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Participation of Uniformed Women in Peacekeeping Missions in Liberia and East Timor

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Abstract- This study sought to assess uniformed women's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions with specific reference to Liberia and East Timor. The study was qualitative in nature and a case study research design was used. To achieve its objectives, the study drew nine (9) research participants from uniformed personnel particularly from the Zimbabwe Defence Forces, Zimbabwe Republic Police and Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service who have previously served in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Liberia and East Timor. In addition, two other key informants were drawn from local offices of United Nations Women and Southern African Development Committee Regional Peacekeeping Training Centre. The study found out that despite being a key ingredient for successful operational impact in any peacekeeping mission, the participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions was low due to a variety of factors. The study also noted that uniformed women peacekeepers were grappling with a plethora of challenges ranging from language and cultural barriers, low number of female peacekeepers, gender stereotypes to non-family status of most UN peacekeeping missions. The study, therefore, recommended that UN member states should vigorously conduct a more sustained recruitment of women into national institutions such as military, police and prisons and correctional service in order to increase the pool of personnel for subsequent deployment to peacekeeping duties. In addition, the study further recommended that UN should look at the possibility of reviewing some of its policies in order to reduce the negative impact caused by the prolonged absence of peacekeepers away from their families.

Keywords: participation, uniformed women, peace-keeping missions, gender mainstreaming.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Since the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, the practice of peacekeeping has become an increasingly important tool for international interventions (Behr, 2011). Peacekeepers are deployed into war zones, political uprisings, humanitarian crises and natural disasters. According to Boehme (2008) building lasting peace and security requires women's participation hence modern peacekeeping has thus evolved into multidimensional peace operations. Resultantly, the number of female police officers in U.N. peacekeeping missions around

the world has also increased. Noteworthy is the passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, which remains, landmark recognition of the significance of gender issues in peacekeeping operations (Vayrynen, 2004). The resolution emphasizes the need to mainstream gender into peacekeeping operations as well as increasing the participation of female personnel in all UN peacekeeping operations. According to Vayrynen (2004), women peacekeepers have proven in all aspects of peacekeeping that they can perform the same roles, to the same standards and under the same difficult conditions, as their male counterparts.

Women have been deployed in all fields of peacekeeping in areas such as police, military, correctional services and civilian components and have made a positive impact on peacekeeping environments, both in supporting the role of women in building peace and protecting women's rights (Boehme, 2008; Odanovic, 2010; Dharmapuri, 2013; Jennings, 2011). Bridges and Horsfall (2009) noted that women peacekeepers have proved to be role models to other women. Women from Timor Leste and Burundi acknowledged that women peacekeepers act as their role models as they inspire them to either join the local police or the military. More interesting is that literature on women and multidimensional peacekeeping missions has found that the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations brings about numerous benefits which include improved support for the local population, improved behavior of male peacekeepers; expansion of the mission's skills, approaches and perspectives (Boehme, 2008). For instance, the deployment of the first ever all female Indian Formed Police Unit in Liberia in 2007 is touted as having scored remarkable successes.

Protracted intra-state conflicts in Liberia and East Timor were marked by widespread sexual and gender-based violence, which continued in the aftermath of the civil wars and was typically accompanied by impunity for the perpetrators (Kember, 2010). In 2004, a UN report criticised peacekeepers in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti for the sexual abuse of young women by trading food and money for sex (Bridges and Horsfall, 2009). Top UN officials credited the arrival of women peacekeepers for

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helping improve behaviour among UN peacekeepers. According to Bridges and Horsfall (2009), the perception and reputation of peacekeepers in the field are essential in a peacekeeping mission's outcome. Female peacekeepers are generally well regarded by members of host countries; this is a fundamental advantage. The uniform commands a level of respect and authority; simultaneously, women's presence normalises the force and reinforces the peacemaking agenda of the UN peacekeeping troops.

Despite the crucial role played by women's participation in peacekeeping, the number of women participating in peace operations sadly remains quite low. International efforts also appear to be less significant as women make up barely 2% of UN military positions, 10% of UN police, and are conspicuously rare in senior leadership (McCarthy, 2011). Building lasting peace and security requires women's participation. However, women remain underrepresented in peacekeeping missions. The needs and perspectives of women continue to be overlooked in post-conflict disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration processes as well as in security sector reform, rehabilitation of justice, and the rule of law (Dharmapuri, 2013). Rebuilding democracy and creating a stable society in war-torn states shall remain elusive if women continue to be under-represented in peace-building processes.

a) *Purpose of the Study*

To assess the role and challenges faced by uniformed women participating in peacekeeping missions in Liberia and East Timor.

b) *Research Design and Methodology*

A case study research design and qualitative methodology were used for this study. The major rationale for using a qualitative approach in this study was to explore the experiences, benefits and challenges of uniformed women peacekeepers particularly in the performance of international assignments of peacekeeping. A qualitative research approach was also considered the most appropriate way to capture experiences and voices of uniformed women, particularly those who have served in peacekeeping missions. In this study, a sample of nine (9) uniformed personnel comprising six (6) women and three (3) men were selected out of the entire population of three hundred and forty-six (346) women who according to the consolidated database at UN Women office in Harare have taken part in various UN peacekeeping missions between 2006 and 2014. Purposive sampling was used to obtain research participants who have previously served in UN peacekeeping missions in either Liberia or East Timor between 2006 and 2014. Key informants were nine (9) uniformed personnel comprising six (6) women and three (3) men who were purposively chosen from the Zimbabwe Defence Forces

