Women, Peace and Security:

Gender Perspectives on Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

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"We all know and are in the habit of repeating the fact that civilians constitute 90 percent of the victims of conflict and the majority of that number we know are women and children. And there are two approaches to this dilemma. One is to focus on the children and if you do that you get children.

But if you focus on women you get everybody".

– Jane Holl Lute

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Introduction

Peace is and always will be a process. It is multi-tiered, built and sustained. It will always require constant safeguarding by networks of people across cultures and time. Peace is a course of action across a multitude of criteria. Women are a key criterion and serve as principle actors in conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies. Gender informs perspective on men, women, communities, culture and identity. It is the cornerstone to an understanding of conflict and peace anywhere. Gender perspectives are far more than women's perspectives; they are a holistic viewpoint needed to craft policy on security. Policies and programs aimed at promoting peace cannot be sustainable and effective without a gender dimension. Arguably, the concept now embodied in the notion of gender mainstreaming has existed for some time although it was fragmented into ideas of local environment and indigenous culture, applied as appendages to strategic policy. Gender mainstreaming represents a modern approach of integrating the criterion associated with peace and conflict and analyzing them collectively, recognizing links, patterns, intersections and associations between issues, trends and outcomes.

As it is often said, the end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new and more complex type of conflict. War is no longer defined as interest-based conflict between states. Scholars in the area of conflict resolution suggest that non-state actors are key players during conflict and in the process of resolving it. This recognition has produced different approaches to conflict analysis and prevention.[1] The concept of human security has consequently become more popular. Conflict is now viewed as *privatized*, involving civilians and non-combatants revolving around ethno-political questions of identity, struggles for liberation, independence, and self-determination.[2] The implication of this is a formal change in policy terms of the actors who have a role in conflict prevention and reconstruction. New concepts of conflict prevention emphasize a role for women and civil society as well as partnerships between them with governments, international/non-governmental organizations to generate multi-layered, comprehensive capacities.

Modern perspectives on conflict prevention and peacebuilding have led to visible efforts to gender mainstream in recognition of the valuable contributions women can make to peace and security.[3] An international benchmark was set in October 2000 when the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It was a watershed resolution building upon work that began 35 years ago.[1] It called for women's full participation in peacemaking, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian activity, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts as well as in peace processes. But, it remains to be effectively, methodologically implemented. The potential for women's contributions to conflict prevention and peacebuilding is not in question. What is less understood is how to accurately conceptualize gender and women in this context and how to integrate gender mainstreaming into peace and security activity and policy. To this end, this article exposes the 'big picture' on gender issues associated with contemporary conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts. It reviews women's roles in conflict and its outcomes to highlight their agency in peacebuilding and the problems associated with attempting to homogenize them as actors. It then examines women's unique post-conflict experiences and the problems linked to consolidating empowerment. The article concludes with policy recommendations related to improving gender mainstreaming prior to conflict and afterwards.

Women and Conflict Prevention

There are two ways to view women's roles in conflict prevention. One side of this issue is outside of a developing country context where women are playing increasingly visible roles in professional security-related jobs such as police, intelligence officers, and active personnel in the armed forces, navy and air force. Currently, women serve in 95 percent of all US Army occupations and make up about 15.7 percent of the Active Army.[4] In January 2014, the US Army announced it would provide 33,000 jobs to women in 132 military occupational specialties.[5]

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[1] Significant milestones in international women's rights instruments include: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Women's Convention 1979), the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Declaration of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing (1995), and in 2000 the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Further UN Security Council Resolution 1820 and Resolution 1888 emphasized the need to protect the rights of women during armed conflicts, to prevent sexual violence, and to fully integrate women into post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction processes.

Despite more women being professionally involved in conflict prevention, there is still room for improvement evidenced by the low level of presence among female uniformed persons in national deployments to UN peace operations. In March 2013, less than 4 percent of UN peacekeepers globally were female, which represents approximately 3 percent of UN military personnel and about 9.7 percent of UN police.[6] Progress has been uneven. The other side of the issue is inside a developing country context where conflict is a threat. Traditionally, women in this context made their biggest contributions to structural issues that prevented the resurgence of conflict,[7] but they are now increasingly becoming involved in the operational aspects of conflict prevention in areas such as early warning and de-escalation.[8] Urban and rural women contribute differently. Therefore, women play diverse roles depending on their country-level context, socio-economic standing, education level and legal and cultural entitlements regarding participation.

