The Situation of Women in Countries in Transition and Conflicts

A report of the Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan Solidarity Initiative (EEMSI)

Conducted by the African Women Leaders Forum (AWLF)

1.0 Introduction.

African women have historically taken a centre role in the liberation and democratic agendas across the continent. In the liberation struggles against colonialism and apartheid, young women and women took up arms fighting in the battlefields as soldiers, war collaborators, political mobilisers among other different roles. Ending colonial rule was a prerequisite for ending patriarchy and restoration of women's socio-economic, civil and political rights. Nationalist movements and leaders at the time echoed the women's aspirations that the liberation wars were not going to be won without women's contributions[1].However, the post-independence period was described by many feminists and scholars as the greatest betrayal[2] as women were kept at the

---

[1] Tanya Lyons, Guns and Guerilla Girls, Eudora, Ebitimi Kombo Women in liberation wars in settler colonies of Kenya and Zimbabwe and , Aliou Ly the Promise and Betrayal: Women in the national liberation Struggle in Guinea Bissau

[2] Aliou Ly, Promise and Betrayal: Women in national liberation struggle in Guinea Bissau

3

margins of nation building and governance, creating discourses that undermine the frontline roles women have played. Although women's movements continued organising and delivering policy and legislative reforms as well as shifting norms and beliefs that subjugate women post-independence, nationalist discourses have remained patriarchal, and continue to devalorise or make invisible the contributions of women in nation building, national development, democracy and governance.

The statistical representation of women in governance institutions such as local councils and parliaments, corroborate the continued marginalisation of women in public spaces. As of 2021, women constituted 30.9% in Parliament in Southern Africa, 30.8% in East Africa, 21.7% in Central Africa and 15.7% in West Africa[3]. This is despite most African countries having signed up to the African Protocol on Gender and Development, the Maputo Protocol[4] and African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (ACDEG) instruments which centre the role of women in national development and the governance of African polities.

While some milestones have been reached particularly in reforming policy and laws to recognise the rights of women, the statistical representation of women above tells a story of erasure of the efforts and power of women in the public arena, and in particular in influencing politics and governance. Women's narratives and experiences are downplayed, their voice usually silenced and their actions in the fight for social justice and democratic societies are nullified. The situation is worse for women in countries in *transition* and *conflicts*. Their voices are silenced, their efforts erased from the broader narratives of the struggles, yet they are affected the most by transitions to democracy and conflict situations. It is imperative to surface women's experiences during transitions and conflicts not only to recognise how they are differently affected but also to compel their experiences to inform inclusion strategies in building back better. For Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan who experienced protests and conflicts during the Covid-19 pandemic, paying attention to women's experiences in such times is key in making sure that reconstruction processes are rooted in tackling the structural injustices and inequalities that increase women's vulnerability and marginalisation in times of crisis.

1.1 Background:

The African Women Leaders Forum (AWLF) conducted a Solidarity Mission from 29 November to 04 December 2021. The goal of the mission was to provide and promote African feminist solidarity, recognise women's roles and promote their participation in politics and leadership in countries in transition and conflict, document their experiences and inform collective advocacy to

---

3
https://www.statista.com/statistics/1248481/percentage-of-women-in-national-parliaments-in-african-regions/

4
https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WG/ProtocolontheRightsofWomen.pdf

amplify the needs of women and other marginalised populations in countries in transition and conflict in sub-Saharan Africa. AWLF assembled a team of dynamic women from its secretariat and working group to be part of the eSwatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan Solidarity Initiative (EEMSSI). The team visited and met with feminists, activists, representatives of women in the informal sector, leaders of young women and women led civil society organisations and political representatives in Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan.

2.0 Methodology

A hybrid of methods were used, combining in person and virtual interviews and conversations with activists, feminists, young women and women led civil society organisations and political representatives to listen to the stories and experiences of women in situations of transitions and conflicts. The EEMSI team travelled to eSwatini and conducted face-to-face interviews and meetings in Manzini and Mbabane. In Mozambique, the team collaborated with the Southern African Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN) which was hosting a sub-regional conference in Maputo including identified women from different parts of Mozambique including Cabo Delgado which is the northern part that has been experiencing armed conflict since 2017. AWLF participated in the conference, making observations of the key issues raised on the situation in Cabo Delgado. Follow up in-depth interviews were then conducted with identified women participants. AWLF also took time to interview and listen to journalists covering issues in Cabo Delgado in Mozambique. For Ethiopia and Sudan virtual interviews and meetings were held with youth organisations working in Tigray and Irob. AWLF also participated in online meetings held to discuss the situation in Tigray. Literature review of civil society, media and government reports was also done to compliment the data generated from the different meetings and interviews conducted for the four countries.

A thematically arranged narrative on understanding the context, state of women's participation and representation and the power of feminist solidarity, including some direct quotes from the people interviewed was compiled. The people contacted and interviewed are those that the EEMSSI team were able to identify and meet up with. Nonetheless, with fact finding and solidarity missions factors including time constraints and availability of people to engage mean that the list of people consulted and literature reviewed are not exhaustive. For the protection of participants who requested anonymity, the names of individuals and organisations will remain unmentioned in some sections of the report.

3. A synopsis of the situation in the countries under EEMSI

3.1 Eswatini

Formerly known as Swaziland, Eswatini has experienced protests in recent months calling for wider political reforms in Africa's last Absolute Monarchy. Political parties were banned in Swaziland in 1973, when a state of emergency was called by then king, Sobhuza II and the

independence constitution (implemented five years earlier) was repealed. To this day, the state of emergency remains and the ban on political parties is still firmly intact under the rule of King Mswati III. The reasons for the banning and state of emergency were that; the opposition was gaining popularity, thus posing a threat to the aristocracy at the time and that the constitutional crisis had emerged due to political parties which bring about disturbances and ill-feelings and are not deemed part of Swaziland's social fabric. From this period onwards supreme power from judicial, to executive and legislative was vested in the King, which laid the basis for the current political structure of Swaziland.