(ZDF), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS). Two other key informants were local representatives of the SADC RPTC and UN Women in Zimbabwe. The key informants were asked to share experiences and knowledge on their peacekeeping stints in Liberia and East Timor. They were also asked to highlight challenges encountered by uniformed women in peacekeeping as well as giving recommendations on how the participation and role of uniformed women can be enhanced.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study reviewed an array of literature from various authors and scholars relevant to the topic under study. The study elaborates on the concept of peacekeeping, women's role in peacekeeping as well as the role of uniformed women participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Two case studies of previous UN peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast are also discussed.

a) *Feminist Standpoint Theory*

This study was premised on the Feminist Standpoint theory. It postulates that social sciences such as international relations should be practiced from the standpoint of women (Calás and Smircich, 2006). The theory reflects on both the formation of subjectivity and the creation of knowledge (Calás and Smircich, 2006). It also analyses how identities are constructed through social practices, such as work by focusing on inequality, power, and patriarchy (Gherardi, 2003). The experiences of women's everyday life are the starting point (Gherardi, 2003). In doing so, a feminist standpoint is essential in examining the systemic oppressions in a society that standpoint feminist say devalues women's knowledge. This perspective leads to an awareness of societal expectations on gender relations, which interact with organizational rules and practices (Gherardi, 2003). According to Vincent (2003), standpoint feminism claim that theories or practices have been inadequate because they have failed to take into account the standpoint, activities and experiences of women. In order to correct gender blindness, it is necessary to identify a set of experiences, activities as well as patterns of thinking, feeling and acting which can be characterized as female and to make these visible (Vincent, 2003).

Furthermore, organisational structures and dynamics correspond with gender lines in a number of ways. Daily procedures and decisions segregate, manage, control, and construct hierarchies in which gender, class, and race are involved (Calás and Smircich, 2006). At the same time, gender is also a driving force for organisational change (Acker, 1992). The requirements for management positions increasingly include soft skills, which are traditionally

assigned with female attributes, such as empathy, communications skills, and team spirit (Cockburn, 1991). Flexibility and communication skills are valued in today's organisations, the United Nations included. Thus, the claim of standpoint theory that men and women are different but should be equally valued is increasingly recognised (Calás and Smircich, 2006). This is quite valid in the current discussion on contemporary peacekeeping in which the participation of women has increasingly become more important and thus deserves recognition. Stiehm (2001) observes that without women in senior positions in multi-dimensional UN peacekeeping missions, the needs and potential of half of the population is ignored. Gender-balanced uniformed peacekeeping troops, for instance, symbolise a democratic power sharing in security institutions. In this regard, UN peacekeeping units become role models for local police and military services as well as for all political institutions in the host society (Bastick and de Torres, 2010).

Similarly, Tickner (1992) argues that International Relations is gendered to marginalise women's voices and stresses that women have knowledge, perspectives and experiences that should be brought to bear on the study of international relations. For instance, peacekeeping has been for time immemorial been projected in the male perspective and women's contribution largely remaining tokenist. The Standpoint Feminist theory thus challenges those participating and defining the key terms and issues in international relations, by critically asking them if the normative perspectives and working vocabulary are broad enough to effectively accommodate issues affecting women (Tickner, 1992). The Standpoint Feminist theory was no doubt relevant to the current study as it allowed a critical interrogation of male dominated systems obtaining within international politics especially on the international peacekeeping arena where female voices and experiences continue to be miniscule and marginalised.

b) *The concept of peacekeeping*

Fortna (2008) defines peacekeeping as the deployment of international personnel to maintain peace and security. Thus, peacekeeping attempts to separate the disputing parties and maintain a state of non-violence. Peacekeeping operations are military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement (cease fire, truce, or other such agreement) and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement (UN, 2002). Peacekeeping is generally a multilateral activity, and all of these missions involve military personnel, although many include substantial civilian components as well (Fortna, 2008).

A UN Security Council resolution is needed in order to carry out peacekeeping operations and the UN

Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is the operational manager of peacekeeping missions (UN, 2006). Similarly, the Secretary General of the United Nations carries overall responsibility of the operation. United Nations member-states provide the financing, personnel and equipment required for peacekeeping operations (Forsyth, 2005). The functions of peacekeepers are broad and may encompass the observation of a ceasefire, the establishment of a buffer zone and the organisation of elections (UN, 2002).

