

Unlocking the Doors

Feminist Insights for Inclusion in Governance, Peace and Security

Primer 3 • 2016



By Dr Awino Okech



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DISCLAIMER

This publication is one of three primers in a series titled *Feminist Perspectives on Governance, Peace and Security*.

The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) commissioned Dr Awino Okech to write the series. The aim is to generate discussion among feminists to influence policies that will address the diverse realities of African women. The primers have been published solely for the purpose of pursuing women's rights in Africa.

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Acronyms

AWDF	African Women's Development Fund
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
SMEs	Small to medium enterprises
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Unlocking the Doors Feminist Insights for Inclusion in Governance, Peace and Security

This is the third in a series of three African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) primers entitled Feminist Perspectives on Governance, Peace and Security. The primers are intended to:

1. Offer a review of the major debates on women, governance, peace and security in Africa.
2. Review and analyse women's movements' interventions in governance, peace and security.
3. Offer a set of policy and advocacy priorities based on political and practical realities.
4. Benefit women's rights activists, organisations and people in government at the frontline of local and national mobilisation initiatives seeking to enhance women's leadership.
5. Assist in building alliances and structuring support across various institutions working towards enhancing women's political participation.

The focus on governance is informed by AWDF's renewed thematic approach. It is also driven by the fact that women's participation in governance is a key indicator of the general level of democracy in a society.

The importance of increasing women's public and political participation is reflected in regional and international commitments to gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, and the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SDGEA).

The AWDF primers

Primer 1: Statecraft and pursuing women's rights in Africa

Primer 2: Gender and security in Africa

Primer 3: Unlocking the doors: feminist insights for inclusion in governance, peace and security

Introduction

The post 2015 development framework consultations arising from the 2015 deadline to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have triggered a robust debate on women's rights specifically, and gender equality generally.

The gender equality targets for education, health and governance have formed major areas of review, with due recognition of the interconnectedness between all development drivers. Improvement in one area has a positive effect on the others.

The MDGs review process has confirmed that gender inequalities persist in many countries, and achieving women's rights remains a moving target (UNECA 2012). The low rates of secondary education enrolment, wide gaps in access to decent employment, the gendered nature of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and improving women's participation in the labour market are all pointers to the nature of the challenge.

Inequalities and discrimination based on income, geography, disability and ethnicity intersect with gender and are often mutually reinforcing. Cultural stereotypes about men and women's work continue, thus confining women to petty trading: buying and selling small volumes of goods directly for retail in local markets, while men tend to dominate wholesaling into regional and international markets (Grown et al 2005; FAO 2011). African women remain dominant in the informal sector, accounting for 84% of female non agricultural workers compared to 63% of men (ILO decent work agenda in Africa 2007–2015). Most informal workers do not enjoy secure work benefits and social protection, which is particularly risky for female headed households and for women living with HIV and AIDS (Grown et al 2005; Craviotto 2010).

The effects of the global financial crisis have also led to the privatisation of many of the institutions and mechanisms of social reproduction. This means care of the elderly, daycare for children, and some aspects of health and education have to be privately paid for, or carried out in the household, usually by women's unpaid work.

Reductions in public spending in areas such as health and education have further increased the burden on women, particularly on female heads of households (Craviotto 2010). Pay and employment cuts have also affected small to medium enterprises (SMEs) of which women comprise between 60% and 80%. Female dominated sectors such as SMEs are shaped by their lack of collective bargaining power thus weakening their pay prospects. Even where they have such power, collective bargaining often secures only lower national minimum wages. Although many African countries have adopted minimum wage policies, very few have explicit policies designed to counter female wage discrimination (Craviotto 2010).

As Africa's record of women in parliament improves, it is accompanied by rising intolerance towards women's rights. This is reflected in ineffective electoral systems, politically fragile environments, rising religious fundamentalism, cultural conservatism, recurring democratic recessions, the lack of constitutionalism and political patronage. Consequently, the increasing statistics of all forms of violence against women is a barometer for how women are regarded in these societies. The diverse manifestations of violence against women also enable us to understand the ways in which deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and attitudes are reorganised to lock women out of the state.