Citizens have been campaigning for a democratic system of governance. A series of ongoing protests in Eswatini against the monarchy and for democratisation began in late June 2021. Starting as peaceful protests on 20 June 2021 they escalated after 25 June into violence and looting as the government took a hardline stance against the demonstrations and prohibited the delivery of petitions. In response the monarch used excessive force and police brutality to stifle citizens' rights to peaceful protests, freedom of assembly and association.

The UN Human Rights Commissioner has urged the authorities in Eswatini to fully adhere to human rights principles and reminded the authorities that peaceful protests are protected under international human rights law. The Commission called on the government of Eswatini to immediately cease its brutal crackdown against civilians, restore and maintain internet access and engage in inclusive dialogue with pro-democracy groups and politicians.

Reports coming out of Eswatini indicate that since late June 2021, the army and police forces have killed dozens of unarmed civilians and injured around 1, 000 people, including by shooting indiscriminately at and wounding protesters. According to Amnesty International, the government has reportedly imprisoned hundreds of people and carried out a ruthless crackdown on human rights in response to pro-democracy protests, with dozens killed and many others tortured, detained or abducted.Eswatini has since banned all issuance of permits to hold protests. In particular the Public Works Minister, Prince Simelane on Thursday 22 October 2021 directed all cities and towns not to issue any permit to hold protests.

3.2 Mozambique

In 2017, a group calling itself Ansar al Sunna (translation: supporters of the tradition) started carrying out attacks on government and civilian targets in Cabo Delgado, a province rich in rubies and oil and with a population that is 54% Muslim whereas most of Mozambique is Christian.

The group was reportedly formed in 2015 by followers of the radical Muslim Kenyan cleric Abound Rogo Mohammed who resettled in Mozambique after his death in 2012. Mozambicans call them Al-Shabaab, but they are not the same as the terror group in Somalia. Ansar al-Sunna

wants to establish an Islamic state in the region and claim the Islam practiced in Mozambique has been corrupted and no longer follows the Prophet Mohammed's teachings. Its members, which have grown to thousands, have tried preventing people from going to hospitals or schools as they consider them secular and Anti-Islamic.

Attacks by militant groups have increased significantly over the past year. There have been more than 570 violent incidents from January to December 2020 in the province according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) which monitors political violence globally. Human rights groups have reported the extensive destruction throughout northern Mozambique by the militants.

These have included killings, beheadings and kidnappings, with deaths from attacks carried out by all groups involved in the conflicts rising sharply last year. The most horrifying incident was of 50 people beheaded in a sports field in March 2021. The instability has led to huge numbers of people leaving their homes in areas where conflict has erupted. Nearly 670,000 people were internally displaced in Cabo Delgado, Niassa and Nampula provinces by the end of 2020, according to the UN office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. People have been forced to flee their homes leaving without their identification and civil documents in most cases, making them even more vulnerable.

The UNHCR has observed that women and girls are significantly vulnerable to gender-based violence with many being abducted, forced into marriages or prostitution, raped or subjected to other forms of sexual violence. More than half of those displaced are women and nearly 15,000 are pregnant but 36% of Cabo Delgado's health facilities have been damaged or destroyed.
Initially, police were dealing with the insurgents. But as attacks became more frequent, the military was sent in and has been battling them ever since. This has seen the rise of human rights abuses, arbitrary detentions and extra-judicial killings/executions of citizens and threats to human rights defenders and civil society.

3.3 Sudan
Recently people have taken to the streets in Sudan to protest against the military coup and demand for pro-democracy rule, this follows a coup where Sudan's army seized power on 25 October 2021.

The military has dissolved civilian rule, arrested political leaders, human rights activists, and women and has declared a state of emergency. The coup leader, Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, has blamed political infighting. This coup is being seen as a setback in the country's plan to adopt a democratic system.

On Sunday November 7, 2021, large numbers of citizens including young women and women, pro-democracy defenders and human rights defenders took to the streets of the capital, Khartoum

7

demanding for democratic reforms. The army used force to disperse the protesters. Tear gas shells were also fired. During this, the army arrested more than 100 people, and this included young women and women and politicians and human rights defenders. More are expected to join the protests after calls for action by political parties.

3.4 Ethiopia
There have been similar pro-democracy protests in Ethiopia with Protestants calling for an end to hostilities and accountability in the Tigray region. Pro-democracy protests by the Eritrean and Ethiopian diaspora have also demanded withdrawal of Eritrean troops and Amhara regional forces from the region.

On 4 November 2020, a military confrontation flared up between the federal military and forces loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that has been governing the region. The federal government claimed that the war ended with the control of Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray, at the end of November 2020. Following that, an interim administration was set up in the region and work has been underway to reinstate institutions providing public services and local administration in the region.

Human Rights Defenders are alarmed by the grave human rights violations that have occurred during the war in Tigray. The devastating number of confirmed cases of sexual and gender-based violence adds another layer of urgency to the crisis in the region. Human rights defenders and women have been arrested during the pro-democracy protests.
According to Amnesty International Troops and Militias have subjected hundreds of women and girls to sexual violence in Ethiopia's Tigray region.The report further states that there has been widespread rape and sexual violence against women and that the victims include pregnant women

4. Literature Review
According to Mark Chingono (2015), in conflict prone zones such as Sudan, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Eswatini, women are pauperised and subjected to sexploitation as they face group rape and endure concubinage. They lack security, food, health and education. They are also displaced from their homes, live in the camps and in the bushes with rebels who use them as sex slaves[5].

