

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN LIBERIA CONFLICT

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Abstract

The paper to assessed the impact of the United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia. Historically, the UN has embarked thirty-three (33) peacekeeping operations from 1948 to 2009 with about twenty-five (25) of such operations in Africa. This shows that Africa remains a vital case study for the evaluation of the United Nations peacekeeping operations. The study is anchored on ABC Triangle and Hour Glass analytical tools to clearly understand the issues around gender-based violence during the Second Liberian Civil War despite the presence of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Data from secondary sources were analysed using relational-content analysis. Findings reveal, among other things, that the UN peacekeeping operations have negligible impact on reduction of gender-based violence in Liberia. Among other things, it is recommended that to mitigate the likely adverse impact of the United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia, the United Nations should increase the quality and number of troops contributed to UN peacekeeping operations.

Keywords: *International Organisations, Conflict, Peacekeeping Operations, Violence, Gender-Based Violence, Conflict*

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the era of political colonisation, African States were united in the fight against foreign domination of their states. During this epoch, According to Onimode (2000), the African Heads of States viewed the issue of foreign intervention in the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit at Libreville in 1977 with huge concern, but since the challenge of conflict in

the continent appeared to have deteriorated with its attendant huge challenges African leaders now look outside of their continent for help. Many scholars including Adeboye (2020); Mvukiyehe & Samii (2020); Olycay & Bayram (2020) have written on United Nations peacekeeping operations in Liberia. Nevertheless, none of the scholars focused on the assessment of the impact of UN peacekeeping operations vis-a-vis gender-based violence in Liberian Second Civil War using sound theoretical or empirical approach. This created gaps in the extant literature which requires further investigation and analysis.

Despite having maintained the peace since 2003 as well as imposing temporary ceasefire at various points in the 1990s, the mission stumbled when their mandates were extended beyond peacekeeping to peacebuilding or state-building, which would have largely helped in the protection of women and girls from sexual, physical and psychological abuses. This further deteriorated the security situation in Liberia as the country was characterised by weak governance capacity across all sectors, in addition to the challenge of state-society relations in spite of nearly 13 years of UNMIL engagements in the country (Shilue & Patricia, 2014).

Despite all efforts by the United Nations and other state actors as well as non-state actors to maintain peace in Liberia, cases of gender-based violence arising from the war continued to fester. A report by Amnesty International cited by Ackerman (2022) showed that between 60% to 70% of the Liberian population suffered some form of sexual violence during the conflict, even though the numbers are perhaps higher given that many cases of rape were not reported. Even with the end of the war, United Nations report still showed that 349 cases of rape were reported in Liberia between January and June 2008 which showed a significant increase from the figure in 2007. Therefore, it is important to interrogate United Nations Peacekeeping operation in Liberian Second Civil War in order to clearly understand the reasons for wanton cases of gender-based violence arising from the conflict despite all efforts to maintain peace and protect unarmed civilians during the war.

2. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Peacekeeping Operations

Peacekeeping has evolved from activities that simply monitored the implementation of fragile peace deals with the hope of creating conditions favorable to mitigating the roots of a conflict, to include activities such as protection of civilians, and administration of humanitarian assistance as well as the re-establishment of the rule of law. A peacekeeping operation is

characterised as multidimensional when its scope of operation transcends the military to include police and civilians working together, but each having specific functions (Tshiband, 2010). However, the definition of peacekeeping by Tshiband did not meet our requirements for the definition of the concept in this study.

Karlsrud (2015) contributed to the definition of peacekeeping by examining its aim. According to Karlsrud, peacekeeping aims at preserving peace, normally after a peace agreement has been achieved. It comprises of basically military activity, observation of ceasefire as well as separation of forces after inter-state conflict to multidimensional missions taking on a range of civilian tasks. United Nations peacekeeping is not mentioned in the UN Charter, but it has become one of the most versatile, well-known and often-used features of the world organization. The core features of the peacekeeping are to maintain its impartiality, obtain the consent of the main parties to the conflict, and adopt minimum levels of force except in self-defence or in defence of the mandate. Nevertheless, the definition by Karlsrud did not cover activities like protection of civilians and promotion of the rule of law, which is important in preventing or minimizing gender-based violence.

