

# Summary of the Advocacy Training, South Africa

14 – 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2009

**Women Peacemakers Acquire Advocacy Skills to Re-Define Peace in African:** Among the major setbacks for women's effective participation in peacebuilding are inadequate advocacy skills and low capacity to maintain sustained coordination and networking, which are essential requirements for amplifying and positioning their voice in any effective social change process.



*From left to right: Euphemia Akos Dzathor (WPP Africa Desk Coordinator), Venitia Govender (South African political and legal analyst), Joy Mbaabu (WPP Africa Desk Board Chair), Dorothy Attema (Regional Coordinator – WPP International Secretariat)*

Southern, Eastern, West, Central and the Horn of Africa regions.

The women were mainly alumni of WPP ToTs and other women who were engaged in initiatives of peacebuilding, gender and violence against women.

## **Overall Goal and Objectives**

The Training sought to enhance the skills of the women peace activists to be effective change agents who can use advocacy as a tool for influencing public policy and decisions in order to promote gender sensitive nonviolent peacebuilding. The training also sought to identify women peace advocates and create a database of women non violent peace advocates who will be linked to regional networks of women peacemakers to impact public policy at community and national levels throughout Africa.

Believing firmly that advocacy is a skill that can be learnt, participants were introduced to the concept and process of advocacy and how it contributes to policy change.

Participants were further helped to identify peacebuilding advocacy issues in their various countries and developed country specific strategies after setting policy- focused objectives. At the country level each participant identified their sources of support and even those who are likely to oppose them so they could develop specific and compelling messages to target them for change.

Since the most effective way of achieving results in advocacy

In line with the WPP Africa Desk's commitment to empowering African women peacemakers to pursue sustainable peace through gender sensitive active non violence, the Desk partnered with a South African based organization –IDASA, to hold a one-week Advocacy Training for selected women peace activists from across the Africa continent. This training was held in Orion Devonshire Hotel in Braamfontein, a suburb of Johannesburg in South Africa from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> of September 2009.

The training brought together 20 English –speaking women peace activist's from 14 African countries. The countries represented were Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, DR Congo, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa. These countries represent five geo-political regions of Africa; namely



*A cross section of participants at the Advocacy training*

campaigns is to work as networks and coalitions, participants explored the use of networking and coalition building as a tool for effective advocacy.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the five days is the draft strategy that each participant went home with. They were expected to develop it fully and the Desk has promised to support the implementation of the best strategies.

Generally the women were satisfied with the content and level of facilitation that made it possible for the generation and cross fertilisation of rich ideas and knowledge.

One participant said: ***“All along, I thought advocacy meant going to the street with placards and demonstrating but I got a completely different idea. I now know that I can use different techniques and even at the community level without being perceived wrongly”***



*Training in full session*

Another woman remarked: ***“I was blown away! Content versatile and delivery was executed brilliantly. This is a must do course for all women’***

In another woman’s words, ***“I was doing advocacy without knowing it. This training has helped put what I was doing in context. Now I should be able to structure for more effective campaigns.”***

## **IDEAS AND STRATEGIES AT WORK**

- The capacities of African women in promoting Gender-sensitive Active Non-violence as a way of life were enhanced;
- More precisely, they learnt how to use of advocacy as a tool for influencing public policy and decisions.
- Participants identified policy audiences and thoroughly analysed their interests in particular peacebuilding issues.
- Strategies of grassroots mobilisation and organization were also enhanced.
- Compelling advocacy messages aimed at policy makers were developed.
- Networking and coalition building as tools for effective advocacy were explored.

The most significant outcome of this training is that participants went back home with draft advocacy strategies / plans to promote active nonviolence in their communities thereby helping to help change public policy. Some of these initiatives will be supported with seed funding by the WPP Africa Desk.



**Philomena Ikonya – President of the PEN Kenya Centre, participant at the WPP Africa Desk Advocacy training**

**Some participants brainstorm on their Advocacy plans**

The training received wide media coverage in South Africa because of a press conference held as part of the event. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2009, Euphemia Akos Dzathor (WPP Africa Desk Coordinator) and Joy Mbaabu (WPP Africa Desk Board Chair) had the opportunity of talking about the programme on the SABC International TV morning show called “180 Degrees”.