Gemma Burgess (2017) argues that there are almost always hegemonic notions of femininity within all cultural contexts which shape women's' roles and relative positions. Although largely hidden as a result of the hegemonic gender identity which removes women from the public sphere and places women in the private space of the home; women have participated in public life in

---

5
Mark Chingono, Women war and peace in Mozambique: The case of Manica province, 2015

different ways in countries in conflict and transition. Hegemonic literature has confined the roles of women in conflict torn zones such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique and Eswatini to passive recipients of the violence, to survivors of violence who are copying with the war and its consequences on them[6]. However, their roles are much broader in actual fact. In the four countries, as demonstrated in this report, women's place in the public, political sphere is not marginal. Rather, it is always present and has increased with changing political systems. Women participate in conflict as armed combatants,peace activists, and as formal peace politicians[7]

Women's agency in the demand of rights is apparent in the four countries. The agency is vividly portrayed by Zakithi Sibandze (2021) who portrays Swazi women as having withstood the odds of decades of frustration and repression and pronounced gender inequality and continue to speak out. This is exemplified by the recent protests where the Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly passionately campaigned for the "removal of the security forces from our communities" demanded a "feminist government" and a "new democratic dispensation". The Swazi Rural Women's Assembly did not just demand the removal of an authoritarian regime, but the deconstruction of the patriarchal assumptions on which it rests as well (Zakithi Silibandze (2021).

The agency is also evident in the Global Fund for Women (2021)'s account of the Sudan protests which ousted al-Beshir. Dubbed the women's revolution, women accounted for an estimated 70 percent of the protesters[8]. During these protests, women said that they would rather die in the streets than go home to more repression[9] In Ethiopia, this urgency is apparent in the work of such organisations as the Ethiopian Women lawyers Association, which used the human rights framework to challenge legislation which discriminated against women and to raise awareness of issues such as violence against women (Gemma Burgess, 2017)

There is a consensus among international actors on the need to involve women in peace processes more proactively in countries undergoing conflict and or transition (Anna larson et al 2019). This idea is championed by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325).

---

6 Gemma Burgess, A Hidden History: Women 's Activism in Ethiopia, Journal of International Women's Studies, Vol 14, Article 7, issue 3

7 Tsjeard Bouta and Georg Frerks, Women's Roles in Conflict Prevention, Conflict Resolution, and Post Conflict Reconstruction, Literature Review and Institutional Analysis

8 The Women's Revolution In Sudan: We Stand In Solidarity With Feminist Activists Fighting For Their Freedom https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/latest/article/sudan-womens-revolution-fighting-for-freedom/

9 Ibid

UNSCR 1325 is a product of the realisation that women's experiences in both peace and conflict remain largely unnoticed by international actors and policymakers[10] despite existing evidence that women are active agents of peace, resolving conflicts at all levels of society. Lack of recognition of the work that women do in resolving conflicts at local levels has resulted in little or no recognition of this peace building work of women and the resultant sidelining in peace negotiations and peace forums.

UNSCR 1325 is severely under-implemented by member states. This is evident from the fact that since its adoption, women have participated as negotiators in peace agreements in only 9 percent of cases[11]. Moosa Zohra et al (2013) argue that only one in 40 peace treaty signatories over the last 25 years has been a woman[12]. Less than a third of agreements signed during this period contain any references to gender (UNPO Secretariat 2011: 12; Noma, Aker and Freeman 2012: 21; Ellerby 2013) As a consequence, women's agency and their contributions to peace and democratisation processes have been severely restricted[13]. There is need to acknowledge and recognise the work that women are doing in resolving and transforming conflicts at local levels and to include them in formal peace building processes such as peace negotiations and peace treaty signings. Limiting women's participation in peacebuilding processes excludes the opinions of women from marginalised communities, denying them the opportunity to define and address their own concerns and needs and erasing their experience and knowledge of the conflict in question from the public agenda[14]. The peace building efforts taken by women in all the four countries in this study are documented in this report.

10
Anna Larson, Jenny Hedström, Joanna Pares Hoare, Rosalie Arcala Hall and Sara E. Brown, Women in Conflict and Peace, https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/women-in-conflict-and-peace.pdf

11
Ibid

12
From the private to the public sphere: new research on women's participation in peace-buildin https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/from-the-private-to-the-public-sphere-new-research-on-womens-participation-in-p-305233/

13
Ibid

14
Ibid

5 Findings

5.1 Understanding Transitions and Conflicts in the times of the Covid-19 Pandemic

African transitions to democratic governance span from the liberation actions to end colonial and patriarchal oppression to the post independent civil unrests and conflicts that are seen in countries such as Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Sudan among other countries across the continent today. Civilians and women in particular continue to fight for basic access to economic opportunities and self-determination in the modern nation states. The organising by different political and social justice movements to democratize is subjected to human rights violations-including arbitrary arrests; torture; abductions; economic disenfranchisement and a heightened sexual violation of women from organised state supported groups or states themselves. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic compounded state repression and increased women's vulnerability in all aspects of life. As one young woman political activist in Eswatini
highlighted, *''Covid-19 has created every woman to be a domestic worker or a housewife. Women have been cut off from politics and men are not helping''*. To unpack the lived realities of women, and their roles and power in transitions and conflicts amidst a global health crisis, the EEMSI established the following.

5.2 Deepening socio-economic inequalities

Conflict and the resultant humanitarian emergencies it creates in all the four countries deepen existing inequalities and discrimination against marginalized groups, increases sexual violence and disrupt lifesaving health services for women. It increases their insecurities, exposes them to social and economic vulnerabilities, catalyses their exploitation and exposure to various forms of violence including violence against women (VAW). In addition to suffering from lack of security, food, health and education, women in all four countries are survivors of increased psychological, physical and other forms of violence. War and Covid-19 related curfews made streets unsafe for informal traders who are predominantly women (60 percent in Eswatini, 59 percent in Mozambique[15], 59 percent in Sudan and 68,5 percent in Ethiopia[16]) In Eswatini, women who went out to trade in the streets during the lockdown and curfews found themselves in conflict with penal law and as such, exposed to arrests and loss of wares. In Cabo Delgado, venturing into the streets meant exposure to kidnapping, raping and trafficking by the insurgents.