It is in this context that the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) has published a set of three primers in a suite titled *Feminist Perspectives on Governance, Peace and Security*.

This is the third primer in the series. It analyses the successes and gaps in women's movements' approaches to the intersections between governance and the security complex. These insights are based on AWDF's analysis of some of the major challenges confronting movement building in the areas of governance, peace and security. With these primers, our objective is to reposition feminist politics as a fundamental expression of accountability to our cause and constituencies, and to provide an opportunity for advancing individual and collective learning.



PART 1

Insights

Part 1 of this primer consists of six insights for feminist work on governance, peace and security in Africa. Part 2 offers a series of questions to focus discussion around in taking feminist work to the next level.

..... Insight #1: Disappearing feminisms

The militaristic nature of Africa's liberation and the gender prejudices held by early liberation leaders were incorporated into the post colonial African state, further entrenching a patriarchal state model (Campbell 2003). Women's participation in the nationalist struggle provided the impetus for post independence demands on gender equity, which disrupted pre existing gender relations and cultural norms. However, women's participation in anti colonial movements was often closely managed within gendered boundaries thereby enabling quick post independence reversals. 'Women might have changed and expected to change society, but the male led guerilla movements with whom they worked had not confronted gender equality to any real extent, relying on women only for popular support' (Stott 1989: 63).

The political will to meaningfully address gender inequality diminished rapidly and was replaced by the regulation and control of women in both the private and public sphere (See AWDF Primer 1). Women's political engagement in the new state was systematically eroded not only by the development discourse 'but also through powerful invocation of counter-revolutionary nationalist and cultural discourses that tended to paint any women's organising as feminist – and feminism as being anti-nationalist and pro-imperialism' (Campbell 2003).

In the last two decades, feminists working on women's rights in the development sphere have witnessed further erasure of feminist politics. Good governance, structural adjustment, patriarchal state building, and elite consolidation have led to token gender transformation (Lewis 2008). The universalised approach to 'rights' has silenced the importance of justice, which would imply a holistic understanding of the ways in which certain groups and institutions can prevent others from realising different liberties (Lewis 2008). While important, over emphasising the rights based framework creates a culture of formal procedures that ensure nominal access of all to certain platforms or resources, without guaranteeing comprehensive access by everyone to all structures in society. In other words, the rights framework gives privilege to certain forms of freedom and justice over others and assumes generalised access to mechanisms put in place to safeguard individuals (Lewis 2008).

The loss of feminist language and politics within public gender discourse has led to the association of power within the status quo as desirable and women's aspirations to the status and privileges that men have as sufficient (Lewis 2008). The net result is that the pursuit of equal representation of women in various structures of formal power within the state is constructed as an end in itself. Reclaiming feminist language and politics is therefore essential. It opens up the possibility of imagining the transformation of structures beyond existing class and gender models (Lewis 2008).

..... Insight #2: Sites of engagement

'Over the past four decades, women's movements have invested considerable energy in holding governments accountable to ideals of "gender equality" within political representation, state-based budget processes, and the delivery of resources and services' (Bennett 2008: 2). African states, as constituted today, are spaces in which the promise of democratisation to improve the material and social conditions, as well as to ensure the protection of citizens against abuse by state agents, remains largely unachieved.

Even in recent people led uprisings such as those in northern Africa, the democratic consolidation process remains fraught. While women's movements have continued to be part of the forces of change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the prominent role played by extremist religious groupings in both Tunisia and Egypt threaten democratic spaces for women. In Tunisia, these were well developed before the uprisings (See AWDF Primer 1).

