



# GENDER AND EDUCATION FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE IN CENTRAL AFRICA

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*Women in Sake, North Kivu of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), are eager to participate in their country's peace and development process.*

Photo: UNHCR / S. Schulman



## BACKGROUND

Situations of armed conflict and periods of post-conflict reconstruction in Central Africa pose specific challenges to achieving gender equality and the protection of women's rights. Exclusion of and discrimination against the latter in power circles as well as in the allocation of resources and levels of income, have been identified as factors that continue to stoke a culture of violence. To achieve a lasting culture of peace, it is important to involve women in mechanisms for preventing and pre-empting crises.

### **The UNESCO Declaration in Zanzibar in 1999 and the assertion of women's crucial role in promoting a culture of peace**

This declaration called on African governments, the African Union (AU), other regional and sub-regional organisations, as well as the United Nations system, to take urgent and efficient measures to ensure that women are fairly represented in decision-making processes, particularly those concerning prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and peace negotiations.

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*Women must actively take part in processes to promote a culture of peace.*

Photo: UNAMID/Albert Gonzalez





## The year 2000: The United Nations Security Council recognises the contribution of women in conflict prevention and resolution

In the year 2000, Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security was adopted. This resolution expanded the scope of application of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It asserts the importance of the woman in the consolidation of peace and urges member States to ensure increased representation of women at all levels of decision making in national, regional and international institutions, as well as in conflict prevention, management and resolution mechanisms.

Furthermore, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights relating to women's rights in Africa as well as the African Union Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development Framework, are important regional instruments that aim to promote women's participation in peace consolidation.

Finally, at the sub regional level, the 11th Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), held from 26 to 27 January 2004 in Brazzaville (Congo) made a declaration on equality between men and women. The declaration affirms the need to take into account the needs and concerns of women and men in the policies and programmes of the Community in order to build a society of peace, security and stability.

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*Security Council meeting that adopted UN resolution 1325 on women, peace and security*

Photo: UN / unmultimedia.org



In spite of all these efforts, much still has to be done to achieve women's participation in peace consolidation, particularly in Central Africa. The establishment of a culture of peace requires the mobilisation of all the vital and positive forces (women and men) of society, since there can be no development without peace, and peace cannot be sustainable when it is not sustained by both women and men.



*CAFCO women reviewing Resolution 1325*



## The role of women in maintaining peace and social cohesion

As advocated by the Zanzibar Declaration of 1999, women play a key role in promoting a culture of peace. The need to safeguard traditions, oral literature and African languages that are the sources of numerous social practices, contributes to cohesion and stability in societies. The woman's role as educator in the family and in society has been underscored, including the function of initiation rites that permit, inter alia, the establishment of strong and permanent solidarity links for an entire generation of young girls. African women played a vanguard role in the history of Africa's independence and women's organisations continue to battle for their basic rights and to preserve peace through mediation actions.

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*Sally Nyolo is a brilliant Cameroonian story-telling artiste*

Women play a leading role in poverty control, economic exchanges and conflict prevention. They are more than ever needed to promote inter-generational dialogue and the civic education of young generations. Women are also very active in informal mechanisms on the sidelines of peace talks. During the Sun City peace talks of April 2002, civil society women in the DRC met to advocate inter-Congolese dialogue and to compel participants at the talks to reach an agreement. In the North-Kivu region, women from all walks of life undertook various actions for peace. They created and continue to create pressure groups, organise demonstrations for peace, draft petitions, etc. They also promote peace through numerous associations.



*Congolese Women rejoice after the signing of a Peace Accord in Goma in 2008*

UN Photo/Marie Frechon





## Obstacles to women's participation in peace consolidation

The exclusion of women from power circles and discrimination against them in the allocation of resources and sources of income have been identified as two indicators of bad governance, prevailing social inequalities and a lingering culture of violence.

