Feminizing the peace process in Africa: A comparative analysis of women, conflict and peace-building in KwaZulu-Natal and the Niger-Delta[1]

By

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Abstract

As everywhere else in the world, women in Africa, in spite of their majority stake in the population of most countries, assume a minority status as they are socially, economically and politically excluded from the formal sectors of the public space. They remain 'traditionally' confined to the private domain of motherhood. The masculinisation of the public space is, for instance, reflected in the marginalization of women in the post-conflict reconstruction and governance processes of their communities despite the positions they often assume during and after conflict, not only as the most vulnerable victims of conflict, but also as traditional agents of peace. Indeed, it is in recognition of the reality of women's victimhood in conflict and the potentiality of their agency as peacemakers, that the United Nations Security Council, in 2000, passed the landmark Resolution 1325, which mandates all member-states of the United Nations to ensure a critical mass representation of women in all aspects of their national life, both in pre and post-conflict situations.

However, beyond this clarion call for more women's inclusivity in formal decision-making processes, do women really make a qualitative difference? And in the light of the critical mass vs. critical act debate, what formal and informal factors inhibit their political participation, effective political representation and, *ipso facto*, their contributions to sustainable peace and progress in the continent?

This paper hopes to relate to these questions by focussing on the lived experiences of 295 rural and urban women in the face of political and "taxi rank" violence in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and on-going armed and social conflict in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. X-raying into the emerging character and patterns of women's engagement with violence and conflict situations in these areas, it will argue that African women remain critical to peace-building efforts in the continent, not just because of their numbers, but because of the value they can, and in some cases, do bring to the table.

The paper will also utilize John Lederach's Moral Imagination as a theoretical model for feminizing the peace process in Africa, as it's relational attributes which, according to him, are central to peace-building, and are part of the African feminist ethic of peace that were truncated by western imperialism and it's attendant adversarial culture. Consequently, we will argue for the reinvention of African feminism within an African cultural prism; one where our women will proudly see their femininity as the basis of their political participation, and use it as an instrument of the much needed transformative politics for progress in Africa.

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[1] This is only a draft and work-in-progress which should not be quoted as yet.

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Introduction

Globally, women, who constitute the majority in the population of most countries, assume a minority status as they are socially, economically and politically excluded from the public space. They remain 'traditionally' confined to the private space defined by motherhood. Africa is not left out of the ensuing masculinisation of society where, despite the roles women assume during and after conflict, they are conveniently marginalized in post-conflict reconstruction. Also, women are victims not only of armed conflict but also of its assorted social forms. In worst cases, they have been considered the spoils of war and as a means of degrading the enemy (Marshall, 2004: 1; McFadden, 1994). Indeed, as Rehn and Sirleaf (2001: 21) assert, 'women and children are the main victims of warfare, and they account for an estimated 80% of refugees and displaced persons worldwide'. In the same vein, in social conflict arising from the state's inability to secure its peoples from poverty and such other human security concerns, many women find themselves having to strive to feed and cater for their families when the male breadwinners are unwilling or unable to provide.

In Africa, this trend is particularly worse because it is the continent most ravaged in the last decades of the 20th century by the scourge of war and its effects as well as by poverty occasioned by state weakness, which in itself is a potential source of conflict. Women (who make up over 50% of the African population) constitute a bereft group even among the poor in that they earn lower wages than men; have lower literacy rates and limited access to social services. They encounter more difficulties in obtaining employment and, as such, become a minority group when in reality they are the majority in Africa. For instance, millions of poor women throughout the continent are prevented by traditional custom and law from owning land, however hard they work on it to grow food for their families (Terry, 2007:10). Indeed, the predicament of poor women is a worrying factor since the health and education of mothers have a direct influence on the welfare and future of their children. Clearly, this has huge medium and long-term implications for societal harmony, peace, and development if one considers that these children will form the bulk of tomorrow's society.

The marginalization of African women at the economic level obviously carries over to the political superstructure level where their participation is restricted, and sometimes non-existent. Since the post-colonial era, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997: 232) argues, "except for a few women who manage to come forward in national struggles and a few flamboyant

individuals, participation by women is still the exception". She contends further that "women's participation in politics often seems marginal and a very dependent extension of men's, making it doubtful if African independence has necessarily brought improvement in status for most African women" (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997: 233). The masculinisation of the public space is, for instance, reflected in the marginalization of women in the post-conflict reconstruction and governance processes of their communities despite the positions they often assume during and after conflict, not only as the most vulnerable victims of conflict, but also as traditional agents of peace. And it is in recognition of the reality of women's victimhood in conflict and the potentiality of their agency as peacemakers, that the United Nations Security Council, in 2000, passed the landmark Resolution 1325, which mandates all member-states of the United Nations to ensure a critical mass representation of women in all aspects of their national life, both in pre and post-conflict situations.

This study examines how Nigeria and South Africa (arguably Africa's biggest giants and are both signatory to resolution 1325) fare in terms of feminizing politics and the peace process by interrogating the nature and quality of women's representation in politics. Specifically, in response to the broad question of whether women really make a qualitative difference or not, this study attempts to answer questions around whether more women in politics will enhance peace-building in Africa? And in the light of the *critical mass* vs. *critical act* debate, what formal and informal factors inhibit their political participation, effective political representation and, *ipso facto*, their contributions to sustainable peace and progress in the continent?

The study engages with these questions by focussing on the lived experiences of over rural and urban based women in the face of political and "taxi rank" violence in KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa, and on-going armed and social conflict in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. It uses the questionnaire and interview instruments to survey a total of 295 women in both regions, and analyses the data generated through the SPSS and regression analysis

The case of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa's most populous and most politically volatile province, is particularly instructive because despite a much vaunted 26.2% women representation in the provincial parliament, the province is not any more peaceful than it was 15 years ago and poverty remains feminized, with women disproportionately affected by gender-based violence and the scourge of HIV and AIDS (See Ndimande, 2001; Ndinda, 2004; Lerclerc-Madlala, 2001). Rural women, who constitute the majority of poor women in the province, feel that they are marginalized economically and politically as they are neither aware of the rights and privileges that the gender mainstreaming efforts of the government

bestows on them nor do they know who their female representatives are, not mention that they do not understand how government works in the province[3].

As in KwaZulu-Natal, women and men in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria have different and disproportionate experiences of the chronic social, economic and fundamental human rights abuses which plague the region as a result of oil exploitation activities and its attendant despoliation of the environment. Studies on the gendered nature of the Niger-Delta crisis, such as that of Gabriel (1998), Korimapo-Agary and Agary (2005) as well as Ikelegbe and Ikelegbe (2006), show that women continue to be at the receiving end of the paradox of "abject poverty in the face of enormous oil mineral endowment", which has been used variously to describe the crisis of underdevelopment in the region (Okonta and Douglas, 2003; Simpson, 2008). Ironically, despite the gendered nature of the social anomie in the Niger-Delta, women, who constitute approximately half of its population, and in spite of the informal contributions they often make towards peace and reconstruction, are conveniently excluded from the public decision-making processes of their communities and the region as a whole.

Theoretical considerations for feminizing the peace process in Africa
Gender inequality hampers development therefore striving to emplace gender equality should be at the heart of the development process and this means recognizing women as subjects, not objects of the development process, recognizing their value as human beings, and their right to participate in public life, and enabling them to do so. However, as the *critical mass vs. the critical acts* debate and other studies have shown[4], putting more women in politics does not automatically translate to meeting the yearnings, aspirations and development needs of the teeming number of women, especially those in rural Africa, who remain poor, illiterate, excluded, oppressed and constantly abused. Why then do we need to feminize the peace process by involving more women in the political processes of conflict or post-conflict societies in Africa? Are there valid theoretical considerations for feminizing politics and ipso facto, peace-building?