---

15 The Enabling Environment For Women In Growth Enterprises In Mozambique, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---ifp_seed/documents/publication/wcms_184769.pdf

16 A Comparative Study of Women in Formal and Informal Businesses in Jigjiga City, Ethiopia : Characteristics, Linkage, Challenges and Way forwards

Displacement as a result of conflict and unrests meant loss of wares by informal traders and disruptions to most of their gainful economic activities. In all the four countries, no measures were put in place to cushion the women whose incomes were eroded as a result of conflict and the Covid-19 pandemic induced lockdowns. Such safeguards (extending loans, stimulus packages and injecting money into the financial markets to help businesses recover from the adverse effects of the pandemic and conflict) were only accessible to formal businesses such as in the case of Mozambique and Eswatini which offered relief packages to formal businesses which were in distress as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Most banks require title of land or other immovable property as collateral, yet most women do not own such property. Informality, which also meant lack of collateral security, meant inability to access these cushions by women.

Collateral security can be in the form of land, which most women do not have. In Mozambique, only 25 percent of the women have land title use rights. In Ethiopia, under the customary system of tenure, marriage is a primary means of getting access to land.This means that women's access to land is entirely through male family members, hence giving them only subordinate rights. This path to land rights is susceptible to breakdowns in relationships due to divorce, death and the changing priorities of male landowners, underscoring the fact that although women hold land on behalf of their male children, they may be deprived of access and ownership to all or part of the land in question when the boys grow up to claim it[17]. Similarly, in Sudan, the authority to allocate community land lies with a system of local chiefs and individuals and groups have rights to land through membership in the community. Land, once possessed by an adult male in accordance with existing rules, can be inherited by his son while women have access to land only through male relatives[18]. In Eswatini, women were not allowed to own land or property until recently when a court ruled against his practice. The Constitution of 2005 vests executive authority for the management and governance of land in the Ngwenyama (the Siswati term for the King) in trust for the Nation . Even if one has title deeds, the King can still dispossess one of the land as he wishes. Activists who dared oppose the Monarch were dispossessed of their land.

Deep at the bottom of the economic inequalities common in the four countries, with a slight variation in Ethiopia, which all participants pointed as the drivers of the unrests and conflicts was corruption by those in power for their self-enrichment at the expense of citizens (kleptocracy). Deriving its meaning from a Greek word, kleptocracy is defined as a government that pursues its own self-enrichment at the expense of its citizens. Mozambique is ranked at 2,7 out of 10 on the

---

17
Forum for Social Studies, Policy Brief Number 40, Women Land Rights and Land Utilisation In Ethiopia, https://www.fssethiopia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Policy-Brief-No.-43-EN.pdf

18
Food and Agricultural Organisation, Gender and land Rights Database, https://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/country-profiles/countries-list/land-tenure-and-related-institutions/en/?country_iso3=SDN

Corruption Perceptions Index where 0 represents highly corrupt and 10 represents clean[19]. Sudan is considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world, with a ranking of 174 on the Corruption Perception Index. Ethiopia is ranked at 87 on the Corruption perception Index, the lowest among the four countries under study. Women suffer corruption to a greater extent due to the unequal power relations and distribution of resources between men and women. Corruption exacerbates these power dynamics, limiting women's access to public resources, information and decision-making, thus reinforcing social, cultural, and political discrimination[20].

The general loss of income from the pandemic and unrests/conflicts, coupled with the continued misappropriation of resources by governments have exposed most of their citizens to poverty. Public services have continued to diminish, with access to basic rights such as health, education, water, sanitation and roads gradually becoming non-existent. In Ethiopia, 73 percent of the healthcare facilities were destroyed by the war when hundreds of thousands of pregnant women are in dire need of maternal and obsteric care and when survivors of gang rape and mass rape are in need of post rape care. According to the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survery of 2016, 23 percent of women aged between 15 and 49 have survived physical violence at some point in their lives, and 10 percent have experienced sexual violence. Violence against women in the home has been rife and more girls, young women and women have been subjected to the scourge of HIV. Violence experienced in the unrests and conflicts has remained very gendered, as women are sexually violated in the public space and stigmatised for that violence and their participation at the same time. According to the United Nations, 22 500 women have suffered sexual violence in Tigray. Human Rights Watch[21] reports that by December 2021 in Mozambique, 600 girls had been kidnapped, enslaved and shared amongst the fighters as sex slaves.

5.3 Shrinking political and organising space

When the civic space is open, it works as an arena where individuals, communities and organisations are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance. In conflict torn countries, opportunities to organise and participate in the civic space are often limited. War causes anarchy and chaos. Violence and the horrific experiences undergone by women including

---

19 Overview of Corruption and Anti-Corruption in Mozambique, Transparency International, https://www.u4.no/publications/overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption-in-mozambique.pdf

20 Angélica Fuentes Téllez, The Link Between Corruption and Gender Inequality: AHeavy Burden for Development and Democracy, retrieved on the 16th of March 2022 from https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-link-between-corruption-and-gender-inequality-heavy-burden-for-development-and

21 Mozambique: Hundreds of Women, Girls, Abducted, Human Rights Watch, 7 December 2021, https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/07/mozambique-hundreds-women-girls-abducted

inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment all have the effect of displacing them from the public sphere, important political positions and decision making spaces. Violence in Cabo Delgado, Sudan, Tigray and Eswatini has confined women either to their homes or in the displaced persons camps.   In Sudan, Ethiopia, and Eswatini, civic work is criminalised and humanitarian corridors are closed.