Since the evolution of peacekeeping in 1946, UN peacekeeping missions have become complex and multidimensional as mandates now require the provision of operational support to national security sector institutions; protection of civilians and critical infrastructure as well as provision of support to reconciliation and reconstruction efforts (Kember, 2010). The composition of modern peacekeeping missions frequently comprise robust military components and a large civilian contingent of specialists in policing, human rights, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of combatants, humanitarian assistance, economic development, and institutional reform and reconstruction (UNDPKO, 2002).

i. *United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) 1999-2001*

The conflict in Sierra Leone began in 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel group, invaded the country (Lamp and Trif, 2009). With the Sierra Leonean government too weak to militarily defeat the rebels, the RUF managed to gain control of large parts of the country. It was only in 1995 with the help of Executive Outcomes, a private military company that the Government managed to halt the RUF rebels' advance on Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital (Hirsch, 2001).

The RUF illegally exploited the country's resources, especially diamonds, and committed unconscionable atrocities against the civilian population in the areas under its control. The Government of Sierra Leone signed a peace agreement with the RUF which was called the Lomé Agreement. This peace agreement granted the RUF a blanket amnesty and substantial political power as well as important cabinet posts in the new government. In addition, the Lomé Agreement specifically requested the United Nations to authorise the deployment of a peace-keeping force in Sierra (Lamp and Trif, 2009).

The United Nations Security Council established UNAMSIL through Resolution 1270, of October 22, 1999. The resolution also authorised UNAMSIL to assist parties to the Lomé Agreement in the implementation of the Agreement, in particular, the disarmament of rebels and pro-government paramilitary forces, as well as the planned elections. In February 2000, the Security Council expanded UNAMSIL's tasks to, inter alia,



providing security to key locations in Freetown, while it reaffirmed the mandate to protect civilians (UN, 2001).

In addition, the Council authorised the expansion of UNAMSIL's military component to 11,000 troops, up from the 6,000 authorized in Resolution 1270. In August 2000, the Security Council changed UNAMSIL's mandate and in 2001, UNAMSIL began to venture into RUF-held territory. UNAMSIL further conducted robust patrols into RUF-controlled areas and later permanently deployed to key locations throughout the country, forcing the rebels to dismantle their military positions and disarm in the process (Lamp and Trif, 2009). By January 2002, all rebels had been disarmed and UNAMSIL's mandate was terminated on December 31, 2005 after a successful mission (Hirsch, 2001). Sierra Leone had been returned to civilian rule and the RUF had been vanquished.

ii. *United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) 2004 – 2005*

Côte d'Ivoire remained de facto split between two spheres of influence by early 2006 with the south held by government forces loyal to President Laurent Gbagbo and the north, conquered and administered by the Forces Nouvelles rebels (Lamp and Trif, 2009). To the astonishment of neighbouring countries and the international community, these decades of prosperity were replaced by a cycle of violence, human rights abuses, successful or failed coup d'état(s), and a general descent into ethnic and religious divides.

In response to the growing demand for UN involvement and recognising the volatile situation in Côte d'Ivoire, on February 27, 2004 the Security Council established the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) through UNSC Resolution 1528, starting from April 4, 2004 (UN, 2004). UNOCI's authorized military strength amounted to 6,240 personnel, including military observers, staff officers and up to 350 civilian police officers. The mission was mandated to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities and its areas of deployment (Hirsch, 2001). The Resolution also provided for the coordination of UN forces with the French Licorne soldiers (approximately 4,000 troops) and requested the latter to offer full support to UNOCI particularly with respect to security issues within the areas of activity and military interventions either in support of the mission, or against belligerent actions outside its scope (UN, 2004).

Despite the deployment of peacekeepers, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire further deteriorated, straining UNOCI's resources and flatly revealing the mission's incapacity to ensure the safety of civilians within the boundaries of its deployment area (Bullion, 2001). On March 25, 2004 in Abidjan there was a crackdown by state security forces on an opposition-led demonstration which resulted in at least 120 people killed, 274

wounded and disappeared (Hirsch, 2001). After two days of social unrest, with the help of international mediators such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the African Union and the UN Secretary-General the tension was diffused and the parties returned once again to the negotiation table. Due to multiple tasks and limited personnel UNOCI had limited potential for regular patrols, a factor which increased the vulnerability of Ivorians living within the buffer zone. Overall, UNOCI was effective in fulfilling its mandate (Lamp and Trif, 2009).

c) *Gender Mainstreaming in UN Peace Operations*

Gender mainstreaming refers to the process of assessing the implications for men and women in any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels (UN, 2000). It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (UN, 2002). Mainstreaming gender is therefore about achieving gender equality.

Integrating gender perspective into UN peace support operations relies on international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as other UN instruments that provide the foundation, rationale and international standards for gender mainstreaming (Olsson and Tryggstad, 2001). The Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) made in 1993 provide internationally recognized standards that can be used to legally define violence and discrimination against women. In 2001, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The central goal of 1325 was to ensure that the contributions, needs, and priorities of men and women would be taken into account in the planning and implementation of peacekeeping operations- in a manner that creates greater equality and access to resources and benefits for all (UN, 2001).

Women's active participation in peace processes was seen as imperative to achieving international peace and security hence Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security sets clear standards for integrating gender perspectives into peace operations (Odanovic, 2010). The resolution reaffirms the 'important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building', and stresses the 'importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution' (UN, 2001).