In this study, peacekeeping is defined, in this study, as comprised basically of observer missions as well as lightly armed forces that maintain ceasefire, while operating in static mode through the consent of parties to the conflict. Peacekeeping equally means conflict containment which adopts the form of neutral outside assistance in order to mediate and persuade belligerent parties to disengage from traditional perspective. This clearly shows that for peacekeeping operations to be successful, the cooperation of parties in conflict, international community, regional and sub-regional organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU) and United Nations must be secured.

Gender-Based Violence

Before reviewing the general concept of gender-based violence, it is vital to first concept of violence. Violence has been prevalent in human history, but like other forms of violence, it has been culturally as well as socially organized given that it varies largely in its nature and extent over time and across spaces. Given the nature of violence, many scholars have defined it in diverse ways. According to Bufacchi (2007), violence can be defined as an intentional act of excessive or destructive force. Violence can equally be defined from two broad perspectives

which are as an act or as a violation. Though the foregoing definition of violence is vital in this study, it did not cover four important elements of violence.

A comprehensive definition of violence encompasses 4 important elements regarding behavior that is: intentional, unwanted, non-essential, and harmful (Hamby, 2017). Though the four elements of violence are identified by Hamby which is vital in this study, it did not cover sexual, physical and emotional abuses associated with violence.

Gender-based violence includes an extensive range of interactions, from verbal harassment and institutional discrimination to enslavement and murder. This equally includes acts of physical, emotional, sexual, economic, verbal and psychological violence by intimate partners or family members, sexual assault, marital rape, sexual harassment and intimidation, forced prostitution (Russel, 1984)., but this did not cover gender roles and behaviours that would trigger gender-based violence which is can give a clue to how to mitigate gender-based violence in Civil Wars.

The term gender-based violence is used because such violence is shaped by gender roles and status in society. Gender-based violence against women does not encompass every violent act a woman may have experienced. Gender role and expectations, male expectations, sexual objectification and discrepancies in power and status have legitimised, rendered invincible, sexualized and helped to perpetuate violence against women (Russo, 2006). This definition by Russo did not cover the definition of gender-based violence by the United Nations, which would have aligned the study within the context of the United Nations.

In this study, the definition of gender-based violence is adopted. According to Russo & Pirlott (2018), United nations has identified gender-based violence against women as a global health and development issues, and a host of policies, public education, and action programmes aimed at minimizing gender-based violence globally. Gender-based violence against women has been defined as any act that results in or likely to result in sexual, physical, psychological harm of suffering to women including such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty either in public or private life. Gender-based violence has been defined as encompassing child abuse, coercive sex, rape, stalking, and intimate partner violence.

Conflict

There is no unanimous definition regarding the concept of conflict by scholars in specifying what constitutes conflict because many of them define it in diverse ways. This makes many

schools of thoughts to define conflicts differently from other schools of thought. One of the dominant schools of thought in North America defined conflict as clash of interests between two parties. For Boulding (1962), conflict is defined over interests to mean situations in which some changes make at least one party better-off and the other party worse-off, each in their own estimation. This shows that conflict arises from a situation of unequal distribution of resources. However, the definition by Boulding did not cover the structural basis of conflicts, which is needed in the understanding of the character of the Second Liberian Civil War.

Galtung (1997), who represents another school of thought, noted that conflict arises from injustice and structural violence. For Galtung, absence of physical violence as well as direct confrontation between different actors does not necessarily suggest that structural violence is entirely eliminated. This definition of conflict is aligned with the meaning of conflict in this study because it helps our understanding of the root causes of Liberian Civil war.

Similarly, Nicholson (1992) perceives conflict as situation that exists when two people desire to take part in acts that are mutually inconsistent. The definition of conflict by Nicholson can be extended from single individuals to groups of people because more than two people can be involved in a conflict (Shant, 2019). From the foregoing definitions of conflict, the common elements that are manifest in all the definitions of conflict are divergent goals and interests of two or more actors or parties who employ various means in realising their objectives, but that did not cover diverse layers of conflict, which is important in the characterisation of Liberian Second Civil War.

Chand (2019) noted that conflict can be expressed as a process where perception whether real or otherwise leads to disruption of desirable state of harmony as well as stability in a sovereign state. Characteristics of conflict include that conflict is a process because it occurs in layers. The first layer is always characterised by misunderstanding between the diverse parties. The other layers are characterised by differences of values, differences of viewpoints, differences of interests as well as interpersonal differences. Conflict is called a process because it begins with one party, perceiving the other party to oppose or adversely affect its interests, which usually ends with competing, compromising, collaborating and avoiding. Conflict is inevitable because it is a normal path of life. Conflict is equally multi-dimensional in nature, which could provide explanation of the complexity of the Liberian Civil War.