In Egypt, the closure of space for public dialogue, the recentralisation of power in the executive in the new constitution, and the targeted violence against women protestors, underscores the value attached to human security in the new political dispensation. Ongoing instability in Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic has further highlighted the importance of effective early warning mechanisms to avert violence directed at women. These contexts highlight the limitations of UNSCR 1325 as a preemptive framework. They also draw attention to the range of African Union instruments for peace and security, and those within regional economic blocs, that member states underutilise and don't implement.

This notwithstanding, there is room to manoeuvre. Constitutional review processes that have preceded general elections in a number of countries make general elections important sites for tracking governance deficits and opportunities to scale up women's leadership of, and in, political processes. Secondly, there is the need to gather reliable gender disaggregated quantitative data across all realms of governance beyond national parliaments.

Finally, the presence of a strong women's political movement makes a difference in democratising spaces for women. The bulk of the women's movements' political work has been around building women's capacity to work within existing political party and governance frameworks. While women from these political movements have been key to current gains within the political sphere, the pressure to subscribe and/or defer to political choices and blueprints – which

are far from feminist principles – is high. Granted, attempts have been made to establish women led political parties. But these have often been short lived and have not always been driven by a feminist ideological political programme. There is a case to be made for feminist political movements whose aim is to capture state power as a route to confronting continuous democratic recessions that impact women disproportionately.

..... Insight #3: 'New' frontiers of violence

The evolving nature of patriarchy is manifest in 'new'¹ and increasing forms of violence against women across the African continent. The closure of democratic spaces is seen in the rise of legislative mechanisms across African states. They seek to:

- curtail freedoms associated with bodily autonomy and integrity
- curtail freedoms of association, movement and speech
- define which rights are permissible
- severely limit the work of civil society organisations.

The period 2009–2013 has been characterised by multiple legislative efforts in different parts of the continent. These efforts have attempted to roll back gains fought for by different social justice movements. Some of the most notable efforts are the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill (popularly known as the Bahati Bill) and the Anti-Homosexuality and Same-Sex Marriage Bill in Nigeria. These bills focus on criminalising non heterosexual sexualities. The Bahati Bill in particular sought to broaden the criminalisation of same sex relations in Uganda by introducing provisions to bring 'suspected' Ugandans living abroad back home for punishment. The overarching objective of the Bahati Bill is to 'protect' internal and external threats to the family unit (Tamale 2009). The Bill also included penalties (including the death penalty) for individuals, companies, media organisations or nongovernmental organisations which know of gay people, or work in the area of sexual and reproductive health rights (Tamale 2009).

The Nigerian Indecent Dressing Bill was another legislative onslaught which sought to 'prohibit and punish public nudity, sexual intimidation and other related offences in Nigeria' (Bakare-Yusuf 2011). Its mover, Senator Eme Ufot Ekaette, chair of the Senate Committee on Women and Youth Affairs, argued that the Bill was intended to protect women from violence. In taking this position, Senator Ekaette subscribed to the view that women are to blame for violence through their dress, conduct and 'foreign' cultures. Therefore, violence against women, in her view, is not linked to the exercise of patriarchal power.

Finally, the reintroduction of the Traditional Courts Bill in South Africa reasserts a parallel legislative system which places power in the hands of traditional chiefs by making them unaccountable to democratic checks or balances. The chief system as an (in)formal justice mechanism in most African countries is

1 'New' is used here to refer to the nature of financial and legislative resources both state and non state actors use to roll back women's rights. It does not imply that these forms of violence have not been experienced by women before. It implies though that the commitment to mobilising vast resources towards keeping women in check is new.

often gender blind in its pursuit of restorative justice. It often privileges men and maintains the status quo to the detriment of women (ACORD 2009).

All of the bills mentioned above have found support within state structures and the highest ranks of state leadership. They have been justified on the basis of reclaiming 'Africanness' in the face of increasing 'Westernisation' and have been accompanied by renewed calls to recapture the 'morality of the nation'. Key to the efforts to curb this 'Westernisation' is tighter controls on women's choices with regard to their bodies and sexualities, including sexual and reproductive choices, and their movement and dress. These controls are not only seen in legislative measures but also increasingly in brutal physical violence against women.