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*Quality women must be elected/appointed  
to hold public office*



In the DRC, women have incurred the highest costs of conflict: they have been the most affected as refugees, internally displaced persons, sexual slaves of belligerents; they have been victims of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, and unwanted pregnancies because of rape and are most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infection. However, on the field, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 is slow in playing its role of contributing to gender equality in post-conflict peace, reconstruction and rehabilitation processes in the DRC. Additionally, women are always excluded or marginalised in peace processes in spite of the adoption of Resolution 1325. For instance, in the various peace talks and agreements signed by the belligerents in the DRC, women were marginalised. Such was the case of the Gaborone Peace Agreement in 2001 (only 6 women as against 68 men), the Sun City Peace Agreement in 2002 (47 women as against 360 men), and the Nairobi Agreement in 2007 (52 women as against 320 men).

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*An internally displaced Congolese mother camps close to the UN military base in Masisi (2008)*

Photo: MONUC / Marie Frechon





In addition, women in post-conflict Central African countries continue to face challenges on several fronts:

- **ON THE POLITICAL FRONT:** They are little represented at decision-making levels;
- **ON THE SOCIAL FRONT:** the feminisation of poverty is worsening and illiteracy rates are still high;
- **ON THE LEGAL FRONT:** Though provided for by law, the promotion of gender equality is still weak.

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*This mother has been displaced several times in the turbulent east of the DRC*

Photo: UNHCR / S. Schulman



## Examples of good practices of education for a culture of peace

Numerous initiatives on education for peace, non-violence and conflict resolution have seen the light of day in Africa.

Projects implemented as part of the culture of peace programme by the Yaounde Office of UNESCO and the Fondation Félix Houphouët Boigny in Côte d'Ivoire, have generated positive results, particularly in the area of education, culture and communication. Among these initiatives, it is worthy to note those that use the African culture (music, stories, proverbs and languages) to organise mega concerts and drama workshops with the participation of community radios (Central African Republic).

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*UNESCO's launch of a community radio station in the hitherto troubled Bakassi, Cameroon*

Photo: UNESCO Cameroon





Many women's organisations in the DRC are involved in education for peace through increased and more efficient participation of women in economic, social and political development. Among these organisations, we may cite the Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise (CAFCCO) and the Fédération de Femmes pour la Paix et le Développement (FEPADÉ).

CAFCCO's mission consists in pressing for women's participation in peace processes in the DRC, the incorporation of gender into decision-making processes, increased representation of women in decision-making circles as well as sensitisation and mobilisation of women to participate in electoral processes, helping to eradicate the prevalence of sexual violence and curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

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*CAFCCO personnel at work*

Photo: CAFCCO



FEPADE for its part aims to educate men and women about the importance of peace by equipping them with the skills needed for peaceful resolution of their disputes, and helping to achieve inter-community reconciliation. FEPADE is active in many areas such as:

- legal, medical and psycho-social assistance for women victims of violence;
- peace, reconciliation and a culture of non-violence;
- the provision of education to and guidance of children orphaned as a result of war;
- technical and vocational training for unemployed women and children;
- lobbying for the emancipation and promotion of the rights of women and children.

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*FEPADE training-seminar-on-war-trauma-healing*

Photo: UN / unmultimedia.org





FEPADE has implemented several projects such as:

- the granting of small revolving loans to women victims of violence;
- the setting up of two polyclinics to provide free medical care to victims of sexual violence;
- the education of children orphaned as a result of war;
- the organisation of youth sporting competitions to promote peace and co-existence;
- the distribution of seedlings to farmers.

