

The Role of Women Combatants and Non Combatants in Peace and Security in Uganda

Barbara Alungat

Police Senior Command and Staff College-Bwebajja, Uganda

Abstract

This study examined the role of women combatants and noncombatants in international peace efforts using the case of Uganda. The study employs the gender perspective theory (Hooks 1984) and a maximalist approach to security. The study employed a documentary review, a secondary data collection method that entails engagement with books, magazines, newspaper reports, journals, and articles linked to the research (Creswell, 2014). Findings indicate that women combatants and non-combatants provide security in the areas of prevention and detection of crime, protection of life, property, and rights of the individual, enforcement of laws, ensuring public safety and security and community policing. Similarly, women have been involved in international peacekeeping, building & enforcement operations for United Nations and various regional bodies. Women are involved in preventive diplomacy and gender balance at the international, regional and national levels, and provide food and shelter to fight famine, disease and homelessness . Women are involved in the agricultural sector, providing income to families, communities and nations through informal sector investment. Women's role and involvement in providing security is low compared to their male counterparts due to historical injustices, gender roles, and illiteracy, the traditional conceptualization of security, cultural beliefs, attitudes & stereotypes. The study recommends need for enhancement of sensitization, inclusion, and appreciation of women in providing security by increasing their participation in decision-making at all levels, improving the conditions of service, increasing women's access to credit in the public and private sector to attract others, embracing security sector reforms and increasing government commitment to implementation of UNSCR 1325. Deliberate efforts should be made by states to increase the participation of women in providing security by minimizing structural, economic, and cultural hinderances at all levels because, without sustainable security cannot be achieved without their participation.

Keywords: Women Combatants , Non Combatants, Peace and Security, Reforms, Participation

Introduction

Women are a heterogeneous group seen as passive victims of insecurity despite their potential to actively participate in provision of security. It is increasingly evident that women can make a significant contribution to providing security either as combatants or non-combatants. With the inception of the UNSCR 1325 (2000) women and states are actively involved women in matters of security. Building lasting peace and security requires women's participation and not leaving security only to half of world's population (United States Institute for Peace-USIP, 2011).

The aim of this paper is to share the various roles women combatants and non-combatants

play in providing security with a view to appreciate the role of women as potential active providers of security and not passive victims of insecurity. Peacebuilding refers to “activities that can be identified with building structural and cultural peace” (Galtung, 2001).

Women combatants in Uganda mainly fulfill their security roles by enrolment in the armed forces as enshrined in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. In this paper, the role of the female combatants primarily focuses on the Uganda Police Force (UPF), formed in 1906 as a constabulary. The mandate, command & functions of UPF are derived from Articles 211 & 212 of the 1995 Constitution as amended and sections 2 to 4 of the Police Act Cap 303. UPF’s mandate is to protect life and property, prevent and detect crime, keep law and order and maintain overall security and public safety in Uganda.

In 1960 the first cohort of 20 women police officers was recruited and purposely trained to record statements and manage women and children (or juveniles) who were victims of rape, defilement, incest and indecent assault to 10,267 (20%) as of August 2022 (Uganda Police Force, 2022). This has been achieved through deliberate recruitment of female officers who now shoulder a broader mandate of policing like command and leadership functions, operations, peace support, investigations, traffic management and control, public order management and administration, among others (The Independent, 2021). After the adoption of the Common Standards for Policing in East Africa by the East African Community (EAC) in 2010, it prescribed that 30% of operational policing positions are to be filled by women officers. Consequently, the UPF developed the Gender Policy in December 2010 and UPF Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2019-2023 in line with the National Action Plan III on Women, Peace and Security 2021-2025. These strategies and their implementations are continuously reducing the barriers to women participation as well as promoting affirmative action in recruitment, placement and promotion of female officers. (African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum, 2021). These deliberate interventions have greatly improved women participation in ensuring security which is the freedom from threat and ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and functional integrity against hostile forces of change (Buzan, 1991).