The human security paradigm, women and peace-building
Traditionally, the notion of security is rooted in political realism which sees security from a state-centred perspective that restricts the application of security to threats in the military realm. Traditionalist security scholars equate security with peace and the prevention of

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[3] These views are reflected in the data generated from the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process in KZN. I was part of the team that analyzed the data in April, 2006.
[4] See Grey, 2001; Childs, 2004; Crowley, 2004; Krook, 2005

conflict through military means like deterrence policies and non-offensive defense through public policy and law (Tarry, 1999:2). One of such scholars is Stephen Waltz who sees security as:

> the study of the threat, use and control of military force. It explores likely conditions that make the use of force more likely, the ways that the use of force affects individuals, states and societies, and the specific policies that states adopt in order to prepare for, prevent or engage in war (Waltz, 1999: 212)

In the same realist vein, Buzan *et al* (1998) restricts the security discourse to state security as insecurity is tantamount to threats to the existence of a designated referent object, often times the state, incorporating government, territory and society. Although this conceptualization of security includes society as a referent object, its state-centeredness is clear as the threat to society here refers to external and not internal threats to the corporate existence of a state. Therefore, as Simpson argues, for traditional security scholars, once a state is able to preserve her territorial borders, her governing regimes and structures from attacks or any threat to its existence, as well as maintain its economic relations with the international community, that state or governing regime was perceived to be secured (Simpson, 2008).

Although much of these definitions position the state as the major actor within the international system, the post World War II global system – especially after the Cold War -- altered and widened significantly the nature of security. With its new and relatively unmatched emphasis on the sovereign authority of states (and peoples) as well as its collective security claims through the authority of the United Nations Security Council – and, as some would argue, the net unintended benefits of a nuclearized bipolar system -- the world experienced an unprecedented era of state emergence, security and stability. Not surprisingly, for many states -- particularly those in the developing parts of the world -- this changed and more benign international security environment meant a concern not for external threats but rather for internally-based (albeit, perhaps, externally-supported) security issues. Given this context, it seems that realist notions have changed over the years – it expanded and shifted substantially away from ideas about state quest for surviving inter-state wars to intra-state conflicts and wars that were stoked not only by the imperatives of the global East-West ideological battles but also the challenges associated with nation-building in environments that were often marked by severe resource starvation and competing interests. This has been the experience in Nigeria, for example, where government dysfunctionality and ineffectiveness have had the net effect of exacerbating centrifugal tendencies and intra-state conflict arising there from (CASS, 2005). In these states, people have been killed in large numbers more from non-traditional threats such as poverty, disease, environmental hazards,

unemployment and crime, than from guns and nuclear weapons in interstate wars (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). This gave rise to a rethinking and broadening of the security concept beyond its traditional preoccupation with the state to encompass people as referent subjects, thus giving birth to the concept of human security.

Human security conceptualization accommodates a wider range of issues that not only constitute threats to human existence, but also breed insecurity and societal anarchy. It views security from the perspective of human well-being and includes broad issues of human concern - security from poverty, disease, famine, illiteracy, environmental despoliation, and unemployment, which singly or jointly contribute to the impairments of human existence[5]. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994), threats to human security occur in at least seven distinct areas of human existence namely; the community, economic, environmental, food, health, personal and political (UNDP, HDR, 1994). Kaul, in equating human security with the security of people, and not just security of nations, underscores the primacy of human security in contemporary times thus: "what is needed today is not so much territorial security – the security of the state – but human security, the security of the people in their everyday lives, one that that is reflected in the lives of our people, not in the weapons of our country" (Kaul, 1995: 313-319). Viewed this way, human security can be summarized as "freedom from want and freedom from fear" (Annan, 2005:2). According to Axworthy (1999), human security conduces to

> safety for people from both violent and non-violent threats.
> It is a condition of being characterized by freedom from
> pervasive threats to people's rights, their safety or even
> their lives…. It is an alternative way of seeing the world,
> taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing
> exclusively on the security of territory or government

Therefore, the human security paradigm tends to conceive security from the perspective of people who make up the state, making people the subject and focus of political and security as well as development analysis. In this way, the issues of concern will include security from poverty, famine, illiteracy, environmental despoliation, unemployment, disease and crime, which singly or jointly contribute to the impairments of human existence and lead to armed conflict. Accordingly, questions of security viewed from this perspective will include "who and what threatens people in their everyday lives?", "how are people vulnerable to these

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[5] For more on the human security paradigm, see the UNDP Human Development Report (HDR) 1994, New York: Oxford University Press, 22 – 23; K. Anan, "Secretary-General Salutes International Workshop on Human Security in Mongolia." Two-Day Session in Ulaanbaatar, May 8-10, 2000. Available in http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2000/20000508.sgsm7382.doc.html accessed 27/01/08

threats?", "what are the causes of their vulnerabilities?" and "how do these vulnerabilities lead to conflict?" Also, within such a people-oriented approach to politics and development, we can locate the gender question and interrogate which gender group is more vulnerable to human insecurities and why. In this light, feminist scholars such as Peterson (1992) have attempted to factor women into the human security discourse by contending that the narrow conceptualization of security in traditional militarist terms does more to decrease the security of women than to increase it. She argues that the pre-eminence of state sovereignty is a primary source of insecurity for women, because it reduces the construction of political community to masculine and patriarchal institutions and policies which are basically gender blind or oppressive of women (Peterson, 1992: 32). In essence, the concept of human security is woven around issues of human emancipation (Booth 1991:539), social justice (Peterson 1992) and human dignity and the environment, if they have political outcomes (Ayoob 1995).

In practical terms, vulnerabilities from non-traditional sources threaten human existence, global peace and security more than inter-state war and aggression. For example, according to Boutros-Ghali (1992), poverty, disease, famine and states oppression of their citizens join to produce 17 million refugees, 20 million displaced persons and massive migrations of people within and beyond national borders. Africa, with its weak state structures and failed economies occasioned largely by bad governance, remains vulnerable to human insecurities, such as environmental degradation, poverty, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy, which are rife on the continent. Economically, despite its enormous wealth in natural resources, African states are at the bottom of the list when it comes to measuring economic activity such as per capita income (often less than US$200 per year) or per capita gross domestic product (GDP) – both measured in the UN Quality of Life Index (Isike *et al*, 2008: 29). For instance, in 2006, 34 of the 50 nations on the UN's list of least developed countries were in Africa[6], underscoring the fact that it is disadvantaged in the globalization process and that its marginalized status is not in doubt. Socially, the continent has some of the worst records of insecurity as for instance, while 10 % of the world's population live in sub-Saharan Africa, an enormous 64% of all people living with HIV live in this region, including 77% of all women living with the virus (South Africa, 2007). According to Edge (2006: 6), AIDS related fatalities have also resulted in a rapidly growing number of so-called AIDS orphans; more than 12 million in Africa have been orphaned as a result of AIDS and expectedly, female children constitute the majority of this number.

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[6] Africa's share of income decreased steadily over the past century. In 1820, the average worker in Europe earned about three times as much as his African counterpart. By 2002, the average European worker earned twenty times as much as the average African. And although per capita income in Africa has been increasing steadily, it is still below that of other parts of the developing world such as Latin America

The environment deserves a mention here because a good number of other human vulnerabilities are largely generated from environmental hazards associated with resource exploitation in the continent. For example, an estimated 500 million hectares of land in sub-Saharan Africa - including 65% of agricultural land - have been adversely affected by soil degradation since 1950 and the resultant decrease in food production constitutes the food security dilemma in parts of Africa, especially southern Africa, where food insecurity manifests in food scarcity, malnutrition and hunger (Swatuk and Vale, 1999; Saundry, 2007). Also, drought and desertification, both serious environmental challenges that threaten sustainable development in Africa, have far reaching negative impact on human health, economic activity, food security, physical infrastructure, natural resources and the environment (Isike *et al*, 2008: 27). From the economic and social to the environment, women and men experience insecurities differently as women have a disproportionate share of the effects of these human security vulnerabilities compared to men including the armed conflict that spew from them.

The analytical distinction between traditionalist and the non-traditionalists notions of security is not meant to suggest that consensus among the latter has been reached either. Indeed, there is disagreement between two sub-groups – the so-called 'wideners' and 'deepeners' (Tarry, 1999:1). The wideners, like Mohammed Ayoob, argue that a predominantly military definition does not deny that there are other threats to state survival such as environmental, social and economic, but that these must be sufficiently politicized enough to enter the national and international (humanitarianism) security agenda. The deepeners on the other hand were concerned about 'those whose security is threatened' and thus, support the construction of a definition that allows for individuals or people, for instance women, to be the referent subjects of security beyond the abstract entity called 'state'. According to Anderlini (2007), the human security paradigm resonates strongly on two counts for women. First, the security issues that are raised under that paradigm (poverty, illiteracy, environmental despoliation, unemployment, disease, crime, gender-based violence) are ones to which women relate and no amount of statist security strategies in form of military might can resolve the problems of poverty, HIV and AIDS, malaria, or rape. She contends that while the state must lead the efforts to address these problems, it cannot do so without the input and participation of its own population, majority of who are usually women (Anderlini, 2007; 195-196). Also, in terms of satisfying methodological utility, which is the widener's (Ayoob) main concern, these issues and the women question have become sufficiently politicized enough to enter the security calculus as most states now problematize and make a conscious effort to include women in their public governance structures.