Therefore, conflict is defined in this study as a process in which one party to a dispute perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. Conflict emanates from structural contradictions, behaviours and attitudes in the society, which is aligned with the ideal of conflict by Galtung (1997). Reasons for conflict include differences in values, perceptions, as well as cultural differences and incompatible needs for limited resources (Okereke & Okoli, 2022).

3. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

With respect to the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence, Morten (2010) investigated the Liberian Civil War with a view to determining if it is old war or new war. Data for the study were collected from secondary source and analysed using content analysis. Findings from the study showed, among other things, that the Liberian Civil War manifested violent expression of attitudes towards identity, class and society that have characterized Liberia starting from its formation in the 19th century. Among other things, a balanced explanation of the conflict was recommended. Though Morten examined Liberian Civil War which is related to this study, the findings did not show the impact of UN peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia.

In a study by Gabriela (2011), post-conflict development in Liberia focusing on governance, security and capacity-building using developmental approach was examined. The purpose of the study was to examine the causes of Liberian Civil War from 1989 to 2003 as well as proffering policy alternative which the current government can pursue in ensuring lasting peace and development in the country. Data for the study were collected from secondary source and analysed using content analysis. Findings from the study, among other things, showed that bad governance was the major cause of the Liberian Civil War of 1989 to 2003. It was recommended, among other things, the need for the government to adopt as well as implement the policy of good governance, a long-term development approach, security sector reform, and capacity building at local and national levels. Nonetheless, the study by Gabriela did not show how United Nations peacekeeping operations impacted on gender-based violence in Liberia, which is one of the objectives of the study.

Buhari (2013) investigated the role of peace envoy in Liberian conflict management. The purpose of the study was to analyse the role played by the peace envoys in managing the Liberian conflicts with focus on the United Nations, Economic Community of West African

States and Nigeria participation in ECOMOG for its leadership roles as well as the way forward on the role of peace envoy in conflict management, not only in Liberia, but in Africa as a whole. Data for the study were collected from secondary source and analysed using content analysis. Findings showed, among other things, that the protracted Liberian Civil War resulted in wanton killing, genocide, destruction of properties and increase in the number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. Findings equally showed that the conflict led to violation of human rights of people, especially sexual violation against women and girls, but this did not cover the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia.

More so, Masitoh (2020) examined the success of women's participation in resolving conflicts in Liberia. The aim of the study was to contribute to the study of gender politics by x-raying efforts made by women in resolving Liberian Civil War. Data for the study were collected from secondary source and analysed using content analysis. Findings from the study, among other things, showed that Liberian women created several organisations such as Women in the Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia (AFL), among others, with a view to improving gender equality in many sectors of Liberian society. Though Masito examined the success of participation of women in resolving the Liberian conflict, the findings did not show the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia, which is one of the areas of focus in this study.

Kamara (2021) examined the role of women during peace process in Liberia from the perspective of market women. The purpose of the study was to recover the voices as well as experiences of market women in the process of ensuring peace in the Liberian Civil War from 1989 to 2003. Data for the study were collected using qualitative methods anchored on experiences as well as memoirs of market women towards ending the war. Data for the study were collected from 25 market women, 3 retired market women and 2 officials of Liberian market Association. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were also collected using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interview. Data were equally collected from secondary source. All data collected were analysed using qualitative method. Among other things, findings showed that women were negatively and positively affected by the Liberian conflict from 1989 to 2003. It was recommended, among other things, that women should be adequately protected from gender-based violence during conflicts, but

this did not show impact of UN peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence such as rape, murder, forced impregnation and forced marriages, which are variables this study covers.