Combatants are persons with the right to directly participate in hostilities between states (ICRC, 2017), members of other militias & other volunteer corps including those of organized resistance movements and, members of regular armed forces who profess allegiance to government authority but which are not recognized by conflicting parties. According to Rule 3 of Customary international law, all members of the armed forces of a party to conflict are combatants, except medical and religious personnel. Members of state armed forces may be considered as combatants in both international and non-international armed conflict (ICRC; Customary IHL, 2005). (Wilmot & Hocker, 1998) define conflict as an expressed struggle between at least two parties who perceive incompatible goals.

Similarly, the majority of women play a great role in security as non combatants. The (UNDP, 1994) lays down possible types of Human Security. These include; Economic Security, Food Security, Health Security, Environmental Security, Personal Security, Community Security, and political security. While women combatants have been widely recognized for

the political security, the women non-combatants play an incomparable role in ensuring all the remaining types of human security. Both women combatants and non combatants play key roles in human security by supporting needy people in their communities such as the sick, orphans and the poor, through the provision of pastoral counseling, food for the families as well as engaging in small scale income generating activities (Rallonza, 2020). Additionally, they are involved in peacebuilding activities that entail support for structural and cultural peace. This article shall therefore discuss the role of women combatants and non combatants in providing security as described in the (UNDP, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

Gender Perspective theory

This study is underpinned by the Gender Perspective theory and the Marximalist approach. The Gender Perspective theory contends that the role of women in peace and security has been largely influenced by social constructs. The Gender perspective theory clearly articulates that relationships in society and the roles of men and women are not based on their biological differences but on edicts of social interaction. Most importantly, this theory views women as actors in the development process contrary to feminism which treats women as victims of oppression (Hooks, 1989).

According to (Hooks, 1989), Gender perspectives emphasise the role of women in society basing on their relationship with men. Such relations include cooperation, separation and competition, conflict, mutual support and connection, as well as difference and inequality. Inferably, gender perspectives spell out the systemic differences between men and women, pointing out the distribution of power through allocation of responsibilities. The role of women in peace and security can strongly be discussed on the basis of gender perspectives. This is partly because gender relations evolve with time and they differ from one society to another, which can help us appreciate the changing attitudes towards women participation in the promotion of peace and security whether as combatants or as non combatants.

(Candinda, Ines, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999) argue that social relations such as ethnicity, class, race, among others determine gender relations thereby concurring with (Hooks, 1989) that gender relations should be aimed at understanding the roles of men and women in their day to day activities across societies. Gender analysis is transformational; hence, women cannot be grouped together and be treated as vulnerable victims of partriarchal oppression as feminism presents them. While Hooks (Hooks, 1989) earlier argued that gender perspectives emphasise the recognition of women's reproductive and productive roles, the (UNDP, 2002) termed them as a holistic approach that helps women and men to influence, participate and benefit from the development process. (Candinda, Ines, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999) argued for a need to challenge unequal gender power relations to promote women empowerment.

Marximalist approach

Considering the Gender perspective theory that looks at a holistic understanding of the productive and reproductive role of women, the systemic approach to the role of women

combatants and non combatants in security is important to this study. This study employs a maximalist approach which considers various discernments of across schools of human security. Important among these are the Copenhagen School which conceived the human society in primordial terms.

The Copenhagen School substitutes the 'state' with the notion of 'society' as the referent object of security. In the same view, (Waeber, Kelstrup, Buzan, & Lemaitre, 1993) 'the main units of analysis for societal security are politically significant ethno-national and religious identities'. In contrast, the Critical Security Studies (CSS) and the Human Security Debate pays attention to security of the individual and vulnerable groups by-passing the state to empower and work with influential community-minded agents to address the needs of individuals and groups. CSS focuses attention on the individual rather than the state, as the main referent of security theory and politics. Proponents like Ken Booth, Wyn Jones & Peter Vale argue that security is about human emancipation. (Booth, 1997) defines human emancipation as 'freeing people as individuals and groups, from social, physical, economic, political and other constraints that stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do'. Upon this background, the maximalist approach provides a scholarly understanding of the role of women combatants and non combatants in security.

