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**Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women**

**Prepared by**  
**Lois Lewis Bruthus**  
**Liberia**

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# **CASE STUDY ON THE COMPREHENSIVE PEACE AGREEMENT FOR LIBERIA SIGNED IN ACCRA, GHANA ON AUGUST 18, 2003.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The primary objective of this study should be to supply desired information by describing the role of women in Liberia to date, in the process of gender equality, development and peace.

However, because of the broad range of such scope, and the limited data available, it is only possible to provide an overview of development up to date in the context of women's participation in the process of peace agreement in national design and implementation.

Consequently, this study is based on two Peace Agreements on Liberia which were signed on August 19, 1995 and August 18, 2003 in Abuja, Nigeria and Accra, Ghana respectively under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL). This study also seeks to contribute to a more substantive evaluation and analysis using where appropriate examples from both Peace Agreements and relevant experience in each of these agreements to provide as up to date and as comprehensive a picture as possible.

### **I. Brief Background on the Conflict in Question**

The conflict in question is one of a compound complex nature emanating from a broad spectrum of actors arising out of the Abuja Accord signed between six (6) warring factions. This Accord was noted at that epoch as the most appropriate legal framework for finding a peaceful settlement to the Liberian crisis.

However, since the outbreak of the civil war in Liberia on December 24, 1989, the country has operated a conflict- habituated system wherein the elements which cause and maintain the conflict continue to operate despite the signing of at least fifteen (15) Peace Agreements, designed to restore sustainable and lasting peace to Africa's oldest Republic.

1. Under the Abuja Accord, voluntary disarmament and spontaneous demobilization were planned and coordinated along with the peace process. However, no appropriate programs were designed to address the short-term need of combatants and their families.
2. The complexity of the factional dispute during the Transitional Period under the Abuja Agreement gave birth to a multitude of Transitional / Interim Governments. This disorder became inflated into the military system in which each faction represented in the Interim Government developed its own military wing within its respective territory as a show of strength.

3. The interim / Transitional Government under this period, in view of their multiple composition and extreme divergent views were not able to plan. Donors for lack of plan were hesitant to provide the necessary financing due to the apparent political instability. This dilemma was at the heart of many of the problems that the Abuja Accord was confronted with.
4. The projected numbers of 54,000 combatants were not encamped prior to the disarmament and the demobilization. The combatants expectations were dashed, as the promise of guns for cash did not materialize.
5. Nevertheless, a total number of 37,000 plus combatants were disarmed and demobilized including 4,603 child soldiers of which 67 were females out of a projected number of 6-10,000 child soldiers reported to have participated during the war of the 90's.
6. The population was not sufficiently sensitized to accept ex- combatants into their communities and families; a necessary ingredient to ensure sustainable peace and development in Liberia.
7. Despite these irregularities, General and Presidential elections were organized in July of 1997 in which one of the warlords, Charles Taylor was elected. In this election among the 13 presidential candidates, three represented warring factions while the balance 10 represented civilians. From this total, one female candidate in the person of Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was said to have emerged as the second runner up.

It is interesting to note that Mrs. Sirleaf commanded the strongest un-armed opposition against the president-elect. Nevertheless, Liberian politologue has attributed this defeat of Mrs. Sirleaf to her failure to galvanize the aims and aspirations of all or the majority of the Liberian Women into one united whole.

Another important reason for the failure of the Abuja Peace Accord rested squarely on the non-compliance of the elected Government of Mr. Taylor to respect and implement all of its provisions specifically with reference to the formation and re-structuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia, (AFL) by the ECOMOG forces with the view towards incorporating the Ex-combatants of all warring faction who have expressed the desire of enrolling into the AFL.

This non-compliance of the Abuja Accord provoked a major incident which resulted in the Camp Johnson Road Street battle and ended with the exchange of gun fire at the entrance of the United States Embassy. The consequence of this event ignited the dispersion of all ex- combatants of the other former warring factions to spread around the border towns of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and La Cote d'Ivoire. This was the main catalyst for the military insurgent, which erupted in Liberia from April 10, 1999 to the

present starting from the northern border town of Voinjama in Lofa County thus giving birth to the present conflict in question.