From a historical perspective, Odidi & Daniel (2022) reflected on Liberia's conflict with particular reference to the role Nigeria played in the resolution of the conflict. The study was anchored on the Hegemonic stability theory formulated by Charles Kindleberger in 1973. Data for the study were collected from secondary source and analysed qualitatively. Findings from the study revealed that Nigeria played a significant role in the restoration of peace in Liberia in the First and Second Civil Wars using ECOMOG as a platform. Though Odidi & Daniel focused on the Liberian Second Civil War which is related to the focus of this study, the findings did not examine gender-based violence in Liberia, which is the focus of this study. This created gaps in the area of examination of the impact of United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia, which is the focus of this study.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict Transformation Theory

This study is anchored on the conflict transformation theory. The history of the theory is traceable to the development of the ABC Triangle by Johan Galtung in 1969. Therefore, the proponent of the theory is Johan Galtung. For Galtung, conflicts are initiated through Attitudes, Physical behaviour and contradictory goals of diverse actors (Pathak, 2016).

According to Asobie (2021), the basic assumption of the ABC triangle is that conflict situations have three main parts or components, represented by ABC. A Stands for Attitudes, while B stands for Behaviour. On the other hand, C stands for Contradictions. The upper part of the triangle is "manifest" because it is empirically observable as physical violence, action and communication (Behaviour). On the other hand, points A and C are latent because they are hidden, and can solely be theoretically discerned as thoughts, will and feelings (Attitude), while distribution of resources, "order/turn" because the two are usually documented as agreements, which makes it very difficult to be changed. Therefore, whenever a party to a conflict is attacked, what is vital is not the mere attack, but the motive behind such attack.

More so, the three parts: A, B, and C are interrelated because any part of the points in the triangle may be the point where conflict can be initiated. For instance, incompatibility of goals over territory can bring about hostile attitudes, then to violent behaviour. In the same vein,

hostile attitudes between or among parties in a conflict may bring about the kind of behaviour that creates incompatible goals. The foregoing clearly shows that conflict can start from any of the three points in the triangle, but this must require the interaction of the three triangles. Johan Galtung in the theory claimed that conflict leads to violation of fundamental human rights of people, especially the vulnerable people, while structural violence leads to direct violence or confrontations. Freedom from structural violence is vital in restoring as well as restoring peace, while freedom from structural violence enables freedom from exploitation, separation, and repression (Okereke, 2022).

The conflict transformation theory by Johan Galtung is vital in this study because it is helpful in the understanding of the role of the United Nations peacekeeping operations in tackling gender-based violence during the Second Liberian Civil War with a view to bringing about peace in the country. The theory is equally vital in the identification of the root causes of Second Liberian Civil War, not just manifest causes. The theory is also vital in the understanding of the perception and attitude of global leaders, African leaders and internal leaders in Liberia to the conflict. The theory laid-bare the fact that the international system is characterized by anarchy and complexity by explaining the rationale behind the manufacture and sale of arms and ammunitions to African countries and other underdeveloped countries during the wars, which is located in behaviour of the diverse actors to the conflict.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected from both primary and secondary sources of data. The target population comprises staff of Department of United Nations Women, Abuja; Department of Resident and Humanitarian Department, United Nations Office, Abuja; Department of Planning, Research, and Statistics in Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja; Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja; Nigerian Defence College, Abuja; and the Embassy of Liberia. The reason for the choice of the foregoing organisations as our target population is anchored on their depth of knowledge about issues relating to United Nations peacekeeping operations in Liberia and its impact on women and girls. Data for the study were collected using in-depth interview and secondary sources. Data from from in-depth interview were analysed using narrative-analytic method. On the contrary, data from secondary sources were analysed using relational-content analysis.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from in-depth interview show that instead of reducing the level of gender-based violence in the Second Liberian Civil War, some of the members of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations largely contributed in deteriorating the crime by either participating actively in rape or by not doing enough to curtail the sexual violence against women and girls during the conflict. This is because the United Nations peacekeeping operations did not largely reduce the level of gender-based violence during the Liberian conflict. This further show that the United Nations peacekeeping operations has adverse impact on reduction of gender-based violence during Second Liberian Civil War. The United Nations peacekeeping operations did not curtail gender-based violence in Liberia given that the magnitude of gender-based violence during the conflict is alarming, so whatever the United Nations peacekeeping operations have done falls below the expectation of the people.