All the four countries consider citizen participation a democratic right. In Sudan, the Bill of Rights (Chapter 14) provides for women's rights under Section 49 and right to freedom of assembly and organisation under Section 58. Ethiopia's constitution provides for the right to freedom of assembly, demonstration and petition under Article 30 and freedom of association under Article 31. In Mozambique, freedom of expression and information is provided for under Article 48 while Eswatini provides for freedom of assembly and association in Section 25 of the constitution. However the EEMSI established that there are contradictions between what's on paper and practice as all four governments deliberately close out civic and political space to organise and for opposition political parties to freely mobilise.

Although the coming into power of Abiy Ahmed ushered in a new era of optimism and reform as evidenced by the release of high-profile political prisoners, lifting of draconian state of emergency, appointment of women into half of the cabinet posts and making significant strides to deconstruct the authoritarian governance system, the same period has seen a sharp increase in lawlessness, intensified domestic conflict, heightened identity-based violence and huge internal displacement. The reforms have lifted the lid on ethnic tensions by unsettling the four-party coalition government. The outbreak of the Tigrayan war in 2020 has diminished prospects of fully opening up democratic space in Ethiopia as the government has reverted back to authoritarianism in a bid to contain the war. Such acts of authoritarianism include arbitrary arrests and detentions of Tigrayans, activists and journalists[22]. In reverting back to authoritarianism, the government sealed off democratic space for women civil society organisations such as the Ethiopian Women lawyers Association. Authoritarianism has also resulted in the closure of humanitarian corridors from which individual women activists and women organisations received the much needed support.

In Eswatini, opposition political parties are banned, not recognised and not allowed to operate. A representative of one of the political parties in Eswatini stated that:
"As political parties we are not allowed to operate and meet freely. It's very risky and we sometimes gather in our homes and sometimes in local churches and other different kinds of places. We do have structures and branches in place across all regions of the country".

22
"Ethiopia: End Arbitrary detentions of Tigryans, activists and journalists in Addis Ababa and reveal whereabouts of unaccounted journalists", Amnesty International,16 July 2021

Women who dare challenge the status quo are arrested. The quotation below is testimony to that:
"I was lucky that I was released without any charges but we have a lot of people including our women members who have been arrested on false charges and have been taken to courts"

In Sudan, women played a prominent role in the protests that led to al-Bashir's overthrow. Although a transitional government that replaced al-Bashir's regime repealed the public law used to regulate women's dress and behaviour, the political and organising space was not completely opened as some restrictions remained. These restrictions are apparent in Amira Osman, a women's rights activist's arrest and a pattern of violence against women's rights activists that severely reduced their political participation in Sudan[23].

5.4 Heightened vulnerability of women human rights defenders and sexual minorities

In Mozambique, statistics from UNHCR indicate that of the 732 000 people who were displaced by the war in Cabo Delgado, more than half of them were women, 15 000 of whom were pregnant. In Ethiopia, 110 000 of the women affected by the Tigray war are in need of maternal care, when only 28% of the healthcare facilities are active. Lactating and pregnant mothers in Ethiopia's displaced persons camps are malnourished, unable to breastfeed and are in a terrible state of psychological distress, trauma and tiredness.

 In all the four countries, the state uses force to subdue citizen protests and silence dissenting voices during the conflicts, exposing women to more forms of violation. Dirty war tactics in Cabo Delgado and Tigray place women at the epicentre of conflict. In July 2021 Amnesty International reported that
"It is clear that rape and sexual violence has been used as a weapon of war to inflict lasting physical and psychological damage on women and girls in Tigray"
In Ethiopia and Mozambique, rape is used as a weapon of war. In these two countries, graphic details of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of women which include mass rape, gang rape, allocation of women captives to fighters as sex slaves were reported.

In Eswatini, there were 1 020 recorded cases of rape between April 2020 and January 2021. Statistics from a local sexual and reproductive health rights organisation in Eswatini indicate that the total number of cases of violence reported in a space of nine months was 3 297 which was extremely alarming and worrying for the citizens. In Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, 600 women were kidnapped and shared among fighters, raped, trafficked and exposed to sexual violence. In

---

23 Sudanese Women's Rights Activist Amira Osman Arrested in Raid, Aljazeera, 23 january 2022 , https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/23/sudanese-womens-rights-activist-amira-osman-detained-in-raid

Cabo Delgado, humanitarian staff also demanded sex in exchange for aid. It was also reported that in 2019 in Sudan, women human rights defenders who were arbitrarily arrested were sexually harassed and threatened with rape. In Mozambique, 17 women activists were arrested for protesting against Gender Based Violence, expropriation of women's products in informal markets, war crimes against women, among other women's rights violations, in front of the Justice Palace in Maputo in December 2021. One of the women activists had this to say: *"They used violence, pulled our hair, pulled us by the arms, performed a series of abuse and torture…"*[24] This evidence increased vulnerability to abuse and torture of women human rights defenders and other women in the conflict arenas.

In all these cases, opportunities for healing and access to justice by survivors through bringing their perpetrators to book are limited or non-existent as conflict has led to the breakdown of formal justice systems and heightened impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations. In Eswatini, the Monarch is flagrantly violating human rights with impunity. In Cabo Delgado in Mozambique, the rebels are committing war crimes unabated while in Sudan, the Coup government also acts with impunity and in Tigray in Ethiopia, women and girls' survivors of sexual violence are left without justice.

Women human rights defenders are subjected to stigmatization. Unlike their male counterparts who are considered heroic when arrested, women are blamed and stigmatised for their arrests. They are questioned or cautioned both in the home by close relatives who are supposed to be their pillars of support and in public spaces for 'having invited the trouble to themselves'. One of the women leaders in Eswatini had this to say,
"There is so much high inequality in this country. We are living with so much violation of human rights, threats, police brutality and excessive use of military force. Never in my lifetime did I ever imagine that my beautiful country of Swaziland would see so much bloodshed and use of guns and live bullets on innocent people who include women and children.
Children were arrested, detained and brought before the courts in the absence of social workers.