Role of Women Combatants and Non-Combatants in Providing Security

Traditional State Centered Security

Traditionally, security focused on territorial integrity of a state and non-interventionist theories. , However, overtime, the scope widened to include individual integrity and remained open to inclusion of emerging security concerns. Though the question of human security has gained momentum, traditional state-centered security remains a backbone to human security. This is evident in countries where territorial integrity has been at stake and human security is concomitantly affected. In Uganda where state-centered security is key, especially with the emergency and evolution of crime ranging from terrorism and armed conflict, women combatants and non combatants are playing various roles to promote security under the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF), Uganda Police Force (UPF), Uganda Prisons Service(UPS), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) among others. Women have increasingly joined armed security and law enforcement units at local, national and international level to promote security. Women participate in investigations, patrols, intelligence gathering, guard duties, escort duties, training and administration.

To start with, Article 3 of The African Charter on Human and People's Rights emphasises that, "Human beings are inviolable. Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his life and the integrity of his person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right" Article 212 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda notes that, "The functions of the Uganda Police Force shall include; (a) to protect life and property (b) to preserve law and order (c) to prevent and detect crime and (d) to co-operate with the civilian authority and other security organs established under this Constitution and with the population in general".

(Maslov, 2015) argues that the role of the Police until the late 1930s was limited to crime control through arrests and collecting fines until the professionalisation of policing in the US in the 1960s and 1970s. The Police broadened their traditional roles from arresting and charging criminals, crime prevention, regulating traffic and managing accidents to engage in conflict resolution, problem solving, helping crime victims, witness protection, reduction of social and civil disorder, attending to disasters and emergencies and maintaining active community relations. Examples of the broad functions of policing include fighting drug abuse through public education, traffic safety through education, engineering and enforcement, offering victims of domestic violence an array of services including transportation, housing, protection, counselling and referrals and zoning of operational areas to enhance public safety and security (Cordner, 1996). Women combatants in Uganda have played all the aforementioned roles to ensure security.

Similarly, (Coleman, 2012), (Leckie, 2012) and (Kiedrowski J., Pentrunik, Macdonald, & Melchers, 2013) argue that the widening scope of police work as seen above makes policing a multiple dimension with complicated tasks that call for sophisticated measures. Reducing fear and enhancement of personal security according to Maslov is a key role the Police should play by increasing the sense of security in communities. Women combatants cannot be excluded of the above roles of ensuring social order within the country.

Maintaining community relations and adopting a human rights based approach to policing is another important role of the police forces to which women combatants have adequately contributed. A study conducted in Canada (Gunjavi, LeBrasseur, & Whissell, 2000) highlighted the police service as important to the public and that there was a symbiotic relationship between the police and the public largely because ‘‘police depend heavily on the public to provide vital information about criminal or suspicious activities and serve as witnesses in trials, both of which are predicated upon positive relations’’ (Chow, 2011). Women combatants play a vital role in promoting and protecting of Human Rights throughout the police procedures and processes during policing. In line with the mandate of the Uganda Police Force, the roles played by women combatants in ensuring security include;-

Prevention and detection of crime: Women combatants have been at the helm of fighting crime which is an important aspect of the social regulatory framework which involves adjustments of contradiction in the form of crime prevention and regulation as well as restoration of justice by combating crime (Adorjan & Lee, 2017). The Crime Prevention framework provides for mutual relations between the police and the community as determined by social structure and the state of legal awareness (Kumar, 2012). In view of the gender perspective, women combatants and non combatants are incomparably relevant to this effect.

Protection of life, property and rights of the individual: All humans have freedom to enjoy the fundamental human rights prescribed by law. These rights range from civil and political rights like right to life, liberty and security, right to be treated with dignity, fair trial and equality before the law. Economic, social and cultural rights as well as collective rights as prescribed in (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), (The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, 1986) are domesticated in chapter four of (The Constitution of

the Republic of Uganda , 1995) and are to be protected. Protection of life, prosperity and the rights of the individual cannot be limited to only one gender but the key role women play as combatants and non combatants must be recognized.