Several other radio stations carried the event with interviews from participants and organisers. The “Sunday Independent” Newspaper carried the story under the caption “Advocacy for the sisters in transformation”



African women peace activists at a gender-based advocacy seminar in Braamfontein this week. PHOTO: JACQUES DU TOIT

*Sunday Independent 20 Sept 2009*  
**Advocacy for the sisters in transformation**

MAUREEN ISAACSON

IMAGINE a world free of gender-based violence. The possibility of working towards this, and the transformation of war-ravaged communities in which women bore the brunt of war, was one of the themes of discussion this week at an advocacy training workshop for peace activists at the Orion Devonshire Hotel in Braamfontein.

The conference was hosted by Ifasa and held under the auspices of the Women Peacekeeper's Programme (WPP), an initiative of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation based in the Netherlands.

The African desk of WPP brought a number of women peace activists from 14 conflict-ravaged countries in central, western and eastern Africa, including from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, southern and northern Sudan and Zimbabwe. Participants from South Africa also attended.

The advocacy training programme co-ordinators had strong and determined goals: to enhance the skills of women peace activists, to the extent that they were able to influence policy. The idea is that they connect and work together – because “we are one”.

According to Dorothy Attema, of the WPP international secretariat, a Kenyan woman based in the Netherlands, “all of Africa was in that room”. “Some of you have been imprisoned for your activism and you know that it is not going to be easy”.

The brief, which was also “to change the culture of violent resolution of conflict to non-violent resolution” is mired in obstacles, which the women were determined to overcome.

In a closing session on Friday morning, several women referred to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 which continue to recognise women as key actors in peace building.

Nonetheless, crimes of gender-based violence continued to be perpetrated by peacekeepers, and the donor funds continued to be pumped into peacekeeping missions rather than peace building.

Johanna Harris, an administrator in the Mano River Women's Peace Network in Liberia, frequently and that incest is common in domestic situations”. Despite President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson's attempts to stop gender-based violence, “it is difficult to change attitudes”.

Euphemia Akos Dzathor, the programme co-ordinator and the regional co-ordinator of WPP based in Ghana, said: “We believe that advocacy can be learned. When women are well-grounded in advocacy they will be able to claim their space in the peace process.”

In an interview, Attema said that during the conference it had been essential to steer the women away from issues of domestic violence that they had to deal with in their organisations and to move “on to the wider framework of the patriarchal systems that were responsible for these gender-based crimes being filtered down into the homes”.

Soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) forced ordinary citizens to rape their wives and mothers and daughters and forced families to witness these violations. Such violations continued after the war and a cycle of violence was continued, said Annie Bipendit Mulamba, the executive secretary of the Associations des Femmes Advocates de la DRC.

“The NGOs formed a coalition and lobbied for new laws, to include new definitions of violence against women, to include economic, physical and moral violations,” she said.

“In 2006, the law expanded the concept of sexual violence to include acts, including rape and forced impregnation, forced bestiality. It is now understood that men as well as women can be the victims of rape. The legal procedures are being shortened. Things are getting better”.

During the conference, it was made clear that gender-based violence was not restricted to women, as men too were the victims of rape, and that women were also in many cases the perpetrators of violence. It was suggested that in such instances, the women needed “to analyse their roles from a gender perspective”, to understand how they were being manipulated to serve the patriarchal system.

Attema said the issue of polygamy was widely discussed and it was “widely regarded as gender insensitive and burdensome upon women”.

“My parents were not polygamous, my grandparents were. In Kenya, we say that one man has three women, it means that one man is equal to three women.”

In Kenya, President Mwai Kibaki has two wives, but he goes out of his way to say that he has only one.

“It is a cross-cutting issue, which came up in our sessions these past days... in Congo and in South Africa and in Ghana the women are complaining about the same thing – we are for women empowerment and polygamy spells patriarchy,” said Attema.

“You cannot commit to women's rights in Africa and say that polygamy is okay. The laws have to be adapted to protect women at a family level.”

“In Kenya, women are working on the issue of impunity that exists after violence; in Congo, they are working on reforming the laws. We believe we can change the way things are.”

The key to successful advocacy is confidence, with the knowledge that there is a network working to transform violence on the continent, change is possible.

**Newspaper article of the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2009 edition of the “Sunday Independent” – Advocacy for sisters in transformation – the story of the African woman who seeks to redefine peace is told**