In 2019 the registrar of companies in Eswatini refused to register a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) nongovernmental organization on the grounds that the constitution and domestic laws do not protect against discrimination on the basis of sex or sexual orientation and prohibit same sex relations. The LGBTI organisation challenged the government's stance as

---

24
Mozambique: 17 Women Rights Defenders Detained: Watch,
https://clubofmozambique.com/news/mozambique-17-womens-rights-defenders-detained-watch-206436/

being unconstitutional in a lawsuit that to date, remains pending.[25] In Ethiopia, both male and female same-sex sexual activity is illegal since 2004, with a penalty of imprisonment of 10 years or more, according to The Criminal Code (Proclamation No. 414/2004 Art. 629, 630,106)[26]. In Sudan, same sex offenders were subjected to capital punishment and death sentences. The 2020 amendments replaced capital punishment and death sentences with prison sentences. Mozambique is one of only three countries in Africa to offer anti-discrimination protection for LGBTI people, with protection on sexual orientation grounds in employment since 2007.

LGBTI persons who were open regarding their sexual orientation and relationships faced censure and exclusion from the chiefdom-based patronage system. Some traditional, religious, and government officials considered same-sex sexual conduct as neither morally Swati nor Christian. Despite these barriers, LGBTI persons conducted several well publicised public events, including a virtual pride celebration and various organised dialogues, all of which occurred without incident[27]

5.5 Women's participation and agency in Transitions and Conflicts

During times of transitions and conflicts, women are not passive victims. In all the four countries, women continue to play critical roles in various ways. Although rarely told, the narratives of women in transitions and conflicts are stories of courage, hope and resilience. EEMSI established that young women and women are participating in transitions and conflicts in Eswatini, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Sudan in some of the following ways:

a. Heroic Combatants

Young women and women in the four countries are playing significant roles in the countries in transitions and efforts to positively mitigate and resolve the ongoing conflicts. They are actively involved in mass mobilisation, political and human rights education, actual protesting and offering

---

25 Eswatini Human Rights Report, 2020, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 United States Department of State • Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ESWATINI-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

26 The rights of LGBTI in Ethiopia, retrieved on the 19th of March 2022 from: https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2021/05/07083358/rights-of-lgbt-persons-ethiopia.pdf

27 Eswatini 2020 Human Rights Report, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020 United States Department of State • Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour, : https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ESWATINI-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

solutions to end the conflicts and demand fulfilment of all citizens' rights, conducting local and international advocacy, providing care and supporting the affected.

Historically, in these four countries, women have been some of the most courageous and fierce freedom fighters and advocates. Over 4000 women fought as combatants in the Ethiopian-Eritrean War of 1998-2000[28]. One third of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which swept the capital Addis Ababa in 1991 and drove Mengistu into exile and installed Meles Zenawi into power were women[29], yet their heroism remains unsung. Lieutenant Yvonne Umwiza, who leads a contingent of female naval soldiers in the Rwandan Defence Force has been leading women who fight alongside their male counterparts to push back rebels allied with the Islamic Stage Group in Northern Mozambique. She had this to say of women warriors, *"There are no specific challenges here in Cabo Delgado for us as female soldiers. We face the same problems as the men and we are well trained to perform our duties*"[30] In Sudan, women were at the forefront of the revolution that deposed al-Bashir. They accounted for over 70 percent of the protesters. In Eswatini and all the three countries, the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA) and other women's rights organisations continued to fight in the frontlines of the protests and conflicts.

b. Peace Building

An array of women's organisations and women leaders are doing remarkable work in each of the four countries, under difficult circumstances. The Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association trained and seconded its members to police stations to ensure that women activists who get arrested get better treatment.

Since her election as first female president of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde, together with her fellow female government appointees of the historic gender par cabinet, are using their power and authority to denounce war crimes, challenge the toxic values of militarism and patriarchy that make it possible for men to commit atrocities with impunity. She has embarked on a nationwide peace crusade wherein she mobilised and encouraged Ethiopians to embrace and maintain a culture of settling disputes peacefully. She said: "*We should all stand together and safeguard peace as it is the foundation of all things".* Local Ethiopian women have also been at the forefront in diverting key drivers of violence at local level which have the potential to degenerate into full blown armed conflicts. Examples of such initiatives include the Moyale Area Women's Peace Council and the

---

28 Ethiopian Women Return to Fight a New War, : https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopian-women-return-fight-new-war

29 Ibid

30 Female Soldiers on the frontline in Northern Mozambique, https://www.africanews.com/2021/08/17/female-soldiers-on-the-frontline-in-northern-mozambique//

Council Boru which advocates for peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups in the region and help to mitigate between them when conflicts start to simmer. They urge the sparring groups not to resort to violence and to embrace non-adversarial approaches to conflict resolution such as sustained dialogue and litigation. Ethiopian young women and women in the diaspora are and actively engaged in advocating for an end to the genocide, sexual violence, the shutting of social amenities and aid and the historical discrimination of the people of Tigray and Irob. The Tigray Youth Network and Irob Anina are some of these organisations who continue to organise and raise awareness on the situation in Tigray and Irob.