Enforcement of Laws: The main aim of police institutions globally is law enforcement and keeping order within the society. States have a role of keeping order, protection of individuals and vital interest for public functioning (Sussman, 2012). The law enforcement functions of the Police force cannot be made possible without collaboration with women whether as combatants or non combatants. This falls within the primary tenet of the gender perspective theory where there is a systemic lay out of the various roles each gender plays depending on the social setting of each community. Women are instrumental in ensuring peaceful societies which is only possible through law enforcement. Women's role in strengthening security fits perfectly in the maximalist approach where the traditional state-centered security and the more contemporary provisions of the human security can be accounted for.

Ensuring public safety and security: Globally, Police are responsible for ensuring general security and safety of the population within their respective boundaries. Women combatants have done this through patrols including addressing crime, delivering emergency services, engaging in rapid response, providing visibility for crime prevention, combating crime and arrest (Cihan, 2015).

Community policing: Community policing is a philosophy and practice that emphasizes the involvement of the community in promoting security (Diamond & Weiss, 2009). This method of policing is based on less rigid hierarchies and protocols as compared to the previously used "professional" model of policing. (Trojanowicz & Bucqueroux, 1998) argue that community policing "is premised on the fact that the police and the community work together to identify, prioritise and solve contemporary problems such as crime, drugs, fear of crime, social disorder and overall neighbourhood decay with the goal of improving the overall quality of life". Women play a key role in community policing and this as attested to by the maximalist approach to security. Community policing is inspired by the fact that community members and the law enforcement officers jointly formulate creative and original strategies to address neighborhood crime concerns. Instead of focusing on individual crime incidents, community policing focuses on coming together to address broader public safety goals that focus not on individual incidences, but many incidents at a time (Uganda Police Force, 2014).

Peace keeping and peace building: The role of women in international peace has a long history and can be traced to the First World War where about 1,200 women from neutral states protested against the conflict. Women have played a significant role in peace keeping, peace building, enforcement operations, reconciliation and disarmament processes while serving at various regional bodies where they play a key role in preventive democracy, elimination of weapons of mass destruction as well as ensuring controlled production of conventional arms (United Nations, 2002). Besides, during the peace talks to end the 25 year insurgency by the Lords Resistance Army in Uganda, women marched from Uganda to Juba in Sudan to witness the negotiations (Rubimbwa, 2017). In Liberia, women marched, prayed and sang at the negotiations even without invitation. Women combatants and non combatant have participated

in International Peace efforts as individual officers (experts, observers & advisors), members of battle groups in military, police and civilians under various mandates.

Human Security

In the aftermath of the independence struggles, African countries were focused on territorial integrity as a way of asserting their independence. This was largely the role of the state where patriarchal attitudes supported male domination among the combatants. However, besides the external aggression and protection of national interests, people in the poor and the rich nations have increasingly appreciated the need to ensure human security for the benefit of the state and the individual. Important to note is the increasing need to appreciate the role of non combatants including women in ensuring security to enable efforts relating to community policing to take shape.

Actions that can violate peace and security include human rights violations, unemployment, drugs, pollution, crime, ethnic disputes, famine, disease, among other factors. This is primarily because security threats cannot take place in isolation but are dependent on other factors, hence, promotion of security needs to address the question of human security. According to the (UNDP, 1994), human security can easily be understood in its absence than its presence and lacks a definite definition. The same report lays down the most common threats to security which can help us appreciate the role of women in security. These include;- community, political, economic, food, health, environmental and personal security as discussed here below.

