

Feminism and Global Governance: Investigating the Role of Women in Peace-Building, Human Rights, and Global Development

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Received: August 14, 2024 Accepted: September 4, 2024 Published: November 4, 2024

doi:10.5296/ijgs.v8i1.22162 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijgs.v8i1.22162>

Abstract

The study is centered on the relationship between feminism and global governance with emphasis being placed on the role of women in peace-building, human rights and global development. The study takes a critical look into the radical feminism theory of patriarchy in relations to how it explains and promotes women involvement in significant spheres of governance while further showcasing the remarkable outcome that have been achieved with the involvement women in helms of authority. The study highlights the contributions of women in peace processes with special emphasis being placed on the contribution of Liberian Women after the end of their second Civil war under the governance of President Sirleaf which shows their unique approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation. Several advocacy efforts which were led by women were identified to have resulted in societal and policy changes that propels gender equality and fairness. More so, the study examines the impact on global development of women led initiative which have proven effective in addressing the individual needs of women while further ensuring long term economic stability and a sense of community. The integration of feminism perspective into the agenda of global governance is vital towards achieving gender equality, justice and a peaceful world.

Keyword: Feminism, Global governance, Peace-building, Global development, Human rights

1. Introduction

Within the last decade, there has been an increase in women participation in politics, decision making and in general, global governance. Despite the increase in their participation, it has generally been at a slow pace which clearly is reflective of the fact that there is a general inequality in gender participation in politics (Celis & Lovenduski, 2018; Paxton et al., 2020). This inequality has seen women role in global politics more or less restricted to grassroots level either in peace building process or active politics.

Women are vital to the process of peace building with their roles being essential in achieving security, development, and ensuring human rights. Their experiences and insights can lead to more gender-sensitive policies and initiatives, addressing issues that might otherwise be overlooked. However, they are given minimal role in peace building and even those that are actively involved have not been duly recognized for their efforts. Zeynep (2020) noted the glamour of recognizing the role women play in the prevention of conflict and also in the provision of relief and recovery in post conflict situation which has been a central focus of women's right and other feminist organization across the globe. Despite, women been incorporated in grassroots mediation and humanitarian services, they have been ignored in formal peace building process which comes as a surprise as women are mostly in the receiving end of conflict situations (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018). For instance, only one woman was invited in the Yemen Peace talk which was held in Stockholm in 2018 (Middle East Eye, 2018).

Wilkister (2022) provided insight on the remarkable work carried out by women in the development of a democratic and peaceful society. He noted that women often organized themselves into both formal and informal groups for the purpose of nation building. World War II showcases some of the active role women undertook in grassroots mediation and humanitarian services while shouldering the responsibility of the family. This comes at a period that a high percentage of the male population had been significantly been affected by war with casualty that ranged from high mortality and disability as a result of being in the frontline of the battle, while others were still held hostage as prisoners of war which in effect skewed the population of the male negatively against the women and children. Therefore, German women had to overcome all obstacles while still carrying out grassroots humanitarian exercise to help rebuild their nation from the rubble. In similar vein, women had to organized themselves into a group tag "Mass Action for Peace", this group played massive role in ending of the conflict in Liberia and ensured a peaceful transition. While under the umbrella of "Harambee women Forum", a group of women also aided in the development of devastated communities and ensured peaceful co-existence (Wilkister, 2022).

Despite the effort put into de-escalation of conflict by women and further ensuring development both on a national and global scale, the effort of these women were not adequately captured and even remained sideline in formal peace building processes with equality in women participation in formal peace building process has being a major agenda of feminism. This should come as no surprise as an analysis of women involved in a major peace building process constitute only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators and 4% of signatories between 1992 and 2018 (Smyth et al., 2020). This statistics is alarming bearing in mind that women are more negatively affected during and post conflict. Adeleye and Osadola (2022) also noted the detrimental impact of conflict on women as it may result into both physical and sexual molestation, displacement and the loss of their lives. Therefore, their input in formal peace-building processes should not be taken with levity.

Women impact on a humanitarian scale has yielded to global development with women led initiatives yielding positive outcomes as it pertains to the empowerment of women through financial aids, educational opportunity, the learning of trades and further ensuring that they are enlightened on their rights and privileges while noting that a woman empowered is equivalent

to a community. This initiatives has emboldened women to take part in engagement that is not restricted to domestic activities, hence, ensuring that women are gradually being represented across the political arena. Currently, women serve as head of state and/or government in 27 countries (UN Women, 2024) and are increasingly being elected into political position. However, data reflect that they are still underrepresented at all levels of decision-making worldwide with family and children affairs, social protection, indigenous and minority affairs, social security, social inclusion and development being the most held portfolio by women cabinet members. This shows that there is still a long way to go in achieving gender equality in political participation and even formal peace-building processes. Therefore, the current study delves into the role of women in global governance with special emphasis given to their influence in peace-building, human rights, and global development.

