporting inclusive gender sensitive programming and research methodologies as opposed to exposing the names of the research participants and their places of origin.

### **Adaptation to COVID-19 Pandemic**

COVID-19 has had negative impact on the health and economic well-being of communities in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, hence there was need to constantly reflect on this issue and take safeguarding measures during the whole research process. As feminist researchers, it was also imperative to keep reflecting on the obtaining power relations in society and their impact on women and children during the pandemic. In patriarchal societies, and in economies that face economic challenges like Zimbabwe, women are more likely to be in precarious social and economic conditions that expose them more to the pandemic. As such, adapting gender sensitive responses to COVID-19 to the existing programming initiatives is important in enhancing the peace, safety and security of women and children in rural communities. We successfully added a component of Response to the COVID-19 pandemic to this research process. Although the initial intention of the project included the training of village health workers, community case care workers and women peace builders in producing a homemade hand sanitizer and a homemade toilet cleaner for improved hygiene as a strategy to mitigate Covid-19, limited resources could not permit this, and the project ended at just supplying the project communities with few PEP as well as educating them on wellness and safety during the lockdown. Rural communities in Zimbabwe have devised a manual hand-washing device made from empty plastic gallons and wood to ensure that all households which do not have

running water can still wash their hands from this device which provides running water from the manually filled gallon. While almost every household now has this innovated device at the homestead gate as well as near the pit latrine areas, most of these devices are filled up with detergent free water owing to poverty, as many families cannot afford detergents and sanitizers. Producing a home-made sanitizer would have helped to ensure that all households comply with the hygienic requirements of COVID-A9. Women could also cascade the training to their fellow women in the village post the training, as well as generate income from sale of the sanitizers and toilet cleaning liquid.

### **Findings**

In lesser detail, this section discusses the research findings. The findings are not presented in detail because they make up the manuscript of the community curricula handbook that is yet to undergo a peer review and publishing process. To avoid pre-emptying the contents of the community curricula handbook, only a snapshot of the findings are presented thematically, in line with the objectives of the study.

### **Sources of livelihoods for the six communities**

The sources of livelihoods for the families in the six communities were not always the same, although they resonated quite a lot. These were established as small scale Fishing, informal mining, collecting and selling firewood (women), digging sand for selling, rick moulding, vegetable vending, sex work, professional jobs like teaching nursing and security services, farming, cross border trading and vending clothes at flea markets.

### **Conflict typology and causes of conflict**

The analysis established that conflicts in these 6 districts emanate mostly from issues to do with livelihoods, poverty and dependence of women on men for survival, traditional and religious beliefs, patriarchy and general disrespect for women's rights. Conflicts were also fueled by the existing mismatch between traditional codes of conduct and provisions of the formal law, for example, most young girls below the legal age of consent for marriage were victims of child marriages because of the discord between the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2008) [Chapter 9:23] and the Constitution of Zimbabwe on the legal age of consent to sex and the legal age of consent to marriage respectively among other causes. This section discusses in detail some of the findings.

### **Conflicts emanating from natural resource issues**

For those villagers who survived on fishing, some of the fish mongers do not have fishing nets and are not authorised to fish so they raid the authorised fish mongers to steal their fishing nets and some commit murder in order to get away with the fishing nets and the fish. In the area of informal gold panning, the panniers often squabble over the sharing of resources in the bush, sometimes fighting with dangerous weapons until they maim or kill each other. The reason for these squabbles was established as the general lack of a formal system to run their informal ventures, as well as lack of binding regulations for sharing their proceeds.

### **Gender Based Violence (GBV) and domestic violence (DV)**

A number of factors were identified as contributing to the high incident of GBV and DV in the communities, including but not limited to patriarchal power dynamics; misunderstanding of the gender and women's rights agenda; poverty, unemployment and men feel

emasculated, sex work relations; unemployment, generation gap and drug issues. In all provinces it was established that informal gold miners are often in conflict with parents in the communities for impregnating young girls aged between 13 and 18 years, prying on their ignorance of the SRHR rights, and luring them with their easily earned money from the gold mines. These abusers end up fleeing from the law to hide in neighbouring countries, coming back later to influence the same girls and their parents to receive money or gifts and bury the hatchet. This dynamic exposes many girls to repeated abuse with the abusers often getting away unpunished.

### **Mismatch between the law and the Constitution of Zimbabwe**

There is a contradiction between The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2008) [Chapter 9:23] which makes 16 years the legal age of consent for sex and the Constitution of Zimbabwe which makes 18 years the legal age of consent for marriage. This contradiction has become a loophole upon which early pregnancies and child marriages thrive, at the same time making it difficult for both the traditional courts and the formal courts to reasonably convict for rape. Raising awareness on these issues, intervening in such conflicts, building confidence and mending broken relations has an additional effect of mitigating the spread of HIV/AIDS, mitigating the rise of child pregnancies and child marriages accelerating advocacy work for the alignment of The Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act (2008) [Chapter 9:23] to the Constitution through the traditional leaders, some of whom are members of the Senate.