Community Security: Belonging to a particular group, organization, family, community, ethnic group, race, among other community memberships offers a sense of security. This is because in a group setting, the weaker members such as children and the elderly, can be assured of security by the stronger members of the group. Cultural practices may also promote security, though others may threaten the security of weaker individuals. In the case of families, an increase in domestic violence threatens the security of those that are weak and women have been key in promoting peace in families. Some cultural practices like Female Genital Mutilation common among the Sabin of Uganda threaten the security of women. Upon the efforts of women non combatants under (Law & Advocacy for Women in Uganda Vs Attorney General, 2010) such a custom was challenged and declared illegal hence ensuring community security to women in Sabin and other affected communities. Similarly, in the case of (Uganda Association of Women Lawyers and 5 Others Vs Attorney General -Constitutional Petition 2 of 2003, 2004) the petitioners challenged some provisions of the Divorce Act which was declared void on the grounds gender discrimination.

Political Security: The nature of political leadership in every country determines the enjoyment of the most basic human rights and freedoms. While countries have increasingly become democratic as compared to the earlier decades that preceeded the independence era in African countries, there are still cases of state repression, systemic torture, ill treatment or disappearance among different countries. Such inhuman practices are common in situations of armed conflict which threaten political security of the people. However, women have greatly contributed towards political security with the example of Uganda where we see female leaders

taking up the political space. The Vice president, Prime Minister, Speaker of parliament of Uganda (as of 2022) are female. Many other levels of local government and other government cooperations are occupied by women. Women non combatants have played a great role in ensuring political security. Political security in Uganda is also made visible in regular free and fair elections as provided for in the constitution of Uganda. Women play a great role in ensuring political security as actors and not mere victims of political oppression.

Economic Security: While as many people are engaged in productive and remunerative work, economic security remains a challenge. Women have been instrumental in ensuring basic income of their households through self help projects, small businesses and enterprises, savings groups, cross border trade, village Savings and Credit Cooperative Organisations (SACCOs), among other avenues. With economic security, there are improved living standards and overall development which is interconnected with the peace and security of communities because economic insecurity can fuel crimes like theft, drugs, terrorism, among other vices. Notwithstanding low GDP growth and high unemployment levels, women ensuring economic security in their households and their communities, thereby promoting peace and security.

Food Security: According to the (UNDP, 1994), Food security means that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food. This access may be through growing the food, buying the food or having a constant and ready public food distribution system. This is primarily because availability of food is fundamental to security. Unfortunately, according to (World Vision, 2022), 45 million people in 43 countries were on the edge of starvation as of March 2022. The same report revealed that within the 20 countries where World Vision is working, people face acute food supply shortage, many at the verge of starvation. Additionally, a study by ODI reveals that women make up most of Sub-Saharan farming labour force and estimates indicate that 77% of Ugandan women are engaged in agricultural work compared to 67% of men. Despite women not owning resources due to the patriarchal traditions of many African cultures, they have remained primary care givers in homes; hence, work hard to ensure food security in homes.

Health Security: To ensure Health security, women are playing a central role despite the different challenges relating to government strategies, actions and priorities necessary to prevent, detect and respond to public emergencies. According to The Kampala Declaration on the Global Health Security Agenda of October 25-27, 2017, the ministers and heads of delegation of participating countries of the Global Health Security Agenda outlined the need to continue working to strengthen global health security. (The National Action Plan for Health Security-NAPHS, 2023) of Uganda notes that many of the dangerous diseases including Ebola, Anthrax, Cholera and Yellow Fever are security threats and women play a big role in response and infection prevention and control of the outbreaks..

Environmental Security: The question of climate change has become more pertinent and is increasingly causing alarm at local, national and international levels. This is basically because human beings depend on a health environment; hence, an interference with the ecosystem directly affects the security of human beings. In contextualizing environmental security, (Dalby, 2002) defines security as follows;-

“Security is about the future or fears about the future. It is about contemporary dangers but also thwarting potential future dangers. It is about control, certainty, and predictability in an uncertain world, and, in attempting to forestall chance and change, it is frequently a violent practice. It is about maintaining certain collective identities, certain senses of who we are, of who we intend to remain, more than who we intend to become” (Dalby, 2002, p. 163).