Second, because it focuses on people and their life circumstances, the human security paradigm also opens space for a more inclusive discourse where women can participate directly and effectuate their human rights to life, work, good health, involvement in decision-making and remedy through political participation. Impliedly therefore, human security and human rights are two sides of the development coin as a human security approach to development is rooted in human rights while both reinforce each other. For instance, for poor women, just realizing that they have certain rights can be very empowering, and when they demand these rights from a government that is people-focussed and get a policy response, there is a move towards development. This is the catch in utilizing human security as a theoretical basis for first feminizing political processes and *ipso facto*, feminizing the peace processes in Africa.

The Moral Imagination model of peace-building

According to John Lederach, the moral imagination is "the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist; the potential to find a way to transcend, and to move beyond what exists while still living in it" (Lederach, 2005: 27-29). In reference to peace-building, Lederach contends that it is the capacity to imagine and generate constructive responses and initiatives that, while rooted in the day-to-day challenges of violence, transcends and ultimately breaks the grips of those destructive patterns and cycles within which conflict is perpetuated (Lederach, 2005: 29). Viewed this way, the moral imagination has two qualities; transcendence and creativity, as it implies a break from orthodox wisdom and convention that governs social, political and economic relations between people, communities and states, to discovering new grounds and ways of doing things which is rooted in the human capacity to rise above the ordinary. Therefore, it is the capacity to perceive things beyond and at a deeper level than what initially meets the ordinary eye, leading to a critical turning point that will make the difference between violent protracted conflict and sustainable peace (Lederach, 2005: 19 – 27).

According to Lederach, there are four elements or disciplines that when held together and practiced, form the moral imagination that make peace-building possible and each of which requires imagination. These are relationship, paradoxical curiosity, creativity and risk. Combined, the presence or practice of these elements make the moral imagination and peace-building possible as shown in Lederach's case studies where the peace processes were defined by the capacity of actors to imagine themselves in a relationship, a willingness to embrace complexity and not frame their challenge as a dualistic polarity, acts of enormous creativity

and a willingness to risk all of which led to complex initiatives of peace-building defined by moments that created and then sustained constructive change (Lederach, 2005: 40). However, in the light of its significance to this paper, we shall dwell on the element of relationships and its nexus to feminizing the peace process. According to Lederach, relationships remain central to peace-building because it is both the context in which cycles of violence happen and the generative energy from which transcendence of those same cycles burst forth. He argues that the centrality of relationships provides the context and potential for breaking violence, "for it brings people into the pregnant moments of the moral imagination: the space of recognition that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of life of others" (Lederach, 2005:35). This resonates well with the African social ideology communalism or *ubuntu* which is rooted in the web of human relationship within which people reinforce one another. The meaning and practice of *ubuntu* in Southern Africa can be inferred from a Zulu maxim: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,* which literarily translates to "a person is a person because of other people." This underscores the collectivism and agency of people as the means and end of development. *Ubuntu* captures the human essence of the African personality (male or female) and traditional society built around family-hood. In conceptualizing *ubuntu*, Desmond Tutu (1999: 35) observes that:

> a person with *ubuntu* is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are

Clearly then, relationships are central to the notion of the moral imagination as relationships in an ever-evolving web of social interactions where every member is a part of the web and plays his/her role based on a moral understanding of their personal responsibility and acknowledging relational mutuality. This is why Lederach concludes that peace-building requires a vision of relationship as if there is no capacity to imagine the canvass of mutual relationships and situate oneself as part of that historic and ever-evolving web, peace-building collapse.

Lederach's model of the utility of the moral imagination for peace-building within a of web human relationships relates to this study in two significant ways. First, it means that women and men exist in a social reality where they are meant to complement each other. Second, men, because they remain critical to success of gender equality efforts, have the challenge of transcending the orthodox wisdom and convention of patriarchy that governs gender relations in post-colonial Africa, to create new forms of relationships that are conducive to peaceful co-existence and holistic development. Elements of the moral imagination governed gender

relations in pre-colonial African societies where women were very active and powerful actors in the socio-political and economic lives of their communities.

Women, politics and peace-building in pre-colonial African societies

African women have a long history of consciousness and public participation that pre-date colonialism and nationalism (resistance) politics in the continent. Contrary to Eurocentric and materialist history on African women (see van Allen, 1976; Wright, 1981), the authority and power of women in most pre-colonial societies was particularly evident in both the socio-economic and political spheres. Unfortunately, these have been largely neglected and obscured by analysis which emphasized domesticity and the unwaged role of women as primary producers and as subordinates to men in agriculture-based economies (Guy, 1987, Walker, 1990). According to Nkiru Nzeogwu:

> To read the formal history of states, kings and chiefs in West Africa as well as the treatises of political scientists, one would think that women did not participate in governance, existed only in shadowy spheres, and meekly accepted whatever their male lords and masters directed. These official treatises do not make it clear that a large part of women's present political and judicial powerlessness is not rooted in the culture, but in the encroaching "modern" male-privileging policies and programs unleashed since colonization.
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> The appearance and actions of women such as *Edwesohemaa* Yaa Asantewaa the Ibibio, and the Igbo women are almost always exceptionalized and treated as rare. Circumscribing the prevalence of women so that they sporadically appear in history erases the relevant histories and epistemic meanings required to understand their actions (Nzegwu, 2000, available at http://www.westafricareview.com/vol2.1/nzegwu2)

Over-emphasizing, and in the process essentializing the roles women played as primary producers/reproducers in pre-colonial African history tends to suggest that real power must lie in the control of both agriculture and women as primary producers and reproducers of labour as Wright (1981) argues. However, in most of pre-colonial Africa, there are evidences of women playing active and prominent roles in public decision-making and maintaining social peace by regulating and preventing conflict (Sadiki, 2001).   In these times, due to the flexibility of the gender system of most traditional cultures and languages, women assumed positions and roles that have today become the exclusive preserve of men and as such exercised considerable power and authority in society (see Amadiume, 1987).

Politically, pre-colonial African patriarchies provided spaces for women to participate in the public arena contrary to formal and circumscribed history invented by the West which perpetuate the view that before colonialism African women did not participate in governance, and existed only in shadowy spheres and meekly accepted whatever their male lords and masters directed (Nzeogwu, 2000). No doubt, as Coquery-Vidrovich (1994: 34) notes: "men certainly asserted their political supremacy, but women always retained opportunities for power." For example, in very patrilineal societies such as the Sherbro and Mende in Sierra Leone (West Africa), Ganda in Uganda (East Africa) and the Zulu Kingdom in South Africa (Southern Africa), there is evidence of women playing active roles and having a fair share in politics. Also, in matrilineal pre-colonial societies such as in the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Zimbabwe, Baule, Asante and Bemba women respectively held sway politically. For example, the Ashantes had a female joint ruler with the King (Ashantehene), and was indeed very powerful such that she participated in royal ancestral rituals, was involved in the selection, presentation and enthronement of a new king, and in his absence, takes his place in war. This perhaps was a formal reflection of women power in a matrilineal society ruled by a patriarchal aristocracy where mother progeny relationships determined land rights, inheritance of property, offices and titles.

In diverse states such as Nigeria where there were variants of centralized and decentralized pre-colonial political systems, Igbo women groups such as the *Umuada* constituted a social base of political power and also served as checks on the abuse of power by the Council of Elders. This is not to mention, as Coquery-Vidrovich (1994: 36) put it: "Igbo women ruled among themselves by an assembly or *Ikporo-ani*[7] of related women, widowed, married, or not". According to her, "these women heard spousal disputes, adultery cases, and quarrels between groups and villages among, and the existence of this body meant women could also impose rules on their village political authorities" (Coquery-Vidrovich, 1994: 37). Okonjo (1976) described the Igbo political system as a dual sex system in which political interest groups were defined and represented by sex such that every adult participated. As aforementioned, this is modified by Amadiume's (1987) incisive analysis of the politics of gender in Igbo societies using her society, Nnobi, as case study, which showed that indigenous Igbo society was not based on strict sexual dualism. Contending rather, that sexual dualism and the parallel gender relations they spewed was mediated by flexible gender construction of language and culture (Amadiume, 1987). Therefore, sex and gender did not

[7] The *Ikporo-ani* like the *Umu-ada,* was a mother association of women groups prevalent amongst most Igbo societies and was headed by an *Omu* or queen, who according to Coquery-Vidrovich (1994: 38) was "the female equivalent of male power in the community, known for her wealth, intelligence, and character". Till date, the Ikporo-ani, though now more of a social group of women exist in places like Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria.

necessarily coincide in these societies as women played roles usually monopolized by men and were then classified as males just to underscore women's power - facilitated by their economic independence and the existence of a strong goddess-focused religion (*Idemili*) which was the basis of women's political power at the extra-descent level of political organization in Nnobi (Amadiume, 1987: 52-99). When you add the array of other African Queen mothers, female regents and warlords like Queen Aisha of the Kanem-Borno Empire (Northern Nigeria), Empress Menetewab (Ethiopia), Queen Nzinga of Angola, Queen Idah of Benin (southern Nigeria) (Coquery-Vidrovich, 1994: 37-40), the picture of female power in pre-colonial African societies becomes clearer[8].

