



Just add women and stir?[☆] Education, gender and peacebuilding in Uganda



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ABSTRACT

Although Uganda is not short of policies and strategies to promote gender equality, women's political and social agency remains significantly low. Reasons are rooted in two main challenges: persisting structural barriers; and low levels of education among women. Both are most prevalent in the country's conflict-affected sub-regions. Against this backdrop, we explore and critically reflect on the interplay of education, gender and peacebuilding. We showcase how gender-responsive approaches in education at the macro-level have traditionally been based on initiatives that embrace gender equality by means of a "just add women and stir approach" thereby sidelining history, cultural sensitivity and context.

1. Introduction

There is widespread consensus among practitioners and scholars that peacebuilding can be more effective if built on an understanding of how gendered identities are constructed through societal power relations between and among women, men, girls, boys and members of sexual/gender minorities.¹ Growing evidence further suggests that the greater the level of gender inequality in a country, the higher the chances of conflict.² Yet, to ensure gender equality and sustainability in peacebuilding; a country's public institutions and social services – such as education – cannot be detached from how rigid gender roles and persistent power dynamics are culturally, socially, politically and economically perpetuated and reproduced.³ It is exactly at this juncture of norm-promotion within and through institutional regulation where the Ugandan case offers an interesting puzzle: Even though the country is not short of policies and legislative acts promoting gender inclusiveness, women continue to be significantly disadvantaged and marginalized in political, economic and social everyday life. To give an

example, according to the latest data from the Afrobarometer⁴ 34.8% of male respondents strongly agree (26.4%) or agree (6.4%) with the statement that men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women, compared to 16.9% of female respondents. More broadly, the OECD Genderindex⁵ highlights the discrepancy between opinions about gender equality and practical actions in everyday life and discriminatory social behaviour is still widespread within communities and institutions at large.

According to an evaluation report on gender inequality in Uganda,⁶ there are two main reasons as to why women lack political and social agency: First, Ugandan women continue to face several socio-cultural and economic constraints that are deeply rooted in societal values and norm setting.⁷ Second, low education levels hinder women from overcoming these structural barriers. With regards to the former, women suffer especially from unequal land rights and management, restricted access to justice and continued sexual and domestic violence. As for the latter, Uganda made only mixed-progress towards gender equality in education. For instance, while parity in primary education is almost

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¹ Myrtilinen et al.: "Re-Thinking Gender in Peacebuilding," 2014.

² Hudson et al., *Sex & World Peace* 2014.

³ UNICEF and Learning for Peace, "Gender, Education and Peacebuilding Brief" 2016.

⁴ See: <http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online>, accessed 17.01.2017.

⁵ See: <http://www.genderindex.org/uganda-country-study>, accessed 17.01.2017.

⁶ Coffey International Development, "Gender Equality in Uganda: A Situation Analysis and Scoping Report for the Gender Development Partners Group. Commissioned by DFID and Irish Aid."

⁷ See also: OECD, "Uganda SIGI Country Report. Social Institutions & Gender Index."

achieved, gender gaps widen significantly in secondary and tertiary school.⁸

In the course of our research we further encountered, that these aspects – low education levels and structural barriers – are most prevalent in Uganda’s conflict affected regions spanning from West Nile, to Acholi and Karamoja. It is against this backdrop, that we explore the ternary relation between education, peacebuilding and gender in Uganda. Concretely, we question *how and to what extent the country’s macro education policies and initiatives address gender dimensions to promote sustainable peacebuilding?*

We commence our paper with a short theoretical overview on the interplay of gender, education and peacebuilding. In briefly delineating different forms of gender-based violence in and through education in a post-conflict context, we explain why we will make use of a socio-historical approach in the remainder of our analysis. This is followed by a method section, after which follows a discussion on how regional conflicts in Uganda fortified certain gender dynamics and the role education played therein. We then shift our focus on how gender has been addressed in the education sector in the country’s peacebuilding processes. Concretely, we pay attention to: education access, direct forms of violence in schools, education sector plans and policies, national curriculum initiatives, the role of teachers and teacher training, specific strategies for girls education. Drawing on a discursive analysis we arrive at the conclusion that within all initiatives under our review, there is no critical and socio-historical approach to gender, peacebuilding, and a clear conceptualisation of the role of education therein. We showcase how education is not perceived within current initiatives as a tool towards sustainable processes of social justice in relation to the political and social agency of women and men in a (post-) conflict context. Furthermore, in addressing gender in education and peacebuilding policies, we found that strong emphasis is placed on indirect and direct forms of violence, thereby sidelining alienating and repressive forms of violence. This not only has a depoliticizing effect on a society as a whole, but also decreases representation and voice in the country’s peacebuilding process. Such developments are also fortified by a tendency to dismiss the socio-historical evolution of gendered behaviour and norms within policy rhetoric, school curricula, textbooks and general public debate.