Arguably, the quality of our environment provides confidence in the present and certainty about the future thereby taming our fears of how we shall survive in the future. Taming our fears is central to security and this is the gist of environmental security. At this time when the climate change crisis is a product of both the degradation of our local ecosystem and the global system, more efforts are being invested in ensuring a better environmental security. Important to note is the fact that women have played a significant role in promoting environmental security through tree planting, adoption of renewable energy, appropriate disposal of waste, and sensitization of the public about the need to ensure a safe and healthy environment.

Personal Security: Many people have the fear of falling victims of crime; hence, in the spirit of the (UNDP, 1994), personal security is basically security from physical violence by the state and other people in the community. Threats of physical violence may include torture, arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, among other forms of violence that may be perpetrated by the state. Similarly, violence in form of war from other states, rebel groups and terrorist groups constitutes a considerable threat to personal security. A more common category are the threats perpetrated by individuals and gangs such as urban crime, organized crime, street violence, and threats directed towards weak members of the society such as domestic violence and sexual gender based violence against mostly children and women. Additionally, threats to personal security such as drug abuse, suicide, as well as vices like prostitution threaten personal life. Women combatants and non combatants are playing a significant role in combating crime which is currently the greatest source of anxiety to individual persons.

Barriers to meaningful participation of Women in Peace and Security

There are various factors that constrain meaningful participation of women in peace and security and these are mainly systemic, reciprocal or even biological. Among the systemic factors are those that have been laid down by the society, community, institutions, ethnical groupings, among others. An example can be given of the patriarchal attitudes that are common in African cultures that perceive women as a weak gender and incapable of being actors in peace, security and development. Such negative masculinity propagates stereotypical types, cultural beliefs and attitudes negative to women participation in security. Similarly in many institutions, the infrastructure is male centered, women contribute lower numbers as compared to the male counterparts due to historical injustices, gender roles and illiteracy. This compromises decision making because women are under represented.

Some of the factors that constrain the participation of women are reciprocal from the systemic factors. While the systemic factors lay down the societal perceptions about women, women are in turn controlled by male's perceptions of women. An example is the aspect of ownership of property where women do not own property such as land in many African

cultures and are often left out on family inheritance. Due to lack of capital and the means of production, they are unable to get actively involved in production which frustrates their participation in economic security, food security, health security, personal security among others.

Finally, the last category of factors constraining meaningful participation of women is the biological factors. Anatomically, women are different from men; hence, making them victims of rape, sexual assault and different forms of sexual harassment. Even as women play their reproductive role, they often get leave from work in the last stages of their expectancy and during the early days of nursing newborn babies. This affects their career progress yet in cases of self-employment it impairs productivity which frustrates women's role in peace and security. All the above occur despite the presence of legislations in place, gender policies and institutional mechanisms to attract women in the peace and security sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This paper has utilized the gender perspective theory to discuss the different roles women combatants and non-combatants play in providing security. It also used the maximalist approach to security ranging from state centred to human security approach. It is worth noting that women combatants and non-combatants continue to play a significant role in providing security amidst challenges hampering women from participating in the security sector. There are mechanisms like legislation and policies in favour of the role of women in providing security. Human security has been universally accepted as compared to the tradition state-centered security approach which was envisaging territorial integrity as the main security concern of a state as compared to individual integrity. Many people increasingly appreciate the role of women combatants and non-combatants in promoting security and this has been supported by government reforms, legislation, and international instruments such as UNSCR 1325 (2000).

Recommendations

States and governments should design deliberate efforts to increase the participation of women combatants and noncombatants in providing security by addressing structural, economic and cultural hindrances at policy-making level.

States should increase women participation in decision making at all levels, improve on the conditions of service and access to credit for women in the public and private sector to attract more women, embrace land reforms and security sector reforms to enable women inclusion and appreciation of the role women play in providing security.

Government should increase government commitment to the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and relevant legislation should be utilised to encourage women participation in preventive diplomacy through training and quota system.

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