Resolution 1325 is a step in a chain of attempts to mainstream gender in the UN discourse on peace operations. Since 2000, five additional resolutions (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960 and 2122) have been adopted creating what is known as the UN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Framework. Together, they form the basis for advocacy, education, reform and capacity building on gender equality and women's rights, as they relate to peace and security operations (Lamp and Trif, 2009).

i. *The Role of Women in Peacekeeping Missions*

Analysis of the role of women in peacekeeping and peace-building processes is particularly scant as sex-disaggregated data in many cases has only recently begun to be collected (Kember, 2010). However, the United Nations Secretary General's Report (2002) outlines women's roles and functions in peace and security related processes and activities as among others:

- i. The importance of women participating in the design, writing and inception of mandates. The absence of women during this process increases the possibility of their absence during the implementation of the mandate. This should start at national level if we want it to succeed in the international arena.
- ii. The role of female civilian police officers is vital ensuring that security needs for women are addressed properly. The participation of female police in the establishment and training of new police forces such as East Timor sets a critical example to the local population.
- iii. Female public information officers collect, analyse and disseminate information that is gender balanced and that addresses the information needs of women.
- iv. Women in uniform are in a better position than civilian women to gain access to military resources needed to establish refugee camps, provide logistic support and liaise with their civilian counterparts during complex humanitarian crises. More women should therefore be included in all peace/humanitarian and disaster relief exercises and activities.
- v. Women legal officers should be included in the development of constitutional and legislative reform.
- vi. Women peacekeepers should participate in the total disarmament programme. The safekeeping of weapons and armaments is often one of the most important tasks left to women in conflict situations.
- vii. The identification and registration of women and girl combatants should be eased when women peacekeepers are involved.
- viii. Women should take the lead in the design and implementation of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes to address the specific needs of female ex-combatants.

ix. Female officers play a critical role in providing women's groups and networks with the necessary liaison and communication links to the formal military structures.

Key to the role of women in peacekeeping was further buttressed by the passage in 2000 of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (Dharmapuri, 2013). Among its provisions are calls for increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in institutions addressing conflict; expansion of the contribution of women in United Nations peacekeeping operations, especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel; the incorporation of a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations; and special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse (UN, 2000).

In her study on the women's participation in peacekeeping, Kember (2010) noted that the inclusion of women in peacekeeping operations brings about an array of operational benefits. As a result of active participation of women in peacekeeping there is improved support for the local population, improved behavior of male peacekeepers; expansion of the mission's skills, approaches and perspectives. McCarthy (2011) also concurred with this assertion by pointing out that the significant presence of female peacekeepers has the potential to mobilize host country women to increase participation in political processes. Other benefits include enhanced information-gathering capacity; increased attention to women's and children's security; modelling of gender equality; and even a reduction in conflict (Hudson, 2000).

In 2003, Ministers of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men agreed that rebuilding democracy and creating a stable society in war-torn states is not possible if women are omitted from the peace building processes (Bridges and Horsfall, 2009). In addition to reducing negative aspects of UN peacekeeping, a critical mass of female personnel has the potential to promote a more tolerant, non-violent, political culture in war-torn areas (Pupavac, 2005).

d) *Benefits of Uniformed Women's Participation in UN Peacekeeping Missions*

The increased participation of women in peacekeeping operations has numerous benefits which include:

i. *High levels of discipline among peacekeepers*

It has been observed that participation of women in the peacekeeping operations contributes to a higher level of discipline among the male staff members of the mission and decrease in number of cases of sexual exploitation and abuse of women in which the members of the peace keeping missions are involved

(Bridges and Horsfall, 2009). By having a civilising effect on their male colleagues, women's presence ensures a better-behaved, less-corrupt and less-abusive PKO. Furthermore, with regard to the problem of sexual exploitation or abuse committed by UN personnel, women are less likely to be perpetrators, thus lowering the overall level of sexual exploitation or abuse committed (Marks and Denham, 2006).

ii. *Intelligence Gathering*

Through direct contact with their local community, women have an opportunity to gather information indicating growing tensions and potential for conflict outbreak, and local women's organizations often appear as mediators between the parties in war, the Government and the United Nations (UN, 2002). Bearing in mind that women establish contacts among themselves more easily, participation of women in peacekeeping operations facilitates establishment of contacts and cooperation with the women in local community, which allows for the opportunity to obtain the information otherwise unavailable to male staff members of the peacekeeping missions.

iii. *Enhanced operational effectiveness*

In addition to serving the goal of gender balance, increasing the number of women in peacekeeping operations has been shown to have positive operational impact. Security is measured by the ability of a population to be mobile, to have access to resources and infrastructure, and to be free from physical violence. The primary task of peacekeepers is to contribute to that security. Data from a 2010 DPKO-sponsored study on women peacekeepers based at the U.N. Mission to Liberia (UNMIL) shows empirical evidence that mainstreaming women in peacekeeping roles can have an impact on security for the population (Kraus, Enholm and Bowen, 2011).