In Cabo Delgado, women's rights activists and organisations are organising amidst the conflict, giving hope and addressing the rights of girls, women and the crisis in the region amidst the fighting and proactively putting on the table ideas for conflict resolution and post conflict reconstruction. The girls have been building homes that would replace the homes lost as a result of the war in Cabo Delgado. This initiative seeks to provide inclusive and sustainable housing solutions to displaced women and girls affected by the Cabo Delgado war. Women peacebuilders in Eswatini were the first responders to the increasing violence in their country during the protests. Relying on dialogue as a peacebuilding tool and their access to various actors and stakeholders in the conflict, they are uniquely placed to lay the foundations for peace. For instance, they have been facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues with the Prime Minister, engaging with the diplomatic missions, and are in the midst of negotiating power with traditional authorities.

c. Advocacy on women's participation and representation
Participation and representation of women in their diversity remains crucial in the mitigation of conflicts and the post-conflict development priorities. Women's rights organisations in all the four countries have played pivotal roles to ensure that women are not left behind in understanding the root causes, manifestations and contribute in co-creation of solutions to address the cause of the conflicts and advance successful democratic transitions. They also mobilised communities and kept them informed on the ongoing situations.   In Ethiopia organizations such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyer's Association (EWLA) used the human rights framework to advance the righs of women in the private and public arena and to challenge violence against women[31]. Other women's rights organisations including the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), Tigray Youth Network, Irob Anina Civil Society (IACS), Tigray Action Committee among others remained on the frontline of amplifying the situation of women and girls in Tigray. [32]

---

31 Gemma Burgess, A Hidden History: Women's Activism in Ethiopia, https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48832687.pdf

32 Ibid

In Sudan, women were at the forefront of the revolution that overturned the rule of al-Bashir. The women's movement in Sudan perceived the revolution as a watershed time to dismantle patriarchy and to achieve gender equality. Central to the #FallThatisAll uprisings was the celebration of women. The once vilified, ridiculed and delegitimised roles of women activists were crowned the title "Kandaka", a name given to the Nubian queens of ancient Sudan[33] Despite registration restrictions imposed by the al-Bashir government, the number of registered NGOs focusing on women's rights issues rose to 37 by 2003[34], thereby constituting the bulk of civil society work. The women continued to outline and demand freedom, peace and justice as prerequisites for their participation in society including post the conflict.

In Eswatini, the Swaziland Rural Women's Assembly (SRWA), Liphimbo Labomake, Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA), African Women's Peace Organisation, Coalition of Women in Informal Sector, COSPE, Women Unlimited, One Billion Rising Swaziland and the Women's Rights Consortium of the Coordinating Assembly for Non-governmenttal Organisaions (CANGO) have passionately campaigned for the removal of the security forces from communities, justice for civilians, a feminist government and a new democratic dispensation. Women's rights activists and feminists including Doo Aphane, Nelisiwe Mtshali among others continue to contribute in deepening analysis on the inequality and injustice faced by women in Swaziland and call for systemic change to reform Eswatini society. Similarly, in Mozambique, women activists and organisations such as Promura, Form Mulher among others are demanding an end to atrocities targeted at women and Cabo Delgado for the peaceful participation of women and realisation of the people of Cabo Delgado's socio-economic and political rights. They are also calling for the eradication of historical inequalities and access to economic opportunities by Mozambicans for the development of their communities and the country. The organisations have also called upon an end to sexual violence against girls and women and by both government and rebel forces and police brutality against informal markets dominated by women.

d. Movement building

Individual and groups of women in Ethiopia, Sudan, Mozambique and Eswatini have joined hands with other women from the rest of the world in the biggest mass action to end violence against women (cisgender, transgender, and those who hold fluid identities that are subject to gender-based violence) in human history, in the mould of One Billion Rising. One Billion Rising is premised on the staggering statistic that 1 in 3 women on the planet experiences violence during her lifetime, a statistic which would amount to more than one billion women and girls experiencing

---

33 The Revolution Continues: Sudanese Women's Activism,
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-46343-4_6

34 Ibid

violence[35]. Vulnerability to Gender based violence is particularly heightened in countries which are in conflict and transition such as the four countries under study. In Mozambique, the One Billion Rising Movement is coordinated by Josina Machel, a human rights activist. In Ethiopia, the One Billion Rising is coordinated by the Women For Change club, a group of inspired women who work to empower women through personal and professional development. In Sudan, the One Billion Rising Movement is organised by the Maidanik Movement, a Sudanese feminist revolutionary independent movement while in Eswatini, the movement is coordinated by Liphimbo Labomake also known as the Eswatini Women's Coalition/Movement. The One Billion movement has called for an end of all forms of violence against women and the meaningful inclusion of women in conflic resolution and post conflict reconstruction processes in all four countries.

e. Sexual and reproductive health services

Women in the countries under study developed local based solutions to ensure women's continued access to sexual reproductive health services under these difficult circumstances. In Sudan, during the war, women and girls in rebel held areas of the Nuba mountains of Southern Kordofan had little or no access to contraception, antenatal care or emergency obstetric care[36] Bombardment, destruction of clinics by bombing, poor distribution of medicines, and hard-to-cross frontlines all further reduced access to sexual reproductive health rights for women in Cabo-Delgado, Mozambique. Women activists from the displaced community of Cabo Delgado solicited and obtained support from the UNFPA and UN Women to install sexual reproductive health tents and girl friendly space which provided emergency sexual and reproductive health and gender Based Violence response services to those in need. These tents also distributed female dignity kits and deployed mobile clinics to remote areas.

Similarly, in Sudan, individual and women local groups solicited for and liaised with the UNFPA and other international development partners and obtained sexual reproductive health services (including tuk tuk ambulances) and distributed them among women who did not have access as a result of the conflict. In Ethiopia, organisations fighting "period poverty" include the Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory, formed by an Ethiopian woman named Freweini Mebrahtu who used her background in chemical engineering and her experiences growing up with period poverty in Ethiopia to create the Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory. This factory trains and employs local women to create washable, reusable sanitary pads that cost up to 90% less than average

---

35 One Billion Rising Appeal for Peace, https://www.onebillionrising.org/48400/one-billion-rising-appeal-for-peace/

36

disposable pads[37]. With proper care, the pads can last up to two years, making them more environmentally and financially sustainable for impoverished Ethiopian women.