In essence, pre-colonial African women held complementary, rather than subordinate, positions to men in their societies and played far more important roles in the economies of their societies, where many were involved in farming, trade, and craft production, than previously conceived in Europe or America (Terborg & Rushing, 1996). Although men appropriated political power and were dominant in most of these societies, social power, which was the base of political power, was generally based on seniority (age) rather than gender. The absence of gender and sexism in the pronouns of many African languages[9] and the interchange-ability of first names among females and males strikes Sudarkasa (1987) as a further relation of the social de-emphasis on gender as a designation for behaviour. For instance, amongst the Igbo of Nigeria, you would typically hear a woman being addressed as "Ngozi, daughter of Okonkwo and the wife of Okoli" instead of "Mrs Okoli" which effectively denies Ngozi of her personage and that of her parents. Indeed, "many other areas of traditional culture, including personal dress and adornment, religious ceremonials, and intra-gender patterns of comportment, suggest that Africans often de-emphasize gender in relation to seniority and other insignia of status" (Sudarkasa, 1987:36). Indeed, across different parts of pre-colonial Africa, the dominant cultural worldview that defined social, economic and political existence was underpinned by a communal ideology that was rooted in *ubuntu*.

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[8] Clearly, men's physical strength gave them huge advantages over women in ancient warfare strategies, which required physical combat. This was the case in nearly all societies in Africa as elsewhere around the world. Nevertheless, there were many cases of outstanding female military leadership and activities. Even in societies like Rwanda, which did not have a tradition of grooming women for combat, there is the historical figure of *Ndabaga,* a young woman whose warrior father had no son to replace him so that he could retire (as per tradition) from combat in his old age. Since she had no brothers, *Ndabaga* disguised herself as a man and went to war where she fought bravely and with such skill that she came to symbolize extraordinary courage and women's leadership See RDRC, (2004) *Demobilization and reintegration of military personnel, progress report*, November 2004.

[9] For example, amongst the Igbos of eastern Nigeria, no distinction is made between male and female in subject pronouns. According to Amadiume (1987: 89), the third person singular, *O*, stands for both male and female unlike the English gender construction, which distinguishes male and female as 'he' and 'she'.

Clearly, this was not a worldview that ill-treated, neglected or humiliated women since an injury to one was an injury to all. Men did not need to feel threatened by women as each complemented the other in ways that allowed them to function cohesively as a social unit. Rather, men and women co-existed in these societies, not as equals though, but as complementary subjects living in a mutual world of responsibility sharing, where differences were appreciated and celebrated. Masculinities were understood in ways that regarded and respected women, where it was a virtue to protect women, not just in ways that perhaps suggested that they were weaker beings needing men's protection, but out of consideration that women were equally deserving of deference and honour with natural abilities and powers to produce economically and reproduce existentially.

Concisely, colonialism disrupted the traditional systems of production in pre-colonial societies and, in so doing, reinforced existing systems of social inequality by introducing oppressive forms of social stratification through the instrumentation of the colonial state. The resultant loss of power for women have been exploited by men, who in an attempt to maintain the new privileges, often assume hegemonic and or dangerous masculinities that are usually justified by a misconception or misrepresentation of African culture.

Practical considerations for feminizing the peace process in Africa
The practical considerations for arguing for a feminization of peace-building in Africa is located in the preliminary findings from the case studies which underscores the reality of women's vulnerability to the after-effects of armed conflict, the failure of male-dominated politics and the fact that women bring a different approach to politics that has positive implications for peace-building.

Vulnerability to the after-effects of armed conflict
In terms of armed conflict, this study confirms the reality of women's disproportionate vulnerability, compared to men. Indeed, an analysis of the gendered dimensions of conflicts in Odi, Uzere and Igbokoda show that women and men in the Niger-Delta are affected differently by conflict and they respond differently as well. While both women and men use and manage natural resources, their different gender-defined roles, responsibilities, opportunities and constraints within and outside households, ensure that women are more vulnerable, than men, to conflict in the Niger-Delta. These also determine how women affect and are affected by conflict. Concisely, conflict in the Niger-Delta tends to impact on women

more than men in that women continue to bear the after-effects of conflict. And irrespective of whether they were involved or not in the processes that led to conflict in the first place, they become victims of the conflict as they are left to bear the after-effects. Some of these include domestic abuse, rape and its health as well as lingering psychological effects, prostitution and the burdens of the new roles they assume as breadwinners of their families due to the loss of their husbands and sons.

Out of the total of 110 women surveyed, 78 were living in the selected study areas (Odi, Uzere and Igbokoda) when conflict started in their communities. Of the 78, a significant number 68 (87%) reported that they were affected by conflict as they experienced one form of loss or the other ranging from loss of husbands, sons, relatives and friends, livelihoods and property, to psychological trauma arising from rape by soldiers, physical abuse and torture by youth groups and armed men respectively.

Figure 1: Effect of conflict on women
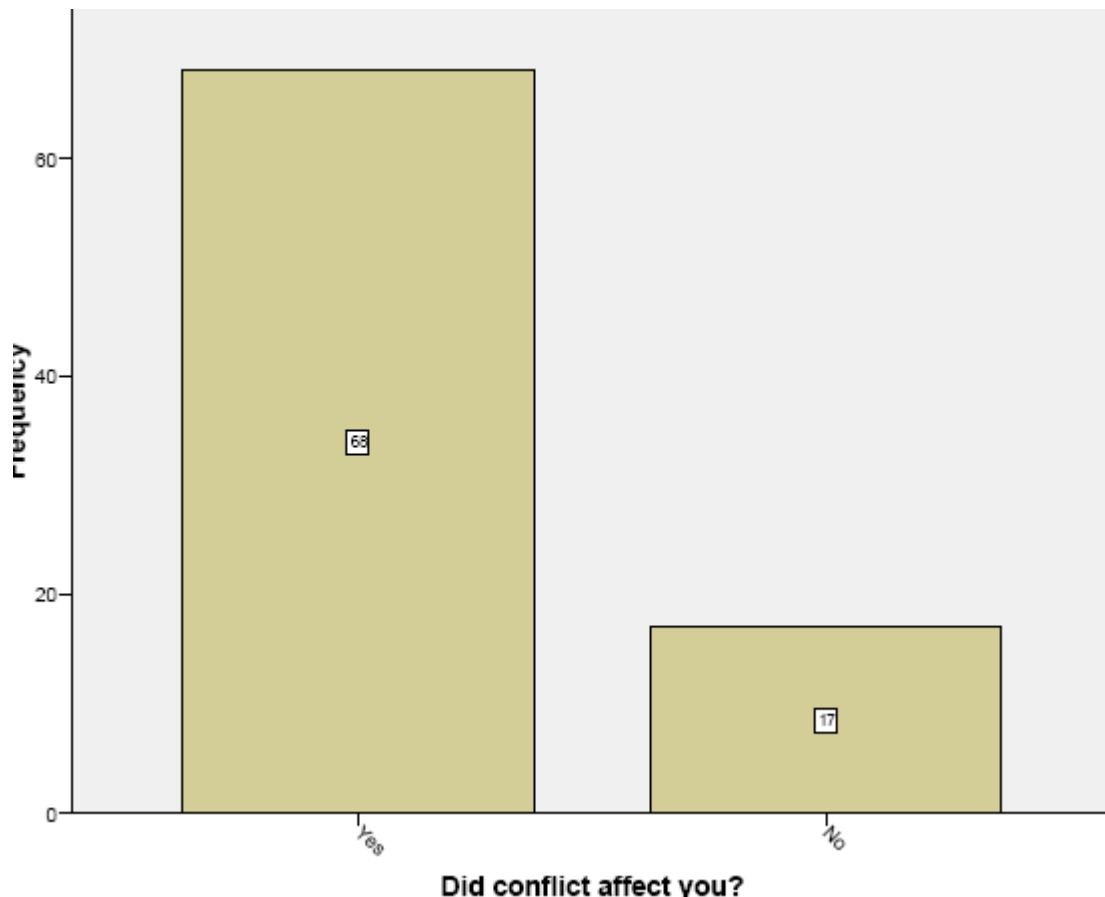
Of the 85 who responded to the question on the whether the conflict affected them or not, only 17 (20%) said they were not affected by the conflict in their communities. Due to personal reasons, the remaining 25 (22%) of the total of 110 women surveyed, choose to