In the cultures in which the physical contact between men and women is forbidden, the tasks such as body search of women and search of premises where women stay would be much more difficult if they are not entrusted with female staff members. Similar problem occurs with provision of medical help to women. It is often not allowed to attend to women unless there are female doctors in the medical team (UN, 2006). The all-women Indian FPU also set up Women and Child Protection Units (WCPUs), highly accessible and secure police stations across the country, staffed with female police (Kraus, Enholm and Bowen, 2011). By working alongside local women, female peacekeepers serve as resource for building the capacity of the community to sustain national security structures and also emphasize transparency and inclusivity for those structures.

iv. *Greater trust and Protection*

Participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping operations contributes to a greater trust

in the mission, not only among the local women but also men. When contacting with the local population female mission members often show greater level of understanding for local cultural and religious peculiarities and they are more successful in establishing dialogue, which encourages trust and cooperation of the local population with the peacekeeping mission staff (Odanovic, 2010). Peace Keeping Operations with more women peacekeepers are able to protect citizens, especially women and children, because women peacekeepers bring a greater awareness of and sensitivity to their particular needs and challenges, and because women peacekeepers are less intimidating or provocative than men peacekeepers (Jennings, 2011).

v. *Inspiration and Role Models*

The presence of women peacekeepers "inspires more women to join their local police services (Marks and Denham, 2006). As national police and military institutions evolve to include more women, they can gain credibility. Women peacekeepers in Liberia lead recruitment of women for the National Police which boasts of almost 20% women (Dharmapuri, 2011). The presence of women in evolving security structures enhances overall national stability in the transition to peace. Women peacekeepers become role models for local women in challenging social and cultural context, both within and outside of the security sector. Having female and male peacekeepers working side-by-side can be catalytic in breaking down traditional views that discriminate and marginalize women (Giraud, 2004). By giving an example to the local community that women can be successful in police, military or other tasks within the peacekeeping operation, it is possible to have an indirect impact on the local population's gender based stereotypes of social roles of women (Kraus, Enholm and Bowen, 2011).

vi. *Sensitivity to the host nation*

Female staff members of the peacekeeping operations are more sensitive to the needs and problems that women in local communities are facing, therefore the women and the girls who had been exposed to sexual and physical violence are more likely to report these cases to the female personnel of the mission (Marks and Denham, 2006). Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has asserted that women bring extra sensitivity and more caring to the security sector, these are the characteristics that come from being a mother, taking care of a family, being concerned about children, managing the home (Kember, 2010). By creating the atmosphere in which the women are unafraid to speak openly about the problems they are facing, especially about sexual violence, the feeling of increased security is created among the local population, particularly among the women and children. Women peacekeepers ensure a more compassionate or

empathetic response to victimised women and children, especially those that have been sexually assaulted; it is often claimed that it is “easier” for a raped woman to talk to another woman about her assault (Norville, 2011).

vii. *Acceptance of UN's Presence*

The presence of female peacekeepers can increase local communities' acceptance of a UN force. For example, a study based on the missions in Namibia, South Africa, and Rwanda found that in all of these operations, women police peacekeepers were seen by locals as less threatening, more willing to listen and soldiers can often access and interview more elements of a local population, that is, the women, boys, and girls, especially in cultural contexts that are conservative and do not allow men outside the local community to interact with the community's women (Kraus, Enholm and Bowen, 2011). This increased access to the population by and better able to diffuse potentially violent situations (Kember, 2010). Force acceptance and improved communication with the local population are vital to addressing the problem of sexual violence in conflict. Local women are also more likely to report incidents of sexual violence to female officers (Jennings, 2011).

e) *The role of uniformed women in peacekeeping*

Uniformed women peacekeepers that were deployed to the two missions of Liberia and East Timor highlighted that their competences and skills were very handy especially in dealing with issues involving vulnerable groups such as women and children. In addition, uniformed women peacekeepers also assisted a great deal in the arrest of female offenders as well as in the management of female inmates in prisons and correctional facilities.

A female police Superintendent who served in East Timor who was a Community Policing Advisor highlighted that her duties involved training and advising the local police. Despite being deployed in a remote district of Manufahi in East Timor, she assisted the local police (National Police of Timor Leste) cultivate good relations with the public through series of meetings with local traditional and religious leaders (Suco Chiefs). The Superintendent was also involved in the UN Police/ National Police co-location programme whereby the UN Police worked together with local police monitoring how they performed police duties. She said,

“During my tour of duty the few female officers in the mission area demonstrated strong ability and also proved competencies to effectively and efficiently execute responsibilities on international peacekeeping assignments.”

Another female police peacekeeper (Inspector) from East Timor pointed out that she was elevated to a higher position after just serving for two months. She was later deployed in the Reform, Restructuring and Rebuilding Department and was part of the UN Team that carried out evaluation of the Joint Development Plan

(JDP) of the East Timor National Police. The JDP was aimed at assessing the National Police's progress towards resumption of full police duties without the assistance of the UN Police. This role was quite demanding and involved intense travelling across East Timor, writing progress and evaluation reports. The police Inspector further stated that,

“Due to my exceptional performance, I was rewarded by getting an extension of my tour of duty by an additional six months from the initial one year. By the way, UN peacekeeping missions are reluctant to give extensions hence are given in exceptional cases.”