Finally, while debates on the nature of support by mainstream women's movements to those working on lesbian and transgender concerns remain fraught within African feminist spaces, it is essential to reflect on the 'fears' evoked during these debates. The notion that overt support for lesbian rights 'hijacks the struggle' in the face of larger anti poverty and human security concerns uses the same arguments deployed by the patriarchal state to roll back women's rights. These include the following 'facts': non heterosexual relationships are 'un-African'; they are relationships that do not emphasise reproduction but pleasure; and that these relationships are not ordained by 'God'.

As women's movements work towards fighting multiple forms of oppression that become more resilient in their current manifestation, we must sharpen our tools of analysis and engagement. Through consistent self reflection, we must recognise the danger of using the same tools that are engaged to write women out of the state, against women living and working on the edges of patriarchal societies. This self reflection is an important process because it facilitates the dual task of dismantling patriarchal tools in their new manifestation while working with women who, through their lives, challenge hetero-reality.

..... Insight #4: Traditions of documentation

The social power structures and injustices that sustain gender inequalities are resilient and powerful. This makes the social change that women's movements catalyse and contribute to often unpredictable and constantly shifting. Research and documentation initiatives within diverse women's spaces have increased significantly. They have been characterised by a move away from developing reports for donor accountability towards the recognition that traditions of historicising our work, whether orally or in writing, are critical. The bulk of this documentation falls in the areas where interventions are the greatest and where financial and human resources are available, predominantly in:

- service provision and capacity building, such as leadership training
- psychosocial and medical support for women in situations of armed conflict
- shelters for survivors of violence
- legal support
- sexual and reproductive health rights
- women in elective politics
- HIV/AIDS related work

- sexualities
- religious fundamentalisms.

These interventions and accompanying documentation constitute rich, contextual narratives that enhance feminist knowledge and theorising on lived experiences within states in recession, equity trends and reversals, knowledge on self care, resource mobilisation and movement building.

Beyond encouraging wide circulation of these traditions of documentation, there is a case to be made for hybrid continental partnerships between women's organisations, research bodies and institutions of higher learning in the form of action research partnerships. Such partnerships can enrich the analytical work derived from these vital sources of primary information, as well as support how these research efforts evolve at a very early stage. The trend has been for organisations to develop research programmes which are often under resourced and end up being desk based studies. The research is largely outsourced instead of enhancing systematic efforts to capture and theorise their work, which is where the 'gems' lie. Hybrid partnerships would ensure that African feminist knowledge is driven by and large by contextual needs and not by global consumption patterns and financial streams.

Despite increasing militarisation on the continent, there remains limited African feminist analysis on the security sector. While there are rich sources of information, as noted above, from women's organisations working at the front-line of militarised societies, this documentation is largely anecdotal, limited to areas of intervention by specific organisations and primarily designed to account for women's participation – or lack of it – within the sphere in question. Due to time and resource constraints both human and financial, this rich literature rarely accounts for what these experiences tell us about militarisation beyond its effects; neither does it reflect on institutional and values transformation (See AWDF Primer 2). This dearth of analysis is partly informed by the fact that very few activists engage these institutions with this objective in mind.

There is also the feeling that as activists we must take advantage of the windows of opportunity where they arise, such as through reform processes. By doing this, we are opting to shift these institutions from the inside, which is a difficult and often slow task, especially where political commitment is nonexistent. Where such analysis exists, it is either not designed to influence the policy sphere, or not used by policy activists to engage such spaces.

There is no silver bullet to dealing with the militarisation challenge on the continent. However, we must recognise that both strands of work are essential and that there has to be increased investment towards the generation of feminist analysis in this area. In addition, effective and robust assessments of our work, tracking and documenting backlash and reversals, and the resilience of the women in our movements, are critical to the larger historical and political context within which we work.