abstain from answering the question on the impact of conflict on them. What emerged from further attempts to get their responses was that they experienced deep psychological injuries they were yet to recover from and as such could still not speak about them years after the particular conflict. For some in this category, like in Uzere, they still live in fear because the conflict is far from over[10]. In other words, women are significantly affected by conflict as they suffer both its short and long-term impact irrespective of whether they are directly involved in the cause(s) of the conflict or whether they ran away from the conflict spots at the time. According to Chief Isreal Akhorta[11], "conflict affects women more than men even though the men generate and fuel conflicts in the first place" (Interview with Chief Akhorta, 5 June 2007). According to him, even though the whole family suffers losses incurred from conflict, women ultimately bear the burden more as men have a way of simply removing themselves from the problem by either abandoning their homes during the day, subsuming themselves in alcoholism or engaging in extra-marital activities that only serve to worsen the family situation (Akhorta Interview, 2007). Find below a presentation of data on the range of losses suffered by women as a result of conflict in the study areas

Figure 2: Volume of loss due to conflict

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[10] For example, on 4 June 2007, just a day before this survey commenced in Uzere, youths from neighboring Emede (long time feuding rival of Uzere over land and oil resource) attacked Uzere putting the entire community in fear. This kind of inter-community fighting is one dimension of the Niger-Delta conflict.

[11] Chief Isreal Akhorta is the Chairman of Uzere Development Union, a widely accepted and supported community governance apparatus that complements traditional and local government authorities in terms of town administration, development planning and implementation. This kind of community based organisation is replicated across the 17 Isoko clans and they are all affiliated and subordinated to an umbrella body called the Isoko Development Union (IDU). IDU is an ethnic movement that aggregates and articulates the development concerns and needs of the Isoko nation within the Nigerian Federation.

Biggest loss due to conflict
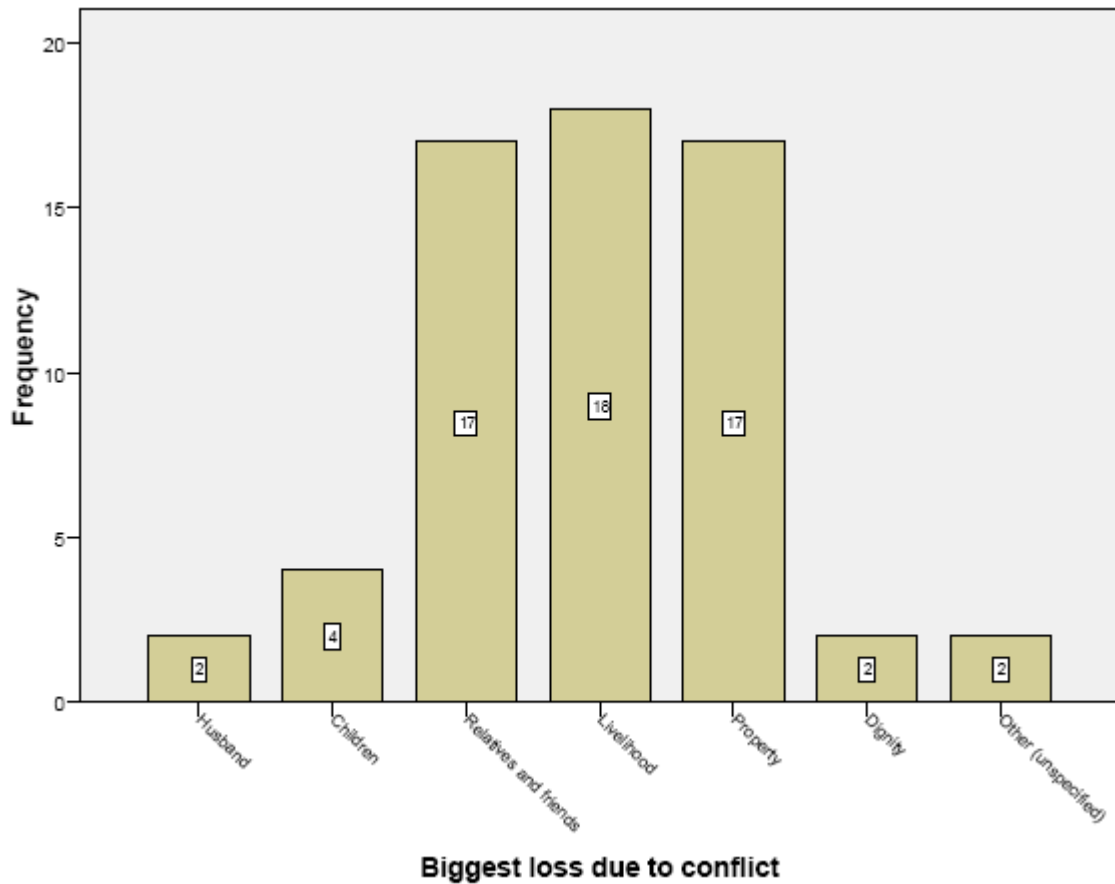
As the figure above shows, 62 (79.5%) of the 78 women who responded to the question of whether conflict affected them indicated what they thought was their biggest loss was. The remaining 16 (20.5%) also had losses but could not quite specify which loss was biggest compared to the others. As aforementioned, women suffer varying losses as a result of the various dimensions of conflict in the Niger-Delta. For instance, they bear the brunt of poverty thrust on them by the loss of a breadwinner; husband, lover or son and the sudden loss of their own livelihoods due to armed conflict. According to women in Odi, this was a common problem in the years following the violent sacking of the community by soldiers in November 1999. Women disproportionately bore the brunt of the economic dislocation that followed as more women became household heads overnight. In instances where their husbands and fathers survived the violence, they (men) increasingly took out their frustrations at not been able to provide for their families on the women in the form of domestic violence (FGD with Odi women, 3 May 2007).

Concisely, armed conflict in Odi, Uzere and Igbokoda, violates women's human rights to dignity and personal security, health security and food security. Indeed, all across the region, women have been victims of violence perpetuated by the state, MNOCs and ethnic militias as well as armed gangs which bestrides the region like a colossus. In all of this violence, women have been beaten, raped, maimed and killed. For example, it was reported that over 238 Ijaw

women had been raped in four major military crackdowns on Ijaw resistance in Kaiama, Yenogoa, Warri amd Odi (CASS, 2005:53). However, beyond their victim-hood to human insecurities and human rights violations in the Niger-Delta, do women bring a different approach and value to politics, peace-building and development that justify arguments for feminizing the political process?

The failure of male-dominated politics

According to Okonta (2000) "at the core of the crisis in the Niger-Delta is the failure of politics to allocate authority, legitimise it, and use it to achieve the social and economic ends that conduce to communal wellbeing". This is further buttressed by CASS (2005), which explained conflict in the region as been the result of "the failure of existing structures and processes to resolve fundamental issues of allocative and distributive inequities (cultural, economic, political and social) and therefore, of justice and good governance in the area" (CASS, 2005:8). More specifically, it traced local women's protests and activism in the Niger-Delta to "the failure of traditional governance system and communal/ethnic elites to obtain benefits and distribute same to community members. Rather, they have become corrupt and compromised by the MNCs" (CASS, 2005:65). This failure of politics, which weakens the state in terms of realizing its essence, is also reflected in the proliferation of social movements, ethnic and youth militias, cults and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all competing, sometimes violently, against the state on the one hand, and between themselves on the other. In many ways, both the existence and the activities of some of these groups, which serve to provide alternative sites for political engagement[12], implicate the Nigerian state as a weak or shadow state[13]. Examples of these groups include the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationalities in the Niger-Delta (MOSIEND), Movement for the Survival of Itsekiri Nationality (MOSIEN) Isoko Front, the Urhobo Economic Foundation (UEF) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). Other categories include ethnic militias like the *Egbesu Boys,* Niger-Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND). The proliferation of these groups is as much about the diversity of interests that they need to

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[12] Some of them provide alternative social services to their constituencies where the government has failed or is too inept – thus making rallying points for ethnic nationalism. Also, see *Tell December 2005* interview with Chevron's Environmental & Regulations Compliance Manager, who said MNOCs serve as substitute government.