A female correctional peacekeeper (Principal Prison Officer from Zimbabwe) who was deployed in Liberia also acknowledged the important role played by uniformed women in peacekeeping missions. She pointed out that,

“Uniformed women like me were also being assigned guard and patrols duties among many other operational tasks our male counterparts were undertaking during the co-location phase with the local prisons authorities in the mission area.”

A key informant from the UN Women highlighted that uniformed women were much better in terms of emotional intelligence and empathy thus were not aggressive but rather more willing to negotiate. She further pointed out that in matters of sexual violence, uniformed women peacekeepers provided a better alternative to men in many respects, for example, survivors of rape or sexual assault are more comfortable to share their ordeal with women peacekeepers than male. She also underscored the fact that given the motherly nature of women, most uniformed peacekeepers were better positioned to understand problems affecting the elderly and children, even beyond what the survivors express in words because they are used to handling such cases back home.

The above findings are in congruent with a study by Kember (2010) who noted that uniformed female peacekeepers have proven that they can perform the same roles, to the same standards and under the same difficult conditions, as their male counterparts. Kember (2010) also established that uniformed women peacekeepers deployed in areas such as police, military, correctional services and civilian have made a positive impact on peacekeeping environments, both in supporting the role of women in building peace and protecting women's rights. Vayrynen (2004) further buttresses the above findings by asserting that uniformed women peacekeepers have a comparative operational advantage in sensitive situations such as female body searches, working with women's prisons, providing escorts for victims and witnesses of sexual violence, and screening of female combatants at disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration sites.

This view is also shared by Bridges and Horsfall (2009) who observed that female police and soldiers often access and interview more elements of a local population, that is, women, boys, and girls, especially in cultural contexts that are conservative and do not allow men outside the local community to interact with women. This increased access to the population by female officers expands the ability of peacekeepers to gather comprehensive information that can contribute to overall mission effectiveness.

The Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police also echoed similar sentiments in a speech made at a welcoming ceremony for returning police peacekeepers contingent from Liberia (The Herald, Zimbabwe, 27 April 2016). The article highlighted that the Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police said,

"I would want to applaud the returning female officers who like their predecessors, have been faithful stewards of the organisation's distinguished professional record. The outpouring of commendations from the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations [UNDPKO] with regards to the outstanding and sterling work done is quite commendable indeed."

The Police Chief went on to commend women police peacekeepers for their focused commitment, diligence and integrity as they had managed to decisively assert themselves on the demanding international arena and also exhibiting undoubted professionalism. Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police's remarks further buttressed the competency of women as he stated that,

As a matter of record, one of our female officers Assistant Commissioners, recently took up the post of Police Commissioner for Darfur on 14 March 2016. The appointment of the senior officer adds to the roll of honour of other female senior officers who have previously distinguished themselves on these high level competitive appointments, among whom was another Senior Assistant Commissioner who successfully executed her mandate as Operations Strategic Coordinator for the United Nations Mission in Liberia. (The Herald, Zimbabwe, 27 April 2016)

f) *Selection criteria of uniformed women as peacekeepers*

All the nine peacekeepers interviewed during this study pointed out that selection for UN mission was based on an individual's length of service and good performance. In the two UN mission areas of East Timor and Liberia, deployment to various posts was based on an individual's work and academic profile. In addition to the academic profile, job interviews were also conducted to ascertain a candidate's competence to hold the post. Six (6) of the peacekeepers interviewed

served for one year six months each while the other three (3) peacekeepers who had long term contracts served between two to four years. The above views are in sync with various requirements set by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations when calling for peacekeeping personnel from troop contributing countries. The DPKO requirements outline skill sets and experts' profiles for all UN peacekeeping components in field missions (DPKO, 2002).

g) *Challenges affecting uniformed women in participating in peacekeeping missions*

i. *Few women in peacekeeping missions*

All the ten peacekeepers acknowledged that during their various tours of duty there were few women in the mission. This resulted in the few numbers being deployed to a few districts and units. For instance, a female police Superintendent who served in East Timor said,

"Out of more than thirty (30) UN Police officers in the district we were only three women. We were forced to play football with men as there were no other females to interact with."

This view is similar to earlier findings by Bridges and Horsfall (2009) who noted that the most obvious gap in recruitment for UN peacekeeping is the lack of women. The United Nations Police Division believes that police and correctional services should represent the societies they serve given the significant role they play in their communities. Women's participation in police and correctional peacekeeping empowers the communities in restoring peace and security and in reconstructing not only their police services, but also their societies.

ii. *Gender Discrimination*

The uniformed police peacekeeper (Inspector who served in East Timor) highlighted that the other challenge she encountered was gender discrimination, which in some instances had racial undertones. According to her, at times this was quite evident in the poor distribution of resources. She stated that,

"The vehicle that I was given was unreliable and constantly broke down. Male counterparts in my unit were not willing to exchange vehicles hence I always had mobility challenges unless when assisted by one of my fellow countrymen from a different unit. This made life a bit difficult because in a conflict state we (as peacekeepers) were supposed to be mobile most of the time"