### **Incest and adultery related conflicts**

Some traditional leaders reported that they arbitrate a lot of incest and adultery cases in their courts. Incest cases rise when men impregnate their own relatives such as sisters or nieces and the case is brought to the court. Incestuous behaviour among men is fueled by traditional beliefs that if a man has sex with their female relative they become economically prosperous and socially powerful. In reality incest is abusive behaviour that thrives on power dynamics between women and men, where women are in most cases lured by money and other attractive gift that are used for sexual coercion. It was established that incest cases normally happen between an elderly male relative and a younger female relative, which again points to the issue of power and control. Other cases involve men who are caught in adulterous affairs with married women.

It was established that such cases often short change women when the husband is found guilty and has to compensate the other party for having an affair with their wives. Judgments often require the guilty party to give a herd of cattle to the aggrieved party, and in the rural family set-up in Zimbabwe these cattle are the family's investment, and the wife and children of the guilty party will lose out when the herd of cattle goes for compensation. Most of the women in the FGDs expressed that the rulings were gender biased because they did not consider the welfare of the guilty party's family, and would rather have the guilty party imprisoned in the formal courts than lose the family wealth. The traditional leaders on the contrary expressed that compensation was the only ideal way of solving the problem since the herd of cattle belonged to the offender by virtue of being head of household. One traditional leader further expressed that it was not acceptable by traditional standards to remove the man from his family and put him in jail because the wife will indulge in extra marital affairs and this would violate the traditional code. These contradictions place the women in precarious positions and could be solved by sensitising traditional leaders on gender and women's rights, standardizing the application of laws and judgments in the formal and traditional courts and ensuring that women in customary marriages in the rural areas also have rights to property and a say in the administration of same property.

### **Gender as a hindrance to women's leadership in peace and mediation processes**

Some conflicts arise when women get into positions of power such as becoming a village head or traditional chief. Some people still believe that women should not be leaders in those positions and as such women face various challenges and obstacles which prevent them from exercising their right to leadership. However, women do not take the challenge sitting down, but always stand up to challenge the processes to ensure that they retain their positions of power and influence. It was however established that sometimes the challenges women face rob them of their confidence, and may struggle to keep up with expectations, hence the need for interventions such as counseling and confidence building trainings for female traditional leaders.

Findings also established that in some parts of Zimbabwe there are many women peacebuilders who lead mediation processes on a daily basis in rural communities, but face enormous difficulty due to a lack of formal training in the mediation practice, lack of recognition because of patriarchy, and lack of visibility because of limited networks and required resources.

A further finding was that while a significant number of communities now realise the roles that women can play as part of the traditional court system, the conventional manner in which the adjudication of cases is done in some traditional leader' courts may present challenges with regards to the recognition of gender and women's rights. This is caused by the fact that most traditional leaders are not trained in the functions and application of formal laws and policies to conflict issues, and as such they will continue to use traditional laws which may run contrary to the tenets of human rights and women's rights, and of the rights of children as stipulated in the national, regional and global laws, policies treaties and protocols.

### **Needs of community peacebuilders**

The following were highlighted as the needs that the community peacebuilders and those that they work with such as the traditional leaders, faith leaders and government volunteers have. Fulfilling these needs could make the peacebuilding and mediation efforts achieve better results. Women peacebuilders, traditional leaders and other stakeholders in the communities need capacity building support in the following areas: SGBV/SRHR laws and policies, Gender and women's rights, Case assessment and case management, Active listening, The language of peacebuilding, Basic peacebuilding and peer mediation skills, Listening and storytelling skills and the skills for rafting binding agreements

### **Conclusions**

This article demonstrated how the utilisation of gender sensitive process design and feminist research methodologies can inform gender sensitive peace education in rural communities. The article further demonstrated how women-led peacebuilding engagements have been a successful strategy to foster women's increased participation for transformative peace processes in line with UNSCR 1325. The article also affirmed the various roles that women play in promoting peace processes in their communities, as facilitators, as agents of change and as team members to development programmes on peacebuilding and mediation processes. Time invested in outreach and community building programmes that include women, traditional leaders, men, boys and girls helps to increase trust, confidence, knowledge and willingness to participate in mediation, as well as to strengthen community relations, especially between women and men. When community relations are strengthened, violence against women decreases and a better peace is created. Such programming also aids a general understanding of the nation States as sites for women's non-violent strug-

gles to foster the women's emancipation agenda, a strategy for equalizing gender relations and eliminating the consequences of unequal power relations that often manifest through incidents of SGBV, VAW and domestic violence (DV).

### Recommendations

There is greater need to train community women mediators to enhance their skills in various skills of peacebuilding and peacemaking. There is also need to along the way, enhance the skills of traditional leaders in the areas of gender and women's rights, basic human rights law, interpretation and application of formal laws and policies to the adjudication process and drafting of legally binding agreements may achieve a lot for gender, peace, security and women's rights.

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