Findings from previous studies are narrower than the findings of this study. for example, Morten (2010) found that the Liberian Civil War manifested violent expression of attitudes towards identity, class and society that have characterised Liberia starting from its formation in the 19th century. Gabriba (2011) found that bad governance was the major cause of the Liberian Civil War of 1989 to 2003, which is different from the finding of this study. Buhari (2013) found that the protracted Liberian Civil War resulted in wanton destruction of lives, genocide, destruction of properties, and increase in the number of Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees. Buhari equally found that the Liberian conflict led to the violation of human rights of people, especially sexual violations against women and girls. Masitoh (2020) found that Liberian women created several organisations such as Women in Peacebuilding Network, Mano River Women's Peace Network, among others, in order to improve gender equality in many sectors of Liberian society. Kamara (2021) found that women were negatively and positively affected by the Liberian conflict from 1989 to 2003. Similarly, Odidi & Daniel (2022) found that Nigeria played a significant role in the restoration of peace in Liberia in the First and Second Liberian Civil Wars, which is not related to the findings of this study. therefore, findings from our questionnaire and in-depth interview largely support the statement, United Nations peacekeeping operations have negligible impact on reduction in gender-based violence in Liberia.

The United Nations peacekeeping operations did not largely reduce forced impregnation of women and girls, rape, and physical harm on women and girls during the Second Liberian Civil

war. This clearly shows that United Nations peacekeeping operations have negligible impact on reduction of gender-based violence in Liberia. This is because instead of working to drastically reduce the level of gender-based violence during the conflicts, some of the members of the United Nations peacekeeping operations participated in perpetuating gender-based violence, especially rape against women and girls during the conflict. The findings of this study agree with findings from Kamara (2021). Therefore, the United Nations peacekeeping operations have negligible impact on reduction in gender-based violence in Liberia.

Since the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, United Nations peacekeeping operations have sought to prevent as well as mitigate sexual and gender-based violence, but with little success. This makes sexual and gender-based violence to remain a huge challenge in the Liberian Second Civil war given frequent reports of sexual abuse and exploitation that emanated from the conflict (Karlsrud, 2015). Report showed that Liberian conflict led to the death of at least ten of thousands of people. Report further showed that 1 out of every 4 Liberians were displaced by the conflict (Shilue & Patricia, 2014). The conflict led to the contraction of the Liberian economy by 90%, while at the same time reducing the life expectancy to below 50 years, increased illiteracy and unemployment rates. Despite about 12 years of UNMIL-enforced peace, 84% of Liberians continue to live on less than \$1.25 per day, a situation that further exposed the women and girls to sexual exploitation (Bellamy & Paul, 2011). Findings by Swiss et al (1998) showed that 49 % of victims of sexual violence in Liberia reported represented physical or sexual violence by a soldier or fighter; 17% were beaten up, tied up or detained in a room under guard; while 32% of them were striped and 15% were raped contrary to UNMIL mandate to protect human rights of the people.

A cursory examination of the activities of UNMIL activities in peacekeeping operations showed that substantial mismatch between response options and the rule of engagement usually leaves the troops in a dilemma, resulting in inaction in combating incidences of rape, forced impregnation, forced marriage and even murder of girls and women which has resulted in over 50,000 deaths and displacement of many more in the country. The foregoing challenge is worsened by the fact that the UNMIL peacekeeping mandates in Liberia were either unclear, ambiguous or lacked the power of dealing decisively with the gender-based infractions. This makes the United Nations peacekeeping mandate in Liberia to be largely criticised as insufficient and devoid of adequate provisions for the protection of civilians, especially women

and girls from gender-based violence as such responsibilities are abdicated to the host country to offer for the population (Akwara, 2021).

7. CONCLUSION

This study has been an attempt to assess the United Nations peacekeeping operations in Liberia with particular reference to determining its possible nexus with the level of gender-based violence in the country. The major finding of the study is that UN peacekeeping operations have negligible impact on reduction of gender-based violence in Liberia. Therefore, it is concluded that unless the United Nations peacekeeping operations are strengthened to overcome the foregoing challenges that confront it in ensuring adequate protection of human rights of individuals during civil wars, gender-based violence would continue to worsen during wars.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Given the adverse impact of the United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia, the United Nations should urgently prioritise intervention in conflicts around the world, especially in Africa with a view to ensuring that cases of rape and forced impregnation witnessed during the Liberian Second Civil War are adequately checked; and
- ii. In order to mitigate the likely adverse impact of the United Nations peacekeeping operations on gender-based violence in Liberia, the United Nations should increase the quality and number of troops contributed to UN peacekeeping operations. This would require increased transborder cooperation as well as collaboration in checking gender-based violence during peacekeeping operations.

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