This view is consistent with the findings of a research study on Enhancing the Operational Impact of Peacekeeping Operations by UN which acknowledged that barriers impacting on the participation of women in peacekeeping operations include gender discrimination. This is largely based on the societal prejudice and stereotypes that women do not have required psychological and physical abilities to perform

successfully in the peacekeeping operations (UN, 2006). Due to entrenched patriarchal systems, some sections of society have a negative perception of women as they regard them as weak and unfit for uniformed services duties such as military and police. There is need to continue educating members of the society especially conflict ridden states in order to remove gender stereotypes so that women are also viewed as equals (UN, 2006).

iii. *Lack of acceptance by male peacekeepers*

The other challenges which uniformed women peacekeepers encountered were lack of acceptance by male counterparts especially when women are in positions of authority. Some of female research participants noted that a few male peacekeepers always tried to make things difficult either by failing to execute tasks as directed simply because the instructions are coming from women. Another female defence forces peacekeeper (Fight Lieutenant who served in Liberia) bemoaned that,

"In some instances, as uniformed women, they were victims of sexual harassment although it is usually done in a subtle way thus making it difficult to report or bring to the attention of authorities."

The above observation is in congruency with the perception that socialization processes and belief systems are some of the barriers that continue to influence adherence to gender-specific stereotypes. In addition, cultural resistance within military and police institutions and in society as a whole remains a major barrier to instituting gender equality (Norville, 2011). The UN Secretary General also acknowledged that women were also being unfairly treated in some peacekeeping missions on the grounds that they should not work in dangerous situations, while on the other hand, some host countries do not readily accept women in decision-making positions (UN, 2002).

iv. *Language Barrier*

Most uniformed women peacekeepers that served in East Timor highlighted that language was a barrier especially given that some locals (Timorese) who were assigned as Language Assistants (LAs) for UN peacekeepers had difficulties communicating in English. Furthermore, some of the male LAs were not comfortable assisting female UN Police due to cultural stereotypes hence, the relationship tended to be constrained. On the other hand, due to the diverse background of personnel in the peacekeeping mission in Liberia, research participants noted that language was one of the major barriers as some of the peacekeepers had difficulties in expressing themselves in English which is the official language for United Nations. De-Groot (2008), observed the impact of language barrier in peacekeeping missions. He observed that language and communication are most obvious challenges in any activity drawing together

hundreds of people from countries with different languages and cultural frames of reference especially deployed alongside national counterparts to build sustainable peace through strengthening host countries' institutions and organizations (De-Groot, 2008).

v. *Marital Challenges*

Some of the uniformed women police peacekeepers from Liberia said,

"That some of their female colleagues encountered instances where the UN would extend tours of duty due to good performance and demand for their skills. However, spouses of the uniformed women peacekeepers back home did not approve of such developments hence culminated in the contracts being terminated."

Another uniformed women peacekeeper (a Chief Superintendent) who also served in Liberia, highlighted that,

"One of the challenges we encounter as women peacekeepers is that most UN missions are non-family duty stations. This is maybe because of the ongoing conflicts hence as peacekeepers we are not allowed to bring our family members or to fall pregnant during tour of duty. You see this affects many women peacekeepers especially when they are deployed for long periods of two – four year contracts. I hope the United Nations might review such policies in future."

Kember (2010) buttresses the above viewpoint by asserting that many UN peacekeeping missions are non-family duty stations. This means that peacekeepers are not allowed to travel to the peacekeeping mission with their families. As a result, family and personal relations tend to suffer. It is also true that more uniformed women than men may self-select against particular jobs and types of operations based on their familial responsibilities to dependants (UN, 2002).

h) *Measures to increase participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions*

i. *Sustained recruitment of women into national security services institutions*

Two uniformed women police peacekeepers who served in East Timor highlighted the need for sustained recruitment of women into national institutions such as military, police and prisons and correctional services in order to increase the pool for subsequent deployments to peacekeeping duties. One uniformed police peacekeeper (Superintendent) from East Timor stated that,

"There is need to ensure that for every UN deployment, a 50/50 gender balance is observed among all contributing countries. This will allow more women to be deployed in peacekeeping missions and also give them the opportunity to fully

demonstrate their competences in the mission area.”

Another uniformed police peacekeeper (Inspector who served in East Timor) suggested that,

“Countries contributing peacekeepers to the United Nations should put in place policies that ensure that there is gender balance which should be adhered to whenever there is selection and deployment of peacekeepers.”

The key informant from UN Women pointed out that,

“In response to the global and regional calls for increasing the number of women in peacekeeping operations in line with UNSCR1325, the UN and member states are giving priority to female peacekeepers in the uniformed forces to take part in peacekeeping operations. As such the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations has set the benchmark for female peacekeepers in each country to be 20% as a measure to ensure that women are systematically integrated in peacekeeping operations. However, because of the gender positive measures used in recruiting peacekeepers, some countries, for example Zimbabwe have surpassed the DPKO’s baseline, and Zimbabwe is the highest provider of female peacekeepers at 35%.”