Using technology to establish a free access portal that can bring together information under one umbrella begins to resolve the question of access which, in some instances, is inhibited by simple questions like rights to the publication and/or the need to purchase it. Such a portal also begins to resolve the question

of the 'lack of African feminists writing in this area', by collating both existing and emerging voices.

..... Insight #5: Cyberspace and technology

Feminist debates on cyberspace can be classified into two major streams:

Stream 1: The 'victimisation perspective'. This perspective constructs cyberspace as an arena within which women are still under the subordination of men. This strand of feminist analysis sees technology as it is conceptualised and experienced by women as another patriarchal tool to dominate and control them (Bhattacharjya and Ganesh 2009).

Stream 2: The 'liberation strand'. This sees cyberspace as a place where women can be free to assume control and pursue what they desire, free from hetero patriarchal norms (Doring 2000: 863). Cyberspace therefore offers the potential for women to become powerful and creative agents and producers in their own right (Haraway 1985).

In Africa, advancements in information, communication and technology (ICT) have led to innovative ways to deal with violence against women across distances, as well as build effective transnational alliances without the demand for physical encounters. The Take Back the Tech! campaign by Women'sNet exemplifies this. Through an interactive map based on the Ushahidi² platform, the campaign allows internet users to share stories, local news and personal experiences of gender based violence using technology (womensnet.org.za).

Mobile phone technology has also been key to improving women's access to hitherto 'missing' state resources. Innovative tools such as the market access tool that relies on a short messaging system (sms) and web based application to disseminate agricultural information to farmers, or the use of mobile technology solutions to provide access to primary healthcare for women excluded from the formal healthcare economy are important innovations for all women, especially those at the margins.

More importantly, cyberspace, through list servers, blogs, Twitter, Facebook and other forms of social media, have facilitated real time encounters across borders. They have extended the ways in which women's movements can build solidarity and respond to issues concerning African women, whether they occur on the continent or in the diaspora.

However, while cyberspace and mobile telephony offer spaces for education, expression, subversion and networking, they can also simultaneously strengthen patriarchal institutions and attitudes. Increasing information, both visual and textual, circulating on the internet that reifies violence strengthens misogynistic cultures. An example is the phenomenon of 'rape sites', where acts of rape are recorded with the perpetrators masked, or video games that advocate for gender based violence (Maltzhan 2005).

2 *Ushahidi* means 'evidence' in Swahili. It is a website initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post election fallout at the beginning of 2008. See <http://ushahidi.com>.

There are three major points to draw from these developments:

- Due to the dwindling financial resources available for civil society initiatives, cultivating technology as a mechanism to broaden engagement and mobilisation across constituencies becomes a necessity.
- We need to increase the number of initiatives monitoring and taking action against violence targeted at girls and women in cyberspace. The anonymity of the internet provides an opportunity for predators to shapeshift, fly under the radar, and be unaccountable to institutions set up to prevent as well as respond to violence against women.
- Advancements in technology are often hailed as a solution to major problems that disproportionately affect women, such as livelihoods, in as much as they deal with hunger and poverty as well as women's health. The growth of biotechnologies that are introduced (often to be tested) into the African market through government deals and/or private companies directly target agricultural economies through genetically modified foods. These technologies, accompanied by climate change, have had an impact on food sovereignty and indigenous crop technology that was predominantly held in trust by women (AWID 2004).

This has a great impact on the sectors of the economy, like informal and small scale farming, where women are dominant. This makes the transformation of unjust economic structures a critical pillar to the technology conversation for women. In the area of health, this has been most obvious by big businesses' control of quality medication for HIV/AIDS.³ Biotechnologies are therefore also an important area of engagement for women's movements that seek holistic governance and economic justice.

..... Insight #6: Women of influence

The concept of women of influence is well developed within the North American corporate sector in particular. It is primarily used to enhance networking and mentoring opportunities among women. In Denmark, Women for Influence is an initiative that brings together leaders in business who have dedicated their time and resources towards supporting social justice initiatives in the Global South.