Other organisations which provided similar services include Dignity Period which increased access to menstrual supplies and education in the Tigray and Afar regions of northern Ethiopia, distributed over 150,000 free menstrual hygiene kits containing reusable pads and underwear. Noble Cup is another women organisation which provides a safe, affordable option for women suffering from period poverty in Ethiopia. Its products can last up to five years even with limited access to water or sanitation, making them financially sustainable in the long term. Noble Cup distributes these menstrual products and holds workshops with the slogan "Every Queen Bleeds" that teach girls about menstrual health and safety as well as female biology. In Eswatini, SWAGAA is on the forefront of fighting against gender based and sexual violence and also advocating for adequate legislation for the protection of women.

5.6 The Power of Feminist Solidarity

Feminist solidarity can be defined broadly as the principle of mutual support among individuals, groups and organisations working on gender equality and women's rights[38]. The word 'feminist' is used to refer to advocating or supporting the rights and equality of women[39]. Feminist solidarity strengthens the power of women to challenge structural inequality and injustices. y[40]. Through taking action collectively, women can draw on their pooled skills, knowledge and resources, enabling them to hold each other and take courses of action which would not be available to individuals and collectives. It also enables them to lessen the risks associated with isolated resistance[41]

Feminist solidarity provides a support system for women to rebuild their lives, assist survivors of violence to get healing and justice and continue fighting injustices[42]. In Ethiopia, Women for

---

37 Fighting period poverty in Ethiopia, https://borgenproject.org/fighting-period-poverty-in-ethiopia/

38 Caroline Sweetman, Introduction, Feminist Solidarity and Collective Action, https://www.jstor.org/stable/24697244

39 Ibid

40 Ibid

41 Ibid

42 Every woman has the power to transform her world. When women work together, we have the power to create a better world for all of us, https://www.womenforwomen.org/about-us

Women International partnered with a local organisation, Mum for Mums, to provide support to survivors of sexual violence.

A participant from a coalition organisation in Eswatini underscored the importance of feminist solidarity and providing security trainings to continuously support women activists in transitional and conflict situations to cope with the struggles and to minimise the reversal of gains. She highlighted that,

"in line with providing feminist solidarity organisations such as AWLF also need to look at offering safety and security trainings for civil society organisations and their members". Another remarked that it was the first time since Eswatini's unrest that a delegation visited to meet and stand in solidarity with women. They commended AWLF for the solidarity mission and encouraged that such support and solidarity be extended to all African countries going through transitions and conflicts as such times are usually discouraging and traumatic.

6. Recommendations

A number of recommendations were given by the various participants of EEMSI. Some recommendations also came from the literature reviewed by the EEMSI team. For the purposes of providing practical and context specific recommendations, these are provided on a country per country basis. The recommendations are targeted at both national governments and other actors including organisations such as AWLF, regional and international community.

6.1 Eswatini

Recommendations to Government

1. The spike in Gender Based Violence in Eswatini must be declared a national disaster
3. Deconstruct traditional norms and values that perpetuate gender inequality and violence against women
4. Promote multi-stakeholder dialogue and the peaceful resolution of the current crisis
4. Promote and protect women's rights to own property including land
5. Promote young women and women's participation and gender equality in all decision-making spaces.
5.Put measures to ensure judicial independence, safeguard the judiciary from capture by the Monarch
6. Put in place a democratic, transparent and accountable governance system that guarantees all Swazi's full socio-economic, civil and political rights. This also entails reinstatement of political parties and multi-party democracy.

Recommendations to Civil Society, regional bodies and international community

1. Provide feminist solidarity to women human rights defenders including   skills training, connecting them to existing resources relevant to their situation and practical support in times of distress,

2. Exert pressure on the Monarch to respect the rights of the women and people of Swaziland **6.2**

6.2 Mozambique

Recommendations to government

1. Promote gender equality and end violence against women

2. Promote transparent, accountable and equitable access and control of natural resources to serve the interests of locals and the country.

3. Put an end to gas and fossil fuels exploitation and illicit financial flows by multinational corporations

4. Promote sustainable utilisation of natural resources by locals and for the development of the country

5 Promote media freedom and stop censorship, arbitrary arrests and detentions of journalists, human rights defenders and civilians.

Recommendations to Civil Society, regional bodies and international community

1. Provide feminist solidarity to women human rights defenders in Cabo Delgado in particular and Mozambique in general

 2. Document and publish women's experiences and roles in the Cabo Delgado crisis

3. Regional bodies and international community to investigate possible war crimes in Cabo Delgado and recommend the Mozambican government to take necessary measures to facilitate justice for victims and survivors

6.3 Ethiopia

Recommendations to government

1. Open humanitarian corridors in Tigray

2. Investigate and put an end sexual violence against women and facilitate justtice for vicims and survivors

3. Put measures to respect the full citizenship of people of Tigray and Irob.

5 Invite international aid organisations to provide humanitarian support to needy women

6 Continue on the path of reform

6.4 Sudan

Recommendations to Government

2. Promote transparent, accountable and equitable access and control of natural resources to serve the interests of locals and the country.

3. Promote gender equality and democratic governance

4. Disarm, demobilise and reintegrate all military organisations and militias in the country

4. Ensure that women play a key role in the design and implementation of post-conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities

6.5 Recommendations to civil society, regional bodies and the International Community

1. Support and strengthen women's organisations in their peacebuilding efforts Strengthen the protection and representation of refugee and displaced women by paying special attention to their health, rehabilitation and training needs.

2. End impunity and ensure redress of crimes committed against women in violent conflict and promote justice culprits involved in rape as a war crime.

3. Establish mechanisms for enforcing and monitoring international instruments for the protection of women's rights in post-conflict situations