The above recommendations are similar to findings in a UN (2006) Report on Enhancing Gender Balance in Peacekeeping which acknowledged that besides serving the goal of gender balance, increasing the number of women in peacekeeping operations has shown to have positive operational impact. It is therefore of paramount importance that the United Nations continues to vigorously appeal to contributing countries to send more uniformed women to serve in peacekeeping operations in order to enhance gender balance.

ii. *Enhancing safety and security for peacekeepers during deployment*

Safety and security issues are critical and often have detrimental effects on force generation and recruitment of peacekeepers. A uniformed woman police peacekeeper (a Superintendent who served in Liberia) said,

“The UN should ensure that there is reduction in the number of casualties among peacekeepers by putting in place sound safety and security mechanisms that enhance the protection of peacekeepers in conflict zones.

The above assertion is in sync with the views of Dharmapuri (2013) who pointed out that UN peacekeeping missions by nature are established in complex and insecure environments which have a potential of rapidly deteriorating and where threats are likely to evolve. She further observed that contributing

countries do not usually have a direct national interest in the ongoing conflict into which their personnel are deployed resulting in a very limited appetite for any casualties. Security risk thus remains a key factor in the reluctance of many countries to contribute forces to UN operations. The risk of loss and the perceived inability of the UN to mitigate such risks constrain generation and sustainability of troop contributing countries deploying peacekeepers (Odanovic, 2010). However, in the literature review, it was noted that Kember (2010) stated that female peacekeepers tend to be deployed to the safest missions and not to places where the security situation is most fragile such as Darfur, Syria, Iraq, among others. She further pointed out that countries willing to deploy female troops and police send them to more economically developed places or in missions with fewer peacekeeper deaths.

iii. *Conducting robust pre-deployment peacekeeping training*

A key informant from the SADC RPTC said,

“Given that some contributing countries continue to lack the capacity to prepare their uniformed personnel in a self-sustaining manner for peacekeeping duties, there is critical need for troop contributing countries to undertake robust pre-deployment training. It is important to realize that pre-deployment training enhances competencies of peacekeepers including gender perspectives, which are key to their work in UN peacekeeping missions. Pre-deployment training also assists uniformed personnel to understand what gender mainstreaming means and its role in every activity of a peacekeeping operation.”

The above recommendation is consistent with the observations made by the UN DPKO, which noted that one emerging challenge for UN member states identifying and nominating officers to UN missions, is that of providing adequate training for staff (UN DPKO, 2012). Similarly, Kember (2010) underscores the fact that pre-deployment training should also play a key role in instilling confidence in uniformed women peacekeepers to act as role models in the peacekeeping missions.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In view of the research findings, the study draws some conclusions. The participation of uniformed women in peacekeeping missions has been recognised as a key ingredient for the successful operational impact of any peacekeeping mission. The study established that uniformed women peacekeepers deployed in areas such as police, military and correctional services civilian were making a huge impact in peacekeeping environments, both in supporting the role of women in building peace and protecting women’s rights. The findings from this study and the review of related

literature have also demonstrated that peacekeeping missions that have been successful in the past have had close to equal numbers of males and females participating. Studies undertaken by the United Nations on peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Kosovo, Namibia, and South Africa to analyze in-depth case studies of the involvement of women noted that female service personnel provide roles in host nations that males cannot provide (Bridges and Horsfall, 2009).

The advantages of the uniformed women's participation in peacekeeping operations are numerous, and at the same time, vital for the establishment of sustainable peace and stability in conflict zones. This study has shown that women in states of conflict confide in uniformed female peacekeepers and are understood better by them. When at least 30 percent of peacekeepers are female, local women become more involved in the peace process. Further investigations into women's roles revealed that female service personnel are able to work with women and children who have endured conflicts with gender-based violence as well as those who have been victims of rape and sexual exploitation.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that:

- i. There is a greater need for UN contributing countries to robustly strengthen the recruitment of more women into national institutions such as military, police and prisons and correctional service in order to increase the pool for subsequent deployment to peacekeeping duties.
- ii. There is need for UN contributing countries to enhance capacity building of uniformed women so that they compete equally with their male counterparts for senior and decision making posts in UN missions.
- iii. There is need for the United Nations to review some of its policies on the non-family status especially on uniformed peacekeepers. This will reduce the negative impact caused by the prolonged absence of peacekeepers away from their families.
- iv. The United Nations and its member countries should provide financial and logistical support for mentoring programmes within troop contributing countries that send mixed or all-women units into peacekeeping missions so that the experiences of returning women peacekeepers may be properly utilised.
- v. The United Nations should promote the involvement of women in peacekeeping operations more by emphasising the contributions of uniformed women, which would motivate a larger number of women to participate in peacekeeping operations. At the same time, UN member states should work on continuous affirmation of gender equality through creating conditions for genuine equality and equal opportunities for women and men.
- vi. Uniformed women peacekeepers should impart their peacekeeping knowledge and mentoring skills in their respective women associations and networks in order to encourage others.

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