2. Gender as an entry point for peacebuilding through education

Our analysis is based on a specific understanding of peacebuilding and education and consequently, how and why we perceive both as closely intertwined. We embrace a conceptualization that focuses on the necessary core transformations in order for conflict-affected societies to move towards sustainable peace. As such we understand peacebuilding in Galtung’s terms – a transition from negative peace (absence of direct forms of violence) to positive peace (absence of any structural, repressive or alienating forms of violence), and consequently intertwined with a broader development agenda.⁹ Peacebuilding is therefore a process encompassing a variety of institutional and socio-economic transformations, from the local to the national level, aimed at ensuring social justice, equal opportunity and human security. In this light, peacebuilding is a long-term activity, which, in an ideal case, leads to sustainable and long-lasting development. This is in line with a range of contemporary theories of war and conflict¹⁰ which see horizontal and vertical inequalities as drivers of conflict or barriers towards sustainable peace. Addressing these inequalities and structural barriers, in their different economic, cultural and political dimensions, supports the promotion of social cohesion, whereby trust, solidarity, and a sense

of collectivity and common purpose within and between groups are strengthened. Needless to add that educational institutions, settings and governance plays an important part in these processes.¹¹

Against this backdrop, we found that various initiatives have recognised the need for gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches in education and peacebuilding.¹² This includes supportive curricula, attraction of more women to the teaching profession¹³ or using educational institutions as platforms to encourage positive views of femininities and masculinities,¹⁴ to name but a few. A recent literature review on (formal and non-formal) education initiatives for youth¹⁵ found it also crucial for such initiatives to avoid and question binary representations of girls-as-victims and boys-as-perpetrators in situations of conflict,¹⁶ Such binaries may reinforce and limit girls and boys to reductive or stereotypical roles of what is considered to be feminine and masculine. For instance, in relation to girls’ sexuality, Hayhurst (2013) analysis of a programme in Uganda for empowerment through sports, concluded that while the programme did promote forms of empowerment, it also (unintentionally) reinforced stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity. In addition, direct forms of gender based (sexual) violence are prevalent in schools all over the world. Sadly, in conflict-affected Northern Uganda gender based violence in schools seems to be highly tolerated and normalized¹⁷ often perpetuated by teachers.¹⁸ Hence, it is questionable how education could be used as a positive force for transformation of gender regimes and the promotion of equitable norms, recognizing the various forms of violence, including gender based violence, that are present in schools.

More generally, there is a growing recognition for the need of a critical approach to the gender dimensions of violence in education.¹⁹ As Novelli and Lopes Cardozo (2008) highlight, education in a peacebuilding context is surrounded by various visible and invisible forms of violence perpetuated within and through education.²⁰ Building on their work, we further argue that, gender is an important entry point for addressing disparities, exclusion, direct and indirect forms of violence and thus conflict.²¹ Because gender relations always intersect with economic status, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc., it allows us to question existing structures, systems and institutions, the interplay of power in these, and consequently gendered norms and binary assumptions.²² In placing this into the context of education, we broadly categorize the various forms of gender-based violence in peacebuilding settings as follows:

Admittably, Table 1 above is far from being complete. For this

¹¹ See for instance: Bush and Saltarelli, “The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict. Towards a Peacebuilding for Children.”, Smith, “Contemporary Challenges for Education in Conflict Affected Countries”, Novelli and Lopes Cardozo, “Conflict, Education and the Global South: New Critical Directions”, Smith et al., “The Integration of Education and Peacebuilding. Synthesis Report on Findings from Myanmar, Pakistan, South Africa and Uganda. UNICEF-PBEA. Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding.”

¹² UNICEF and Learning for Peace, “Gender, Education and Peacebuilding Brief” 2016, El-Bushra and Rees Smith, “Gender, Education and Peacebuilding. 2016.

¹³ Dunne, “Gender as an Entry Point 2009, Kirk, “Promoting a Gender-Just Peace” 2004.

¹⁴ UNICEF ‘Gender, Education and Peacebuilding Brief,’ 2016.

¹⁵ Lopes Cardozo et al., “Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding and Education 2015.

¹⁶ Becker, ‘Girls in Fragile Context,’ 2012, McKay, “Reconstructing Fragile Lives” 2004, Pruitt, ‘Fixing the Girls’ 2013 as quoted in: Lopes Cardozo et al., “Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding and Education” 2015.

¹⁷ Porter, “Say no to bad touches,” 2015.

¹⁸ UNICEF, “Research Briefing: Assessing Child Protection” 2013, Mirembe and Davies, “Is Schooling a Risk?” 2001.

¹⁹ Confortini, ‘Galtung, Violence, and Gender,’ 2006; Kolawole, “Re-Conceptualizing African Gender Theory,” 2004; Maclure and Denov, ‘Post-war education and the struggle for gender equity in Sierra Leone,’ 2009.

²⁰ Novelli and Lopes Cardozo “Conflict, education and the global south: New critical directions,” 2008.

²¹ Connell, “The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal,” 1990; Dunne, “Gender as an Entry Point” 2009, Fuest, “This Is the Time to Get in Front” 2008.

²² Dunne, ‘Gender as an Entry Point.’ 2009.

⁸ MoESTS Uganda, “Educational Statistical Abstract.”

⁹ Galtung, “An Editorial”; Galtung, *Peace, War and Defense*.

¹⁰ Stewart, *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict*, Cramer, “Civil War Is Not a Stupid Thing. Accounting for Violence in Developing Countries.”

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