

“Exclusion is not an event but a process which builds up over time”

Interview with Oury Traoré

Ms Traoré, you were born in Mali but are currently based in Senegal. As the founder of the Madiba Institute for Leadership in West Africa and an International Senior Consultant, you advise regional and international organisations on peace- and security-related projects. In addition, you advocate the inclusion of women in political processes. In what way does exclusion contribute to violent conflict in West Africa?

There are so many forms of exclusion. I do not believe that exclusion is an event. It is not like you implement something and the conflict will happen immediately. Most of the time, exclusion is a process which builds up over time. People have grievances they don't manage to express. It is difficult to speak for West Africa as a whole region. Each country is different and the contexts are different despite the fact that we have a commonality. There are also many different forms of exclusion. One form of exclusion which massively affects women and different ethnic groups is political exclusion. However, women of course do

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not resort to violence in any way. But if you take the north of Mali as an example, there is not just political exclusion; you will also find economic exclusion, social exclusion and even cultural exclusion somehow. So, depending on the country and the nature of the exclusion, there are different conflicts arising. It is important to carry out a deep analysis of each conflict to be able to determine which kind of exclusion has contributed to violent conflict.

What is needed, in your opinion, to better include women in political processes?

That is a big one and I think about this a lot myself. As I keep saying everywhere, no matter what type of intervention we do, how much money we fuel into development projects and different activities, women constitute more than half of our population, qualitatively and quantitatively.

So we cannot exclude them but still have no adequate answer on how to integrate them. What I have noticed while doing some work for UN Women in May last year is that women rarely have the technical and financial resources they need. You have many women candidates who are very courageous and want to enter the political scene and so on but they don't have the support. So organizations come and offer training here and there. But to be a candidate, whether in local or national elections, you require a lot of resources. Political campaigning costs money and women often don't have that kind of support. So we need to provide them with the required support to enhance their political participation. The legal framework is already in place. For example, there is the African Union's Maputo Protocol [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2003], which says that women have to be integrated at all levels. In addition, there is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security from

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2000. Also, all of our national laws and constitution talk about discrimination and exclusion and so on and yet women are not able to claim support. We have to have targeted support, technical support and financial support. We also need to put in a quota system, which is working in some of the countries, for example in Senegal and Cape Verde, but we still have a long way to go.

What role should international actors play in creating the basis for sustainable peace?

Most of the time I think it's very simple: We need to have a change of attitude and work on our own assumptions and our own biases. When you come into the system you should not act like you know the context more than the people who live there. The bottom line is: When I come into your house, you know your house more than I do. And international actors have to play a supportive

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role, not lead the process for the local people. People learn by doing, not by being told to go left and right. It is also difficult if you set the agenda for the local people and then expect that the process can be sustained. A second issue is the aspect of flexibility. Most of the time, when international actors come into a situation, their support is time-bound. And often, they are not flexible. But when you come and work in the context of conflict, it is a long process. So you have to have time, resources and patience. Also, international actors need to understand one thing: Anybody who survived years of conflict has so much resilience. So the

assumption to always say “oh they do not have the capacity” is wrong. The starting point is the resilience of the people. You need to build on the resilience and not come in and assume there is no capacity. This is the only way we can sustain our activities and have collaboration and “walk the talk”. At the rhetorical level, we get very intellectual with the concept of “sustaining peace” and Agenda 2030. But we have to see that a problem that affects my country will also affect the neighbouring countries and eventually everyone else. We are living in a global world and we need to work in global solidarity and let the people who are affected by the problem lead the process.

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Oury Traoré

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