Lastly and most importantly, the provisions of the Accord was never disseminated to the population.

The current Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Accra on August 18, 2003 can be evaluated according to different criteria bearing in mind the priority of the Transitional Government which should be without doubt, the disarming, and disbanding of combatants and militias and the return to their native towns and villages. This measure is more urgent than repatriation and resettlement of displaced persons. It is also understood that the national army will be an amalgamation of different disarmed combatants with different educational and economic background. Therefore, to determine who will be selected for the new army consideration for ethnic and gender equilibrium all pose a challenge. Criteria must be based on formal test to avoid favoritism.

Another important problem which is connected to the Accra Agreement is the framework to determine how the security, the political and the economic situations will evolve during the transitional period. Therefore, possible failure may be in the view of economic constraint compounded by the low educational level and lack of civilian life of many of the disarmed combatants and also of those who have been appointed along factional lines to assume leadership positions within the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary branches of Government.

## **II. Analysis ‘Evolution of Women’s Participation in Liberia’**

Women in Liberia play a key role in the social and family life; consequently, they are important participants in the economic development of their country. It is therefore regrettable to observe that within the context of policy making especially with respect to conflicts and conflict resolutions, women are often relegated to become pacifiers and expedients in the process. Most regrettable is that more than 5 decades when suffrage was granted to women by the late President William V. S. Tubman, few women have played important roles within the political and legal spheres in their individual capacities, but never collectively. Such pulling of the Liberian woman towards an individualistic tendency as well as the un-ending rivalry amongst women have limited the growth of women towards emerging as a collective force to give voice to the concerns of women.

This initiative by President Tubman should have led to a substantial improvement in female employment and participation opportunities. But yet, these elements do not appear to have successfully helped towards the advancement of women in the process of gender equality. It is important to document that Female number in the administrative, executive and supervisory functions have certainly advanced since 1985; but conversely, male number has increased dramatically in the previously female dominated clerical group due to the lack of opportunity for access to advanced quality education on the part of the female; while the male have been better prepared to operate within the modern technological age. In addition, differences in upbringing, education and training have

limited the number of qualified female candidates for many professional grades. Further encouragement of equal participation by women can, however, be expected in future years around 2005. The trend of women's participation in political process has been minimal to date considering that the few Liberian women having ascended the highest ranks as Acting President of Liberia, President of the United Nations General Assembly in the person of Madam Angie Brooks Randolph as Associate Justices and Chief Justice to be followed in recent conflict times with the title of Chairman of the Council of State, it is disheartening to note that with all these achievements, these women have failed to promote the efforts and aspirations of a wider spectrum of other Liberian women for their participation, advancement and development.

While some of these women assumed prominence because of their competence in various fields, others in addition to their competence were viewed simply as pacifying candidates.

### **III. Women's participation in the process leading up to the Peace Agreement**

Under the Abuja Accord signed in 1995, the actual participation of women at the peace talks was at its best, non-existent. From the handful of women represented, the majority were either staff members and sympathizers of the warring factions, and not representing any women group as such.

It could be recalled that the designation of Madam Ruth Perry as Chairman of the then council of state was purely accidental, as such designation did not originate from any women's group.

During the process leading to the preparation for convening the Accra talks, it became clear that the insecurity and the burden caused by 14 years of civil war have pushed hundreds of Liberians from all works of life, in Liberia as well as those in the diaspora, individually and in collective protest groups to be present in Accra for an historical moment to cry out for peace and justice in their home land.

It is in this context that the 15<sup>th</sup> in a series of Peace Agreements, (the second signed in Accra, Ghana) will be recorded as having the highest participation of women (whether as delegates, Observers, Spectators or simply, as concerned citizens, refugees) etc.

The participation of women at the Accra Peace negotiations was not spectacular with regard to decision making. The process leading towards the talks was spontaneous. There was no preparation in order to evolve an effective strategy to ensure the participation of women in the negotiations.