[13] On the weak/shadow state, see Clapham (1996) that "up to a point, an effective and functioning state might provide a useful mechanism through which rulers could help to assure their long-term survival by meeting the needs of their people and building up a sense of their legitimacy. Once the state ceased to be able to perform such functions, much of it became an encumbrance" (1996:251-252). Also, according to Tell, April 2003 Special edition, the failure of government in Nigeria gave rise to an era of corporate rule by oil companies which saw the people relying on these companies for basic infrastructure and services

secure as it reflects the general failure of the Nigerian state to provide basic services and to earn the confidence and support of the people of the region.

In addition, the state's inability to maintain law and order and to entrench the rule of law serve not only to deflate the people's confidence in government but also to force them to resort to securing themselves from the encumbrance the state has become to them by transferring their support to these groups and therefore legitimizing them. The ensuing anarchy has become not only a part of the objective conditions of the Niger-Delta region, but also a key distinguishing feature with political intrigues, kidnappings, extortions, vandalism, protests, intra-communal violence, and other forms of violent acts against both the state and MNCs now forming an integral part of daily existence in the region. And as aforementioned, women share a disproportionate burden of the effects of this failed politics, which ironically, is being perpetuated by their men folks[14]. At the root of this failed politics is the scourge of political corruption. The male leaders who have dominated leadership at various levels of society have become corrupted as leadership positions at all levels are now perceived as "opportunities to make it in life" or "have a share of the national cake"[15]. The empathy and responsibility towards community and people development which are hall marks of accountable leadership have been eroded.

Clearly then, in the face of the feminization of poverty, environmental degradation armed conflict and the crisis of lawlessness, which are all products of political corruption, there is need for a new kind of approach to the conception and practice of politics. Indeed, politics in and towards the Niger-Delta needs to be transformed to become more inclusive and relevant to the development needs and aspirations of the people, who ideally, should be the means and end of politics, the state and development. As Okonta (2000) argues, the alternative to massive militarization in the Niger-Delta is a new political and economic framework, guaranteed by a new federal constitution, that would transfer power, and with it the control of economic resources, to local people in the region. According to him, this would entail the democratisation of politics in such a way that the ordinary people would become the object and subject of development, and thus would development be democratised (Okonta, 2000)

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[14] Formal politics and governance in Nigeria has been dominated by men since the inception of the Nigerian state. A gender analysis of national elections since the 'fourth wave' of democratization, between 1999 to the 2007, reveal that women constituted an insignificant average of 5% in the National Assembly. For example, they were 3.2% of the National Assembly in the 1999 elections, were 5.1% in the 2003 elections and now stand at 7.6% in following the 2007 elections. Across the country, there are 54 (5.4%) women out of the 990 people elected to state Houses of Assembly in 2007.

[15] This emerged from FGDs with women in Igbokoda, Odi and Uzere who all agreed that personal ambition and greed were the overriding motive behind seeking political positions in the region

In this regard, we contend that women and their political participation are the panacea to righting the litany of wrong politics and policies that are the root causes of crisis in the Niger-Delta. Feminizing political processes in the region has a transformative value, not only because of its potential for equity, fairness, justice and democratic decentralization, but also because women, by their very nature, approach politics and the use of power differently from men (FGD with women in Igbokoda, Odi and Uzere) thus underscoring the need for involving them. This study reveals that women bring different values into politics; values that tend to enhance the quality of their representation in politics and could be the missing link between politics, peace and development in the Niger-Delta.

Women are more empathetic to community needs

Our study shows that women see politics as an instrument of service for community development. Unlike the men and youths whose engagement with oil companies and with the federal government have tended to deviate from the development objective of the struggle, women's engagement have always shown unwavering focus and commitment to community development rather than personal aggrandizement. According to "because we are mothers, we tend to empathize with community needs our children's needs are the same as the community needs, so we understand better not to toy with those needs because ultimately, it will come back to affect us more" (Interview with Madam Amafadiei, 6 June, 2007). In all our 3 study areas, there were no cases or issues of women leaders who sold out on the people's struggle in order to satisfy personal interests or for self-enrichment purposes as was prevalent amongst elder men and youths who have variously been at the vanguard of the struggle. Indeed, as Ikelegbe & Ikelegbe (2006) put it, the demands of various Niger-Delta women protests relate mainly to issues of poverty arising from declining incomes underlined by oil-based despoliation of the environment and social disruptions They also focus on marginalization and neglect of corporate social responsibility by the MNOCs, and accordingly, tailor their demands to align with the development issues they raise.

Women are perceived to be less corrupt than men in politics

55% of the women in KwaZulu-Natal and 67% of those in the Niger-Delta perceive women politicians to be less corrupt than men. Perceptions do matter in politics and women politicians are perceived to be more trustworthy and less corruptible than their male counterparts. The universality of this perception was tested by a World Bank study by Dollar *et al* (1999) who found out that "at the country level, higher rates of female participation in government are associated with lower levels of corruption" (Dollar *et al*, 2001: 426). They went on to conclude, based on their findings in this regard, that

> ….there may be extremely important spin-offs stemming
> from increasing female representation: if women are less
> likely than men to behave opportunistically, then bringing
> more women into government may have significant
> benefits for society in general (Dollar *et al*, 2001:427).

In Africa, a 2007 World Bank study revealed that women politicians in Uganda were less corrupt than men. These perceptions were re-echoed by women in our study areas. When asked why they thought more women should be in politics, 73% of respondents answered "because women were less prone to corruption than men". They believed that women were in a better moral position to change the present mode of politics which is corruption-ridden.

Women are more politically tolerant

Women are also more collaborative and accommodative in their political dealings than men, and as such are less conflictual and peace-oriented. This has implications for conflict transformation. According to Anderlini (2007), women are more amenable to practicing the co-operative strategy, which is a shift away from the zero-sum paradigm associated with male dominated politics to a win-win approach. This has proved rather successful in Rwanda, for instance, where women members of Parliament (MPs) worked across party and ethnic lines in a forum of women parliamentarians, leading to the formation of two other cross-party caucuses on population and regional peace (Powley, in Anderlini, 2007). This resonates also in the Niger-Delta where, according to Ikelegbe and Ikelebge (2006: 188), an examination of women protests in 2002 and 2003 reveal, amongst other insights into the patterns of their engagements, that women's actions are en mass, denoting a high level of unity, collaboration and mobilization that cross ethnic boundaries.

Women have been effective in engagements with oil companies

Women have been known to be more result-oriented in their struggles against state oppression and MNOC exploitation the Niger-Delta. When they have to protest, and often they do only as a last resort, they are usually well coordinated, non-destructive and peaceful even in protest. According to CASS (2005: 59), women protests in the region "traditionally push issues beyond a threshold because the women folk are regarded as more patient, respectful and morally compelling"[16]. In terms of analytical applicability, women protests in the Niger-

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[16] Some feminists are wont to argue against this point, as some of them, especially those who adopt western feminist principles and practice wholesale, contend that perceiving women in this light serves to further entrench stereotypes that profile them as weak, subordinate and cultural beings, and thus legitimatizing grounds for the continuous properticization, marginalization and disempowerment of women. However, it must be noted that feminisms or masculinities do not exist in a cultural or ideological vacuum and neither are they homogenous categories In fact as post-modernist feminist scholars have argued, ignoring the differences amongst women and

Delta have led to several Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) between women, their communities and the MNOCs (Ogbodo, 2002; Ikelegbe, 2006). In his study of the July 2002 Ijaw women protests against Chevron in Delta state, Ogbodo (2002) observed that apart from the MOUs, the company (Chevron) also granted concessions to the women and their communities in terms of providing sustainable community development, local business development training and skills development (Ogbodo, 2002).