2. Feminism and Global Governance

2.1 Feminism

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement aimed at achieving equality and justice for women. It seeks to address the historical and systemic inequalities faced by women and other marginalized groups. There are several definitions of feminism. According to Hooks (2000, p. 26), "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." Kimmel (2010, p. 13) defined feminism as "... a social, political, and cultural movement aimed at achieving equality and justice for women".

Feminism can be defined as a critical social theory that seeks to understand, challenge, and change gender relations and the social structures that perpetuate gender-based violence, discrimination, and inequality. Feminist theory and practice have become increasingly important in global governance, as women's rights and gender equality are recognized as essential for sustainable development, peace, and human rights.

2.2 Global Governance and Feminist Theory

Feminist theory argues the role of women in global governance such as World Health Organization, International Monetary Organization, World Bank, United Nation among many other global governing bodies. These theories examine the pattern in which gender shapes power relations, structures, and systems within societies, including in the realm of global governance. It challenges traditional power dynamics and advocates for the inclusion of women's voices and perspectives in decision-making processes. One of the most notable feminist theories that addresses the inequalities that exist in global governance and the exclusion of women in decision making is the radical feminism theory of patriarchy.

Feminism theory of patriarchy calls for the critical assessment of the foundational structures of global governance as inherently male controlled. The theory makes demand for a radical restructuring of international institutions to dismantle these power imbalances to truly achieve gender equality. Bryson (1992) in his submission on radical feminism theory of patriarchy drew attention to the remarks of a major feminist activist, Millett. Millett argued that the relationship between genders (male and female) which is usually based on power is reflected in male dominance over women in all spheres of life. She further noted that the process of patriarchy

starts from childhood with women conditioned to accept male dominance which invariably leads some of these women through the path of self-hatred, self-rejection and the acceptance of inferiority while those that have the confidence of questioning the social norms are made to feel as if they are envious of the male counterpart (Bryson, 1992). Wilkister (2022) also revealed that the society is governed by patriarchy, which presents significant challenges for women. As patriarchy shapes the interactions between men and women across all areas of life, leading to gender inequalities. This social construct excludes women and denies them the autonomy to fully enjoy their human rights. Consequently, women are also deprived of opportunities to actively participate in public life. The assertion by Wilkister (2022) invariably buttresses the point that women generally accept the norms that public governance should be more vested on the shoulder of the male which is a product of inferiority that society have made women internalised.

The relationship between women in terms of power is inherently imbalance with the power of men reflective in the public domain while the power of women confined to the private sphere. Since global governance is considered as activities in the public sphere, the inherent imbalance of power dynamics is reflective with women influence limited due to the male dominance in the public sphere. The aforementioned has led the oppression of women and gender base inequalities when viewed from a social dominance perspective (Pratto et al, 2006; Björkdahl, 2012; Wilkister, 2022).

In comparison to the men, women have extensively been excluded from the global governance due to the patriarchal nature of politics in which “men are considered bearers of the culturally legitimated authority” (Rosaldo, 1974: 21 as cited in Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020). According to statistics released by UN Women in 2019, over 70% of parliamentary seats worldwide are held by men (Khelghat-Doost & Sibly, 2020). The percentage of female members of parliament also varies significantly in different regions of the world. This includes “Nordic countries, 42.5%; Americas, 30.7%; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 27.4%; sub-Saharan Africa, 23.7%; Asia, 19.6%; Pacific, 18.4%; and the Middle East and North Africa, 18.1” (UN Report on Women in Politics, 2019). The aforementioned statistics buttresses the point that has been made by Feminist movement which reveals the impact of patriarchy on gender equality in global governance as women are more likely treated with hostility in political arena (United Nations, 2005). The application of feminist theory to global governance would address the systemic inequalities that exist in international institutions and practices and promote a more equitable and inclusive world order.

3. Women and Peace-building

Women are vital in peace building process; however, they tend to be overlooked in formal peace building process and even when they are actively involved, they seldom get due recognition for their effort. Despite the claimed struggle for equality in women participation in peace process, their representation is low and yet still dwindling. For instance, the number of women that took part as negotiators or delegates in four out of five active peace processes which was either led or co-led by the United Nations as at 2022 stands at around 16 percent which is a decline from the 19 percent and 23 percent recorded in 2021 and 2023 respectively

(United Nations, 2023). While trend data since 1990 further indicates a low representative of women's groups acting as signatories to peace agreements. Out of the eighteen (18) peace agreements concluded in 2022, only one (1) included a woman acting as a signatory or witness (United Nations, 2023). This further reflects the current reality of women actively involved in peace building process.