The steady rise of women in influential leadership positions across Africa, and in the diaspora, must be harnessed towards the broader feminist transformation objective. In 2012, Africa's second woman president Joyce Banda of Malawi came into office. The first woman chairperson of the African Union Commission, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, was also elected. These women leaders, in their new capacities, represent champions within the African Union⁴ who can leverage women's human rights beyond existing commitments.

Internationally, the appointment of four African women: Betty Maina (Kenya), Graça Machel (Mozambique), Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (Nigeria) and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia (who is also co-chair) to the High Level Panel of the

3 See Treatment Action Campaign's website www.tac.org.za [Accessed 07 April 2013]

4 There is also an informal network of women ambassadors to the African Union, which offers another sphere of influence to tap into.

United Nations post 2015 development framework are other milestones. The centrality of African and Southern voices in the design of a framework that is responsive to the realities in the Global South cannot be overemphasised; these voices are critical to that objective. In addition, the appointment of the first African woman as Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, is also important for the community of women working to secure justice for crimes against humanity.

There has been limited interface between women's social movements and women in influential positions in other sectors of society, specifically the corporate sector in Africa. As a result, feminist knowledge about the nature of patriarchy in these sites remains anecdotal. These are also valuable sites for resource mobilisation in its diversity, which then go untapped. Granted, feminist perspectives may be absent in these spaces. But the need to engage and galvanise women's influence in the political and macro economic sphere cannot be overemphasised. It is essential that we catalyse movements across the public and private sector.

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PART 2

Overview

This primer, *Unlocking the doors: feminist insights for inclusion in governance, peace and security* sets out to analyse the achievements and gaps in women's movement approaches to the intersection between governance and the security complex. The contextual analysis that informs this primer at the outset is very clear and pertinent. By situating the analysis in the context of a review of lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the global financial crisis, it offers a vivid background to the central question addressed. The primer highlights persisting challenges to the attainment of gender equality by citing factors such as the overconcentration of women in the informal economy, violence against women, and patriarchal state institutions – as all perpetuating the problem.

The primer then reviews opportunities and challenges in six areas:

1. The historical basis for entrenched gender inequalities, dating from the processes of state formation during the post colonial period.
2. Limitations of the current structure of African states in delivering on promises of development and protection of citizens, as well as opportunities provided through constitutional reform processes.
3. Reference to country examples where specific legislative measures which encroach on the sexual and reproductive choices of women have been adopted in recent years – resulting in a call for ongoing self reflection among women's rights activists.
4. Acknowledgement of the increasing documentation of work by the women's movement; noting opportunities for greater alliance building between women's rights activists and research institutions; and for greater adoption of transformative approaches to security sector reform processes.
5. Assessment of cyberspace and technology's empowering and disempowering potential for advancing women's rights, whilst recognising that ICT and mobile technology have, and can continue to serve as, tools for development and women's empowerment. It can also be used to counter the forces that violate women's rights.
6. The increasing number of women in influential leadership positions is an opportunity for advancing feminists' objectives through alliance building with these women, including those in the corporate sector.

Discussion guide



We hope the following discussion questions assist in deepening clarity and insights on *Unlocking the doors: feminist insights for inclusion in governance*:

1. This primer reviews the women's movement's approaches to the intersection between governance and the security complex. What are the defining elements of this intersection, and how is it evident?
2. The importance of alliance building between feminist activists and other constituencies of women is an important recurrent strand that runs throughout the primer. What opportunities exist for strengthening this kind of alliance building?
3. Referring to *Insight #3: 'New' frontiers of violence*, how could this list be expanded to include an analysis of new and growing security threats in Africa?
4. How well positioned are African feminist movements to analyse and respond to the challenges (above), including the spread of radicalisation and violent extremism throughout the continent and world?