The recognized women's organization Mano River Women In Peace Building Network (MARWOPNET) which was officially invited to these talks is a sub regional peace initiative grouping comprising of women from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and do not represent or incorporate the views of the majority of the women's organization either individually or collectively. No conclusive strategy for highlighting women's concern nor

for the assumption of a leadership role was formulated. The organization's strategy if any, was only to lobby and pacify the belligerent parties to bring an end to the war.

It is worth mentioning however that the women in the displaced centers prior to the conference were very effective in the sit-ins as a way of urging the belligerent forces including the Government to attend the Accra Peace Talks.

Other women's group who attended the talks either as concerned citizens or as observers i.e. The Association of Female Lawyers, the Liberian Women in Peace Network (WIPNET) the Refugee Women and those in the diaspora etc., served mainly as Observers without voting rights. The Female Lawyers were able to scrutinize the text of the Agreement between themselves and the Liberian National Bar Association (LNB) but did not participate in direct negotiations with the parties to the Agreement. That aspect was left with the facilitators and the parties to the Agreement. However, AFELL was successful to the extent of highlighting and including in the Agreement the need for national balance to include gender balance. Its specifics however as to the proportion was not included. The situation regarding the child soldiers, the vulnerable groups and the appointment to the Judiciary were raised. The eligibility criteria for the Chairman and Vice Chairman was strongly advocated by the women as well as the concept of 50/50 representation.

The Women in Peace Network on the other hand influenced the talks silently through the various written slogans decrying the continuous violence perpetrated against women, children and the elderly. At the end of 75 days of lobbying, advocating, discussions and negotiations, it was disheartening to note that only a total of 7 women out of over a hundred women who actually attended and participated at these talks were given the right to vote for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Transitional Government.

#### **IV Gender Perspective and Women's Participation in the Post Conflict Building**

The present Comprehensive Peace Agreement, (CPA) incorporates the Cease-fire and Cessation of Hostilities, Agreement the latter which was signed in Accra on June 17, 2003. This Peace Agreement consists of 37 Articles and is divided into Eleven Parts as follows:

**Part One** consists of 35 definitions.

**Part Two** - Confirms the cease-fire and Cessation of Hostilities, which should have come into force at 0001 hrs on June 18, 2003. To date fighting still continue in areas not yet covered by UNMIL.

**Part Three**-Provides the methodology for the Cantonment Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of combatants.

**Part Four-** Calls for security Reforms with the disbandment of irregular forces and the re-structuring of the Liberian National Police and the Armed Forces of Liberia.

**Part Five-** Urges the release of prisoners and Abductees.

**Part Six-** Promotes Human Rights issues with the establishment of two (2) commissions

a) Independent National Commission on Human Rights

b) Truth and Reconciliation Commission

**Part Seven-** Amplifies humanitarian issues and calls for the delivery of humanitarian Relief and Supplies.

**Part Eight-** deals with political issues, governance, and establishment of Transitional Government: Executive, Legislative and Judiciary.

**Part Nine-** Refers to Post Conflict Rehabilitation and Reconstruction, the creation of a United Nations Mission as well as the return of refugees and displaced persons.

**Part Ten-** provides the dissemination of the provisions of the Agreement to the forces and supporters as well as the general populace. It spells out the role of the international community general amnesty and extra constitution arrangement.

**Part Eleven-** provides for the settlement of dispute; and Entry into force of the agreement.

The Peace Agreement did not explicitly integrate gender perspectives to the extent of actually promoting women's participation.

Out of the 37 Articles only six (6) make reference to gender perspective and purports to be supportive of women's participation in the post conflict peace building as follows:

1. **Article XVI** paragraph 3 (a) (b) on Political Issues- Provides for the inclusion of women as members of the Governance Reform Commission. However, the number or the percentage for women's inclusion was not mentioned.
2. **Article XVIII** paragraph 2 (b) on Electoral Reform- Provides for the inclusion of women in the National Election Commission (NEC). However, the failure to state specific role of the women or the gender percentage will again give rise to women's marginalization.