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*FEPADE has established two health clinics in order to provide free medical treatment to victims of sexual violence, people in need and the community in general.*

Photo: FEPADE



Community radio stations in the DRC also play a key role in stabilising and preventing conflicts by broadcasting many weekly programs on peace. They act as forums for inter-religious and inter-ethnic encounter and dialogue. Such is the case of Radio Okapi that is the fruit of partnership between the UN Stabilisation Mission in the the DRC (MONUSCO) and the Fondation Hironnelle. Radio Okapi has millions of listeners across the DRC. Its programmes comprise regular slots such as « Dialogue entre congolais » that contributes to reconstruction, the maintenance of peace and the building of a people-centered society. Another initiative concerns traditional systems of conflict prevention and resolution that have yielded convincing results, such as those of traditional tribunals in Rwanda (Gacaca), local mediator committees in Kenya (Bunsi), the council of Elders in Somalia (Burti) and family conflict resolution structures in Ethiopia (Chicha).

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*On the air at community station -  
Radio Okapi*

Photo: Radio Okapi





Electoral periods that are often synonymous to tensions in some African countries have sometimes given rise to peace promotion initiatives. As a result, during the 2002 presidential election in Senegal, a Situation Room was established and it brought together statisticians, legal practitioners, sociologists and women community leaders. This technical team was able, during the electoral process, to collect and analyse data communicated by teams deployed across the country to prevent the outbreak of conflicts.

The training of men and women is also an important ingredient in education for a culture of peace. In this light, a professional Master's Degree course in gender and peace consolidation has been instituted in the University of Dakar in Senegal. The initiative was kick-started by the international NGO referred to as Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) as a response to the question of the ability to mainstream gender in peace operations in Africa.

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*Building women's capacity is crucial for a culture of peace*



Recommendations for enhancing the capacity of women men and women in peace-building, the prevention, management and resolution of and men to build peace and prevent, manage and resolve conflicts.

The participation of men and women in conflict resolution and the establishment of a culture of peace in Central Africa is a sine qua non for economic development and social cohesion. However, we cannot but note that women are still marginalised in peace initiatives and their ability to promote a culture of peace is largely under-estimated. This is the more paradoxical as women are the primary victims of conflict, and legal instruments assert the importance of the latter in peace consolidation.

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**Female police officers joining an African  
Union-UN peace mission**

Photo: UN / Albert Gonzalez Farran





A lot of efforts have to be deployed to efficiently mainstream gender in peace processes and to build lasting peace through a multi-disciplinary and participatory approach. Such a goal is to be achieved via the following measures:

- Pushing for the implementation of international legal instruments on women's participation in peace consolidation (CEDAW, Resolution 1325, etc.)
- Encouraging women's active participation in the political lives of their countries (by instituting minimum representation quotas for women in Governments, parliaments, and in council management, etc.)
- Encouraging women's participation in conflict resolution and mainstreaming gender in all analyses, policies and programs designed to stem conflicts and build peace;
- Encouraging the effective and decisive participation of political, civil, religious and traditional stakeholders as well as women's leaders, in peace processes;

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*"I remember one man saying your place is in the kitchen and in the bed, so go back to your kitchen and to your bed. We were very frustrated, and I wish he could be alive to see where we are now." – Catherine Mabobori - Burundian MP who played a crucial role in the Arusha peace talks on Burundi from 1998 to 2000*

Photo from UNIFEM Video/ 2009



- Promoting peaceful co-existence, a culture of peace and tolerance between communities;
- Strengthening the reconciliation, negotiation and mediation capacity of women's organisations and stepping up their participation in decision making and in State institutions;
- Strengthening the role of women as mediators and designing women-led peace missions in societies devastated by war and ethnic and community conflicts;
- Strengthening the capacity of refugee and displaced women to participate in peace negotiations and conflict resolution;
- Strengthening women's role in society, combating violence against them, recognising their role as wealth-generating economic stakeholders and helping to empower them through appropriate training.

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*Rose Francine Rogombé, Head of Gabon's Senate. She proved women in Central Africa and elsewhere can lead their countries when she took over as Gabon's Interim Head of State after the death of President Omar Bongo in 2009. She successfully organised the country's presidential election which Ali Bongo won.*



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[endviolence.un.org](http://endviolence.un.org)

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