Possible reason for low representation of women group could be attributed to the power dynamics between genders as women are perceived to be more involved domestically rather than in the public spheres. This could be the reason that in 2022, despite persistent advocacy from the United Nations Special Envoy for at least 30 percent female representation in delegations and the provision of additional, non-transferable seats for women, the conflict parties in Yemen continued to reject women's participation (United Nations, 2023) with most Middle Eastern countries preferring the exclusion of women in the public domain.

Although women are mostly excluded in formal peace process, their role in grass roots humanitarian services in war-torn zone have been on the increase with their efforts vital in the de-escalation of conflict (Mohammed, 2023). Fact from the United Nations (2023) indicates that from 2022, the number of organization that the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) reached out to have doubled. The aim of the fund is to enhance women's participation in peace processes and further ensure the implementation of peace agreements. The support from WPHF further increased in 2023 with over hundred (100) civil society organizations within twenty-two (22) countries receiving assistance to advance their peace efforts, reduce violence, and overcome obstacles to women's involvement in peace processes. This action clearly shows the efficiency at which women carry out efforts targeted at peace processes, thus, ensuring better transitioning in war torn regions.

The effort of women in humanitarian services could be traced through the historical lane, with women effort ensuring that proper foundation is laid for a peaceful atmosphere. This effort can be traced back to the period following the two major world wars, before the establishment of the United Nations. For example, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was established in 1915, shortly after the end of World War I in 1914, and advocated for the rights of women and peace. The role of rubble women after the World War II ensured the peaceful transitioning of a German Nation that was in ruin and rubble. This process was achieved through women societies organizing themselves into committees for the clearing of German rubbles and the further structural development of the country (Algaamani, 2023). The commitment of these women laid the foundation for active women participation in politics, despite credit was not given to them.

The establishment of the United Nations in 1945 marked a significant shift. The UN Charter, while not explicitly mentioning women in peacebuilding, provided a platform for women's issues. During this period, women's participation remained minimal and largely invisible in formal peace processes. However, within the 1980s and 1990s the number of women involved in formal peace process began to increase as a result of women's movement and feminist struggle for equality. The history of women's participation in peace building reflects both progress and ongoing challenges. While there has been significant advancement in recognizing

and supporting women's roles, achieving equitable and meaningful participation remains an ongoing effort (Abdullahi, 2022).

3.1 Women and Peace-building in Liberia

Women played substantive role in transitioning of Liberia after two major civil wars. The first civil war had taken place between 1989 and 1996 while the second civil war commenced in 1999 and ended in 2003. Between the first and second civil war was just two (2) years gap. It is imperative to understand the contributing factors that led to the second civil war so as to grasp an understanding of the obstacle that women had to overcome to ensure a peaceful nation. Liberia with the first democratically elected female president in Africa, President Sirleaf at the centre stage for the ease in transition and the laying of an important foundation, has ensured the inclusion and the increase in the number of women involved in political arena in the country. The contributing factors that led to the second civil war was the failure of post-first civil war transitional processes such as disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, reintegration, and security sector reform. In essence, the peace-building efforts following the first civil war were a complete failure. Secondly, the scapegoating tactics, corruption, human right abuses used by the government of Charles Taylor and more importantly, his failure to address the ongoing social and economic issues further led into the relapse of the country into conflict (Kieh, 2009).

The Mistakes of Taylor's government ensured that the democratically elected president of Liberia after the second civil war, President Sirleaf prioritizing the establishing of a functional government to address the corruption that had persisted from the previous government. This corruption involved many former military generals and other associates who were still loyal to the previous government due to the benefits they had negotiated. Her government did not condole the financial anomalies that was conducted by employees of the finance ministry as such she promptly fired all employees in the finance ministry who had been appointed during the previous government and later dismissed her entire cabinet while calling for a clean slate in governance (Chêne, 2012; Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021).

One of the major failures of the previous government (Taylor's regime) was the widespread corruption and economic woes of the country, which the administration of President Sirleaf was able to address through the re-establishment of connections with international extractive industries with these measure imperative towards the country's economic recovery. Her tenure collaborated with the International monetary fund (IMF), World Bank, and the United States government to implement the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP) in 2006 while also been pardoned of debt of \$1.2 billion by the Paris Club of creditor countries (Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021).