3. **Articles XXIV** paragraph 3 (b) the establishment of National Transitional Assembly. – Provides for 76 Member Legislature drawn from parties to the Agreement to include women's organization. Failure to explicitly state the percentage allocated for women has again hindered women's participation under the TLA.
4. **Article XXVII**- the Judiciary paragraph 3. The Female Lawyers at the conference succeeded in involving The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) to participate in the nomination for Judicial appointments.
5. **Article XXVIII**– National Balance- provides for national and Gender balance to elective and non-elective appointment. This Article is considered the most important as it holds the key in promoting Gender Balance and ensuring women's participation. It is however, the shortest Article in the Agreement and failed to pronounce on the element of 50/50 or 30/70 concept for effective participation and falls short of providing the measures for non compliance. This failure constitutes the weakness of this Agreement and present the hindrance to women participation in post conflict situations.
6. **Article XXXI**- Vulnerable Groups- paragraph 2 (a) women's concern was integrated regarding the call for special attention to be given to the issues of child soldiers.

While this Accra Peace Agreement seems to embrace gender balance, it falls short on providing any means or policy to ensure its application or measures to sanction its non-compliance. Accordingly, there exist no provision in the Agreement, which provides for specific mechanism to safeguard and to promote women's participation especially with respect to women's quest for the 50/50 concept representation.

## **V. Actual Implementation of the Agreement**

The Accra Peace Agreement is at its commencement stage of the process. Actual implementation of the Agreement has been fraught with confusion and misinterpretation. Respect for gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments has not been complied with and women continue to be marginalized to the extent that out of a total of 76 Member Transitional Legislative Assembly, only 3 women have been elected. This is also applicable for Executive positions, which currently includes three (3) women in the areas of Education, Gender Development and Youth and Sports. Despite such blatant marginalization, the nomination to the Ministry of Youth and Sports is currently being contested by the youth representative. Like all Peace Agreement born out of the ashes of death, sadness, destruction, etc cease-fire is always a problem by itself. Experience has shown that violations are common factor in all crisis whether national or international. The violations observed in Liberia could be explained by lack of logistics indeed, in Monrovia, the cease-fire is holding, but in zones where UNMIL is not deployed, the cease-fire has not been respected.

Regarding the scheduled DDRR Program, it is the hope that the implementators will learn from the experiences of those who were involved in the former exercise since the objective is to ensure sustainable peace and development in Liberia. The DDR program is scheduled to commence two months following the installation of the Transitional Government. However, movement in this area has started with the surrender of the heavy guns by the former Government of Liberia.

In any Transitional Government, there is a high degree of interdependence between the government and the peacekeepers, in this case, the United Nations Peace keeping mission. It is true that some services are predominantly or exclusively public sector. Those often relate to issues of national or international interest, like security, Defense, Diplomatic Representation, or the regulation and control of private interest for the public good like, taxation, construction and planning regulation.

Presently the Transitional Government is supposed to place great emphasis on the role of the private sector activities. This may occur through providing developmental aid, meeting infrastructure need and the provision of commercial, non-commercial goods and services. It is in this group of component that the role of the Transitional Government is to evolve within the mandate of the Peace Agreement. However, while this term of reference is to be developed for a period of two years, the impact by no means could be realized in the social area, such as the rate of growth especially in the health and education services. It is for this reason that the Transitional Government should request donors in the domain of humanitarian for social and educational services especially during this period of Transition. It is hope that the Transitional Government will take all necessary measures to appeal to international donors to fill-in this gap in the interest of women and children who are the victims as the tendency has always been towards compensating the perpetrators and ignoring the victims.

Taking the above focus concerning the participation of women and the promotion of gender equality in the negotiation on the Liberia peace talks in Accra, it is difficult not to agree with an early conclusion that the participation of women in the negotiation was not on the Agenda of ECOWAS and the ICGL. The objective was simply to bring to an end 14 years of civil war in Liberia. If peace for Liberia depended in the participation of Liberian women in the pourparley in Accra, the result I am convinced, from my personal stand point would have been completely different.

The priority for the present situation is that the belligerent forces must stop the killing of Liberian women and their children. The only means open to the Liberian women from time immemorial has been to lift up their eyes unto the hills for prayers. Conversely, the rebels on the other hand, assumed the opposite direction with their AK-47 ready for the kill. Clearly, such finding is not un-imaginable not only in Liberia, but the rest of the African continent.