Women as active peace agents

From the study, women respond to conflict by embracing peace and adopting collaborative methods of engagement. The attitude of women to conflict, which underscores their response and the peace-oriented roles they play in conflict resolution, is not unconnected to the African woman's feminist ethic of care which values interrelationships, connectedness and empowerment rather than conflict and competition. For example, according to Mrs Iyoha[17], while men view conflict as 'struggle or war which must be fought', women tend to see them as 'necessary evils in communities' and only give in to or endorse war after all avenues for peaceful resolution of conflict have been exhausted, and even then, they tend to hope for and pursue prospects for peace during war (Interview with Mrs Iyoha, 13 June 2007). Also, since the injured and dead in conflicts are quite often their sons, husbands and brothers, they tend to focus on the cessation of violence and the rebuilding of their homes, families and communities (FGD with Odi women, 3 May 2007). Indeed, according to Dr (Mrs) Okolocha[18], "because women feel the impact of conflict more than men, they naturally advocate for peace and pursue conflict resolution". This is corroborated by a cumulative 70% of the women in the study areas who were affected by conflict and who said they responded to the conflict in their area by "creating alternatives for survival" (35%), "working towards peaceful resolution of the conflict" (1.4%) or "accepted their fate and moved on" (33.6%). Concisely, women have a positive attitude and approach towards peace, as while men spoil for a fight, women toe the alternative route for peace and calm to reign.

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their global experience of social, cultural and economic oppression amounts to imposing a false uniformity on reality (Barrett, 1992; Eisenstein, 1989 and Molyneux, 1985).

[17] Mrs F E Iyoha is the Clerk of the Legislative arm and Chief Administrative Officer of Oredo Local Government Area of Edo state and a former Head of Family Support Programme in the Local Government Area

[18] Dr (Mrs) H.O Okolocha is a politician, writer and lecturer of English and Literature at the University of Benin, Nigeria

How did you deal with the effects of the conflicts
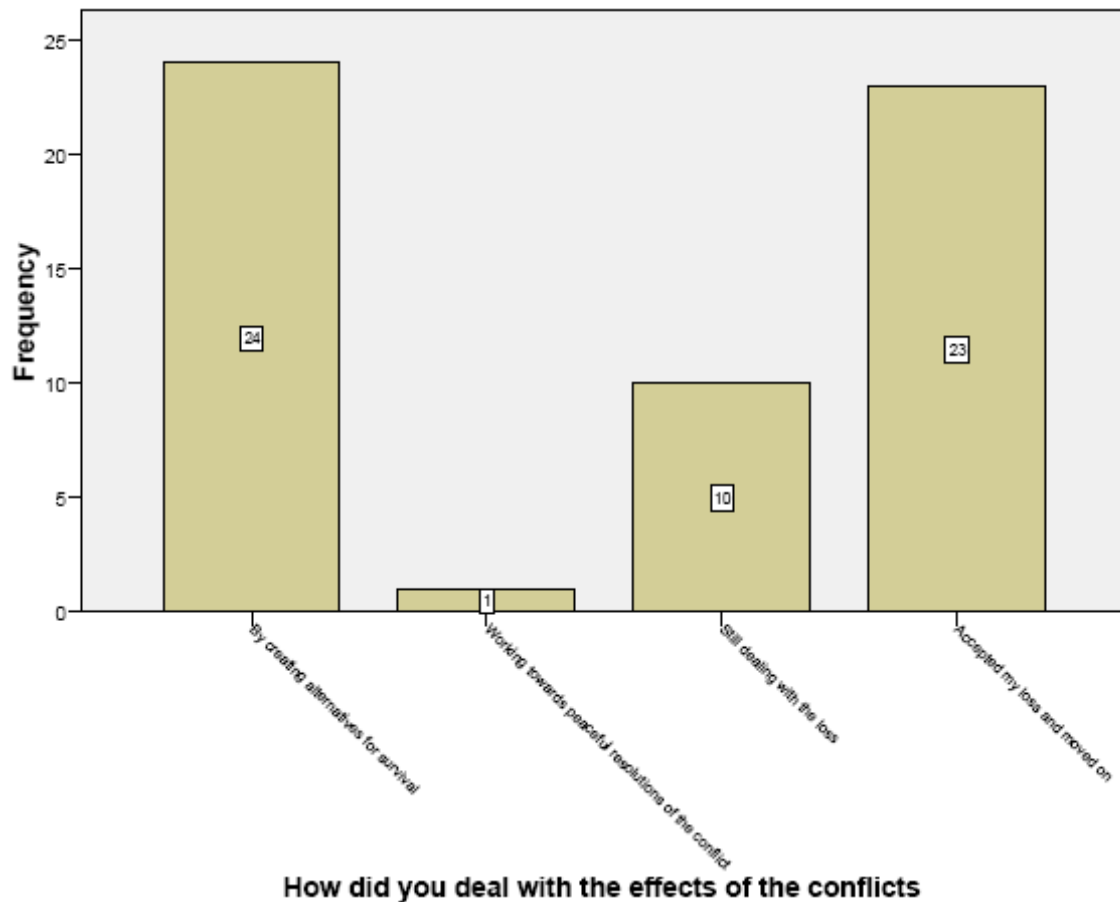
Generally, the major instruments women employ to play their peace roles include suggestions to relevant stakeholders for dialogue, appeals to MNC's community liaison officers, preaching and advocacy for the ideal of peace, persuasion of their husbands, sons and local community leaders to embrace peace, advising youths and children, representation and frequent meetings with stakeholders, prayers and peaceful protests when all these fail. This study therefore validates that of CASS (2005), which contends women and their groupings constitute the main formation of moderation and peace building in the Niger-Delta in spite of their growing activism. Indeed, according to Chief Akhorta, even though women are not usually the cause of conflict, and in spite of the fact that they bear the effects of conflict disproportionately with men, they still impact on conflict positively. For instance, "they operate from the private family level, using moral suasion to convince their husbands and then community leaders not be hawkish in their approach to dealing with conflict situations, and most often, their views are respected because of the myth of 'the sanctity of womanhood' which surround women" (Akhorta interview, 2007). This is not different from the position of Racheal Umukoro, the *Osu-eya* (Women's leader) in Uzere that women always work towards conflict resolution using their special nature which appeals to calm, love and togetherness. To her, "women have special abilities that make them cope with difficulties; they are patient,

hopeful and closer to nature than men" (Rachael Umukoro interview, 6 June 2007). Mrs Iyoha also echoes this view which is also very strongly held by over 80% of the women surveyed thus:

> Women by their nature are more in tune with reality and are as such very resilient. By their biological make-up, women tend to be more patient and resilient in tough situations because of their special relation with nature as mothers. Women tend to be more hopeful and positive about life because they believe in the laws and order of nature, for example, "what goes up must surely come down" (Interview with Mrs Iyoha, 13 June 2007)

Clearly then, women in the Niger-Delta and KwaZulu-Natal are resolute in the face of conflict and able to cope with the effects drawing from the special attributes which characterize their womanhood. These include love, caring, a vision of relationship, and disposition towards peaceful coexistence because of their children.   These characteristics engender peace thus making women veritable agents of peace. However, if women really do bring a different approach and value to politics, why then is a critical mass inclusion of women in politics not able to transform the life circumstances of the majority of women and their societies as a whole?

Probing the Quality *vs.* Quantity debate further: Why are women not delivering the goods?

It remains debatable whether a 30% critical mass of women, or what proportion of women in politics, can make the difference for women and for a more developed society (Grey, 2001; Childs, 2004); Crowley, 2004; Krook, 2005). Dahlerup (1988), in her pioneering study of the utility of the critical mass theory to women and politics, rejects critical mass in favour of *critical acts*, which she defined as initiatives that change the position of the minority and lead to further changes in their situation. Although she concludes that "the opportunity for women to form majority coalitions increases when they constitute 30 %, rather than 5% critical mass" (Dahlerup, 1988: 294), implying that numbers are also important, however, her main point was that change can also come through the qualitative actions of a few women in politics. In Africa, Goetz and Hassim (2003) use the case of South Africa (36%) and Uganda (30%) to interrogate the utility of critical mass in translating women's representation in politics to effectiveness in the policy and reform arenas, especially on those that directly affect women. They argue, for instance, that while the structure of the state and party systems can advance women's political participation and representation, the durability of gains made is ultimately contingent upon the strength of society's general interest in gender equality (Goetz and Hassim, 2003). In the same vein, the case of post-conflict societies like Rwanda and

Mozambique with 49% and 31% women representation respectively in their national parliaments have been cited as examples to underscore the limitations of the critical mass argument (Powley, 2005). In Rwanda, for instance, in spite of the achievements recorded by women in parliament since 1996[19], challenges still include the fact that Rwanda remains largely underdeveloped and according to Powley (2005: 161), "the great majority of Rwandan women are disadvantaged vis-à-vis men with regards to education, legal rights, health and access to resources". Goering (2006) was more succinct in highlighting that 75% of Rwanda's poor are women, and that domestic violence, although declining, remains a major problem.