During her time in office, women who were actively involved in peace movement during the war became a corner stone of her peace-building process in the aftermath of the conflict. Her encouragement of women political leadership led to an increase number of voter's registration. The number of women that occupied key positions in her regime increased with 33% to 50% of government review committees being women while women held 20% of security appointments, although many were in paramilitary roles (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2011; Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021). By 2018, the number of deputy and

assistant minister positions held by women at the national level stood at 25.4% while 15.8% of cabinet positions was held by women (Visionary Young Women Leadership, 2018). However, the number of women in the president, Weah's cabinet, reduced to just 2 out of 17 cabinet members (Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021).

It is undeniable that Liberian women have continued to encounter specific gender-related challenges after the war, making the prioritization of women's equality essential. Consequently, the women's movement is advocating for legislation to ensure women have a guaranteed role in decision-making (Sieh, 2021). The role of women in general in Liberia ensured the protection of women's right and further aiding as a platform for the peaceful transitioning of Liberian society.

3.2 Rights of Women

Some key international treaties and agreement have been made to ensure the protection of women from post conflict violence and further ensure their participation in peace processes. One of such agreement that have proven important to ensure gender equality in post war and peace building process is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) which was adopted unanimously by the United Nations Security Council on October 31, 2000. This resolution addresses the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and calls for their full and equal participation in all efforts to maintain and promote peace and security.

The agreement encompasses every facet of peace-building processes, such as “peace negotiations, peacekeeping, addressing sexual violence in armed conflicts, political participation, judicial and legal reform, and security sector reform”. Global awareness on the aforementioned agreement is on the increase, despite the gaps in the implementation of the agreement (Gbadeyan et al., 2023).

The Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against Women (CEDAW) represents another important treaty that serves to protect the rights of women. The treaty often described as an international bill of rights for women was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It accommodates the right of women to vote, hold public office, and participate in government and public affairs while further describing the discrimination that women are faced.

Civil society groups have put in efforts towards the implementation of UN Women programmes. These societies have been able to yield considerable success through partnership with women's movements to aid increased effectiveness through the dissemination of information on women's rights and other successful advocacy practices.

4. Women and Global Development

Women's involvement in global development is indispensable for achieving sustainable and equitable progress. These progress were obtained through the empowerment of women through economic opportunities, education, leadership role which when summed up has ensured a

progressive global development. The role of rubble women in the aftermath of World War II ensured that Germany which was in a state of ruin and rubble was rebuilt. The manner at which the rubble women organized themselves into groups and committees fostered democracy in Germany. The outcome of their contribution was that they had helped laid the foundation for the current prosperous German nation with the country currently having the largest economy in Europe despite, they have not been directly credited for this achievement.

Another notable women movement is the Green Belt Movement anchored by Wangari Maathai in Kenya. Since the inception of the movement in 1977, over 51 million trees have been planted, and more than 30,000 women have received training in areas such as forestry, food processing, and beekeeping. These skills enable them to earn an income while conserving their land and resources. This initiative has inspired and mobilized communities in Kenya, both men and women, to actively prevent further environmental degradation and to rehabilitate damaged ecosystems. The contribution of Wenger Maathai earned her a nobel prize in 2004.

Women for Women International represents another organization led by women which has been able to stamp their mark on the international stage through their empowerment of women in war devastated region. This organization was founded in 1993 by Zainab Salbi and has been responsible for assisting over 500,000 women in conflict-affected countries. Through their empowerment, women have been able to rebuild their lives, gain economic independence, and become community leaders. The organization achieved these feats by providing financial assistance, job skill training and education on the rights of women.

5. Conclusion

The provision of gender equality to women through their utilization as front liner in formal peace process, and further ensuring that their human rights are not abused could ensure their contribution in global governance. Feminist movement has decried the skewed participation of women in public activities such as formal peace process while their engagement has been limited to grass roots involvement which in its own has yielded positive outcome. Women have been on the receiving end of the brunt of war with several infringement of their right, molestation both sexually and physically, and displacement. The creation of equal platform for women in peace process would ultimately provide better access for their active engagement in global governance. The integration of Feminist agenda has ensured women contribution to global development which was made possible through different agreement and pact made by United Nations. However, a major challenge which has limited the success of these agreement lies in poor and non-implementation.

Women involvement in global development serves as a vital tool for achieving progress with a clear example as seen in Liberia after the conclusion of her second civil war and the election of President Sirleaf which ensured the peaceful transition of Liberia and further incorporating women into her government. By empowering women economically, enhancing their access to education and healthcare, integrating them into environmental sustainability efforts, and promoting their participation in governance, societies can unlock the full potential of half of their population. Overcoming the barriers that limit women's participation requires concerted efforts at all levels, from local communities to global institutions. Investing in women is not

only a matter of justice and equality but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable

Authors contributions

All sections of this paper was written by the corresponding author – EAA.

Funding

This research paper was not funded by any organization.

Competing interests

The authors declares that there is no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Macrothink Institute.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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