The intervention by the United Nations Development Fund for women (UNIFEM) in supporting a consultative meeting for women of Liberia attending the Accra peace Talks

on August 15, 2003 to diverse strategy and reinforce their action in the Peace process was a good initiative; but it came a little bit too late to develop guidelines for the talks. The Liberian women should have been prepared months or years in advance to promote their participation in the talks taking into consideration fourteen (14) years of un-interrupted crisis.

## **VI. LESSONS LEARNED**

The reintegration program in Liberia in relation to the Abuja Accord, which relied on foreign assistance, has been a complete failure. For the Accra Peace Agreement, which is on going, it is important to ensure that the lessons from the previous experience are not lost.

- The development Agencies – ECOWAS and UNMIL are forced to look closely at what they are doing and to re-examine strategy. Thus, the belligerent forces have to provide key information to planning reintegration such as the settling-point for disarmed soldiers and the timing on scale demobilization.
- Access to relevant information on those who are to be disarmed.
- That prior preparation of women at due time is the sine-qua-non in promoting the participation of women in peace negotiations thereby ensuring that their concerns will be integrated within the Peace Agreement.
- Women should always be on the alert to identify signs, which could provoke an armed conflict situation and develop strategy for pacific resolution.
- Because of the limited knowledge of the Liberian women regarding the approach of the Heads of State's initiative of ECOWAS and the UN facilitators coupled with the problem encountered to bring to an end the fourteen (14) years of the Liberian crisis, there was a serious need to consult women as a victimized group to participate whatsoever the objective of the negotiation even in the negotiation to obtain a cease-fire.
- Women in Liberia have never organized themselves collectively with a view towards assuming political leadership.

Such lessons embrace issues for wider understanding and urgent response than those discussed in the present case study. However the recent emergence of the participation of women in the peace negotiations and post conflict situations have helped to highlight the particular deficiency in this topic.

It would be remiss if I fail to state that caution must be exercised in interpreting women's participation in Peace negotiations and post conflict situations. The financial realities of the women in Liberia compounded with the low educational level constitute the major

constraints in the context of gender equality. Such debate is by means connected to areas of economic environment.

Under normal conjecture, women empowerment when assessed for any measure is through the economic sector which is the key to the re-distribution of work. Men and women should play equal role when given equal opportunity. I do believe that the fundamental concept behind women empowerment is that of giving the same volume of work to both sex for the same value. The crucial question is: Does there exist equality and quantity of curriculum/discipline between the male and the female for the attribution of any job?

## **VII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Request UNIFEM to urgently re-establish itself in Liberia to assist Liberian women in developing appropriate tools aimed at strengthening their participation in post conflict development as a follow up activities outlined in the resolution from the consultative meeting for women of Liberia attending the Accra Peace Talks held at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Accra, Ghana on August 15, 2003, supported by UNIFEM
2. Provision of technical support to the Federation of Liberian Women's Organization, which will serve as a conduit to disseminate and mobilize women from all geographical areas of Liberia.
3. Develop strategies to be mainstreamed into the peace process especially within the CNDDRR to ensure full participation of the Liberian women at all levels.
4. That all international ex-patriate must work with the national of Liberia who have participated in all level of the process inclusive of the DDR as Liberians are custodians of the process.

## **FINAL REMARKS**

It is hoped that this study has both informed the debate on gender equality issue in Liberia and helped to focus attention in those areas where the greatest potential for change may lie.

I am advocating for a national and direct promotion of the Liberian woman, the illiterate and the educated as a whole through a holistic development based on re-distributive justice which is the only weapon that provides good future, happiness and would better adjust the status of women in Liberia.

Meanwhile it is expected that the United Nations will do all within its possibility to provide urgent and valuable insights into the promotion for the advancement of Liberian women.

In conclusion I wish to express sincere thanks and appreciation to the organizers of this Expert Group Meeting for affording me the opportunity to share my view on this great and important subject.

**I thank you all.**