In our selected study areas in South Africa, an average of 40% of the women surveyed expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the performance of women in government as they were of the view these women have not made any difference in governance and service delivery in their communities. Of the 134 women in KwaZulu-Natal who responded to the question "Have women in positions of governance made any significant difference in governance and service delivery in your community?" 27 (20%) answered "don't know". Although this could mean anything and could be due to a multiplicity of factors some of which might not reflect on the quality of women politicians participation in governance, in many ways it portrays the failure of women in politics to properly socialize and galvanise their women folk, especially those at the rural areas, to be politically conscious. In Shobashobane, Richmond area and Nongoma, many of the rural women surveyed did not even know who their female representatives were at levels of governance other than the community and neither are they aware of the rights and privileges that the gender mainstreaming efforts of the government bestows on them nor do they understand how government works.[20] The question then is: why are women in South Africa, Uganda, Rwanda and Mozambique which have all reached and or exceeded the 30% critical mass, not able to transform the life circumstances of the majority of women and their societies as a whole? Is it a question of increasing their numbers (i.e. exceeding the 30% critical mass)? Or refocusing

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[19] These include, for example, the formation of a women's caucus; the Forum of Women Parliamentarians where women MPs work together, across party lines, on issues that affect women as a group. According to the forum has several roles: it reviews existing laws and introduces amendments to discriminatory legislations, examines proposed laws with an eye to gender sensitivity, liaises with the women's movement, and conducts meetings and trainings with women's organizations sensitize the population to and advise about legal issues (Powley, 2006: 160). A major success of Rwandan women in parliament was the 1999 revoking of laws that prohibited women from inheriting land. Also, according to Goering (2006), since the post 1994 genocide period, which has been marked by a prevalence of women in politics, primary school enrolment is near 100% and 55% of primary school leavers now go to high school, up from 9% before the genocide. She adds that, women, who in 2000 made up 20% of university graduates, today account for 50%, according to government figures (Goering, 2006).

[20] This also came out from the data generated from the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) process in KZN and I was a part of the team that analyzed the data in April, 2006

the investigation on the intervening variables that bring them up and the socio-cultural climate under which specific female politicians operate? This study rides with the latter and presents its findings on these variables based on its survey of women in KwaZulu-Natal and the Niger-Delta. These include:

Socio-cultural climate of government institutions

This study shows that informal-level discrimination is perpetuated against women politicians by their male counterparts in government through the use of invectives, labelling, innuendoes and sex-role expectations to undermine their (women) authority[21]. Indeed, while Africa's women's status generally improved (at least at the formal level) in the last decade of the 20th century through increased political representation that has brought issues of concern to women to the fore, these gains have been blurred by continuous marginalisation and discrimination at the informal levels of relations with men and society in general. Informal barriers to gender equality, because they occur in the subtle realm of social relations between men and women where 'traditional' male authorities continue to dominate, are actually more difficult to overcome as they cannot be simply legislated away. Unfortunately, their impact, not only on the deliberation processes of governance but also in the application of policy, actually does impede and undermine women's participation in the social, political and economic life of their societies (Fraser, 1997; Robinson: 1995). The prevalence of such a stifling socio-cultural climate in government institutions like parliament, their rules and norms that reflect a bias towards men's experiences and authority is antithetical to quality performance and effective political representation of women (Hawkesworth, 2003).

Mode of entry: who gets what and how?

In both study areas, women depend on the good graces of men to enter the political terrain. In KwaZulu-Natal, the party quota system which is appropriated by men without much consultation with women is the main instrument of recruiting women into politics. In the Niger-Delta, women must continually be in the 'good books' of men to be considered worthy of sponsorship for election into political office. The mode of women's entry into politics impacts significantly on their performance as it affects their attitude, behaviour, actions and influence when they get into office. For example, Childs (2004) posits that mechanisms of candidate selection combined with pressures for party discipline strongly determine what kind

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[21] This came out from personal interviews with the MEC for Public Works, KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, Mrs. Lydia Johnson. According to her, men also use non-verbal communicative methods like expressing doubt on women's technical ability to carry out a task or simply ignoring them when they make contributions to certain debates in council (Interview with MEC, October, 2007). This was also confirmed in an interview with Honourable Esohe Jacobs of the Edo State House of Assembly in Nigeria, 13 February 2007.

of women are elected or appointed into office. Corroborating this, Mutume (2006:8) argues that, "some of Africa's women politicians also have to deal with political systems that promote patronage. Under such systems, (female) politicians are beholden to the party hierarchy rather than to their constituents, which renders elected (or appointed) officials less effective in policymaking". Therefore, while asking questions around the effectiveness of numbers (critical mass) in ensuring quality political representation of women, focus should also be on the systems and mechanisms that bring women into politics and the kind of women politicians these systems produce as well as the impact these 'new women' have on the culture, practice and outcomes (social reform and policy) of politics.

Women acting as men
Cumulatively, 60% of the women surveyed complain that they no longer recognize their representatives when they get into power as they often "behave in like men" in an attempt to prove that they can do the job. This phenomenon is rooted in the process that produces the women politicians in the first place. Indeed, the women that come out of such a male-controlled process of political recruitment end up feeling obligated to their male patrons and tend to remain loyal to them (men) and their causes (usually self-serving). For example, female politicians who come into positions of power as substitute candidates for male relatives (Mehta, 2002) usually end up acting no different from 'men' to fit into role-expectations of their political benefactors. In this way, women lose the essence and value of their femininity which in pre-colonial times was the basis of their qualitative participation in politics, even though in   This reinforces the argument in favour of 'critical acts' against 'critical mass' as the former supports our argument in this chapter that women had more influence and control of the political process in pre-colonial Africa even though their numbers in governance institutions were probably less than what today constitutes critical mass. Therefore, the tendency to overemphasize numbers at the expense of quality representation which is rooted in the very essence of African womanhood has compromised not only effective political representation of women in post-colonial Africa, but has also compromised womanhood.

Conclusion

Male-dominated politics has failed the people of the Niger-Delta of Nigeria including women who constitute the majority of the population. This failure is evidenced in the litany of human insecurities; environmental, economic, health, communal, which sum up the Niger-Delta paradox of extreme poverty in the face of enormous wealth. Added to this is the increasing feminization of poverty, disease and violence which leaves women disproportionately affected by the crisis of underdevelopment and armed conflict. In the light of the failure of male-dominated politics, we contend that women remain the missing link between sustainable peace and development in the Niger-Delta and KwaZulu-Natal.

This contention is rooted in both theory and practice of women's involvement in the public sphere as while there are philosophical and theoretical grounds for feminizing the political process in human rights and human security paradigms, evidence from the field also confirm that women tend to bring in a different approach and value to politics with transformative consequences for change. For instance, evidence from our study areas show that women are more empathetic to community needs and development; are perceived to be less corrupt than men; perceived to be more politically tolerant than men; have shown to be more effective in critical engagements with oil companies and perceived as active peace agents.

In the light of this study, factors that limit the quality of women's performance in the few governance opportunities they have, also contribute to perpetuating their marginalization in political processes. And until more women become part of the political processes of their communities without the aforementioned socio-cultural and structural hindrances, they can not be part of the peace processes. Therefore, we conclude that the low level of women in political processes and the paucity of women in leadership positions in political parties and the state account for why they are absent from the peace processes.

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Honourable (Mrs) Esohe Jacobs, February 2007
Madam Amafadiei, June 2007
Minister, Public Works, October 2007.
Mr. Isreal Akhorta, June 2007
Mrs E Iyoha, June 2007
Mrs. Rachael Umukoro, June 2007
Focussed Group Discussions:
Women in Igbokoda, Niger-Delta, 2007
Women in Nongoma, Northern area of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006
Women in Odi, Niger-Delta, May 2007
Women in Richmond, Midlands area of KwaZulu-Natal, March 2005.
Women in Shobashobane, Southern area of KwaZulu-Natal, 2006.
Women in Uzere, Niger-Delta, June 2007