This policy brief addresses the under-representation of women in Zimbabwe’s public service institutions and in the security sector, despite the government’s expressed commitment to UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. While women account for 25 percent of public servants, there is no woman in the highest ranks of the security sector, particularly in the Zimbabwe Defense Forces (ZDF). Also, women’s representation in the national parliament is 35 percent, while their representation in the country’s urban and rural councils is below 20 percent.  

Women’s under-representation is reflected in their limited influence on peacebuilding in Zimbabwe. Women who engage in peacebuilding in the public sphere face sexual harassment, arrest by the authorities, and censure. The marginalization of women in the public sphere is mirrored in the private sphere. Yet this is a space where attitudes are shaped and value for peace can be instilled in children and young people. The combination of gender discrimination in the public sphere and the exclusion of the private sphere from peacebuilding policies constrains women’s participation at local, national, and international levels (Björkdahl 2012; Tiessen 2015).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The government of Zimbabwe should:
- **Promote** greater representation of women in the highest levels of peace and security institutions in Zimbabwe.
- **Engage** in sensitization campaigns to eliminate the hostile public narrative and sexual harassment directed towards women.
- **Collaborate** with women’s organizations, community leaders, and faith-based organizations in campaigns directed towards mothers using their nurturing and mentorship roles to build peace.
- **Recognize** the nexus between domestic violence and politically-motivated violence and design policies that promote a culture of peace.

The Ministry of Women and Youth Affairs should:
- **Support** the enactment of laws and policies that expand and institutionalize women’s participation in public and private spaces.
- **Engage** in sensitization campaigns to eliminate the hostile public narrative and sexual harassment directed towards women.
- **Collaborate** with women’s organizations, community leaders, and faith-based organizations in campaigns directed towards mothers using their nurturing and mentorship roles to build peace.
- **Recognize** the nexus between domestic violence and politically-motivated violence and design policies that promote a culture of peace.

**CONTEXT**

The Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) provides a framework for peacebuilding through its Social Services and Poverty Eradication cluster. However, the cluster addresses the peace sub-cluster separately from the gender and development sub-cluster. ZIMASSET mentions the role of security agencies and “mainstream peacebuilding mechanisms” without elaborating on how they intersect with gender. Other than brief mention of sexual and gender-based violence, the framework does not directly address the various gender-related constraints that women in peacebuilding encounter. As mothers, women often bear the responsibility for nurturing children and raising them to be responsible adults. As mothers and wives, they often play the role of “conflict resolvers” (Masini 1987, 310) in the family. However, cultural norms that normalize violence by men have contributed to women’s under-representation.

---


Rose Jaji is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Zimbabwe. She is the recipient of an APN Individual Research Grant (2017).
towards boys being raised to view violence as a normal part of manhood and an acceptable strategy in conflict resolution. For example, out of a sample of 4291 married women interviewed in Zimbabwe, 33.6 percent justified wife-beating, compared with 22.4 percent that did not (Fidan and Bui 2016). If a significant number of women see wife-beating as acceptable, this may imply that they are ill-equipped to raise (especially) boys who oppose violence against women, both in the home and in public life, when interacting with women as political opponents for example. These attitudes create a cycle of sexual and gender-based violence. Building sustainable peace by re-socializing adults is a major challenge, as demonstrated by recurrent politically motivated violence during election campaigns in the country in spite of peacebuilding efforts by various organizations, such as Zimbabwe Peace Project and Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, which encourage tolerance and non-violence. Currently, women are left to their own devices on how they raise children whether they draw from local cultures or religions, such as Christianity. Against this background, the government of Zimbabwe needs to assign a central role to gender and peacebuilding in its National Gender Policy unveiled in July 2017 and use this existing policy as a platform to train women to raise peacebuilders.

This policy brief underscores the importance of the private sphere, particularly the upbringing of children, to peacebuilding policy by emphasizing how women can actively contribute to peace education without facing resistance from local, male-dominated cultures. Focusing on women does not necessarily exclude men who should be engaged as heads of households so that they cooperate with women in raising children into adults who value peaceful conflict resolution. Involving men is a proactive approach that will entrench a peace-oriented ethos in children. This approach would also broaden the opportunity for women to contribute to current peacebuilding activities focusing on adults and leaders at the organizational or institutional level and women in leadership positions.2

**POLICY ALTERNATIVES**

Peacebuilding in Zimbabwe usually takes place in formal settings where people participate as stakeholders, employees, or volunteers. For example, peacebuilding discussions involving religious leaders typically exclude women because religious denominations are predominantly headed by men. Since women face constraints in the peacebuilding arena at local, national, and international levels, it is important to harness the capacity inherent in their gender roles in the home and within the family by bringing peacebuilding into this space instead of limiting peacebuilding to the public sphere. This can be achieved by incorporating peacebuilding into existing women’s organizations at the community level.

Peacebuilding needs to become embedded within societal norms and values, as opposed to being resorted to after violence has already occurred, whether in the domestic, public, or political sphere. There is need for an approach to peacebuilding that is cognizant of women’s normative roles and capitalizes on their active participation in raising children in the family or home, so that peace becomes part of children’s values before they become adults. Women’s efforts at instilling such values in their children would complement peacebuilding in the public sphere.

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The government of Zimbabwe should:**
- Promote greater representation of women in the highest levels of peace and security institutions in Zimbabwe.

**The Ministry of Women and Youth Affairs should:**
- Address the obstacles to women’s contribution to peacebuilding in the public sphere, and enact laws and policies that expand and institutionalize women’s participation in public and private spaces, so that they are not subject to gender-based constraints.
- Engage in awareness and sensitization campaigns to eliminate the hostile public narrative and sexual harassment directed towards women who are active in peacebuilding.
- Support peacebuilding efforts by collaborating with women’s organizations, community leaders, and faith-based organizations in areas such as combatting sexual harassment, and awareness campaigns directed towards women as mothers using their nurturing role to build peace, while also acting as peer-educators and mentors.
- Actively engage community leaders and religious leaders to proactively support the transformation of local cultures and religious beliefs in ways that support the principles underpinning commitment to UN Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security.
- Recognize the nexus between domestic violence and politically-motivated violence at the national level and design policies that tap into women’s normative social roles in the family to promote a culture of peace.

**CONSULTED SOURCES**


---

2 UN Women directs its efforts to prevent sexual and gender-based violence to ‘key stakeholders’ identified as the Gender Commission, National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, Zimbabwe Republic Police, and women leaders. In a country where women are under-presented in the public sphere, as noted at the beginning of the brief, this excludes a significant number of women.