Conflict prevention evolved conceptually from Track I diplomacy, which focused on macro-level, official government-to-government diplomacy to Track II diplomacy, which emphasized a role for civil society due to its capacity to indirectly influence peacemaking *between* conflict parties and *within* a conflict party, both of which can transform conflict.[9] It was a bottom up approach that focused on the micro-level. The latest trend in conflict prevention is the Track III approach "defined as humanitarian and development assistance which may or may not have explicit peacebuilding objectives but will have an effect on the context in which peace negotiations are occurring."[10] In short, it emphasizes developmental issues over all others as a means of preserving peace. The concept is that socio-economic structures and human security are key conflict preventative measures. Yet, in terms of gender, Track III approaches have failed to adequately address Maxine Molyneux's useful analytical distinction between *practical* and *strategic* gender interests during the peacebuilding phase.[11] Molyneux highlighted *practical* gender interests as primary needs like access to childcare, healthcare, food, for example and *strategic* gender interests as those aimed at generating social gender conversion typically associated with women's empowerment. Developmental CR approaches focus on *strategic* interests primarily on the premise development and peace are correlated, which they are, but

less so than physical security and basic human security and conflict. [12] In fact, it is now understood that basic levels of women's human and physical security are more central to peace and stability than any other indicator.[13] Furthermore, empowerment cannot be actualized without women having access to the most basic human needs. Taking a less developmental approach and a more gendered, human-centered strategy is crucial to addressing underlying conflict leading to de-escalation and preventative diplomacy, which itself is a first step toward women's empowerment.[14]

Conflict transformation is a process that targets the root causes of widespread violence and conflict by generating human security, and providing for simple human needs. This supports justice and reconciliation.[15] It is a people-centered, rather than a state-centered strategy. However, from a gender perspective this approach suffers from an "add women and stir" tactic because the link between conflict structures and the increase and decrease of violence is understood, yet the necessity of holistic integration of gender issues is not found in Track III preventative approaches.[16] At the core of this issue is the poor integration of strictly development programs with peace and security programs. The mandates are perceived to be distinct although overlapping. Conflict resolution practitioners are weary of doing "development work" and prefer to address strictly peace and conflict issues. This explains why conflict prevention policies are less developmental than they need to be, aiming above the mark at *strategic* interests at the expense of actual preventative measures that directly or indirectly support the same goals. This issue is paradoxically complex and simple at the same time.

Early warning and early response (EW/R) is a pillar of operational conflict prevention. There is a range of theoretical and practical methods to EW/R, but a consensus exists on the core mechanisms: data collection, data analysis, identification of different scenarios, formulation of action proposals, transmission of recommendations, and assessment of early response.[17] In practice, these models are far from perfect and despite extensive research, it remains unclear if early warning really works as intended. It is known that those based 'on the ground' have the best chance of using the tool, and this has bearing on the role of gender in EW/R. A gender-

sensitive focus to EW/R improves early analysis and response options. Gender-sensitive indicators must be included in order to make the process of collecting and analyzing data within current paradigms more effective and encompassing. It also improves anticipation of macro-level conflict through micro-level events such as weapon stockpiles or weapon hiding places. Furthermore, by including micro-level changes, responses can be fine-tuned to address specific vulnerabilities of men and women and mitigate the chance of conflict. Lastly, including women and women's organizations, both of which are peace actors, enhances prevention activity.[18]

However, it is important not to overstate the role gender plays in EW/R. As mentioned, women can support and undermine peace. Therefore, the challenge for EW/R practitioners is recognize situations where gender represents a conflict issue rather than to look for gender indicators everywhere.[19] Gender issues are a practical and empirically difficult to measure as a means of determining a rise in tensions, but useful because the trends are closely associated with the eruption of violent conflict. Thus, by narrowing the analysis of women to their social roles as mothers and monitoring levels of public and private violence against them serves as a significant and important early warning indicator.[20] Appreciating gender is an important tool does not mean it is always directly relevant although it can be of great value. Conversely, the existence of multiple gender roles and identities is an indicator of a peaceful society.

Interestingly, although it is known that equality fosters peace, women's participation in post-conflict peace negotiations and agreements, where crucial governance decisions are made, remains strikingly low. A review by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) of a sample of 24 major peace processes since 1992 shows that women represented only 2.5 per cent of signatories and 3.2 per cent of mediators.[21] A study in 2008 of 33 peace negotiations found that only 4-11% out of 280 negotiators were women and that the average participation of women on government negotiating delegations was 7% higher than delegations of non-state armed groups.[22] This is an obvious policy gap connected to the poor implementation of UN Resolution 1325. Yet, it is critical that women are involved in peace processes that often define the new structures and constitutions, including political and legal institutions. A peace process

provides a unique occasion for women to express their reservations, challenges and knowledge of conflict, but importantly it is an opportunity to have them heard. This can lead to their views being incorporated into reform processes. If successful, they can influence the entire political and legal structure of the country.[23] Local associations in post-conflict environments provide platforms for bringing women into peace efforts. It is with the broadening of peace processes that conflicts enter the de-escalation phase. This understanding reflects the need for improvement in civic involvement, especially women's groups in peace processes, which must be facilitated by governments and international organizations, which have the organizational capacity.

Women and Conflict

Women's roles in conflict and peace are multifarious and they are not homogenous: different religious beliefs, social and economic positions and ethnicities define them as a group.[24] Yet, women suffer disproportionately in violent conflict not just from its by-products, but they are also targeted as a strategy of war. Rape is often used as a weapon of war. Sexual violence is systematically employed to harm and demoralize individuals, terrorize communities, implant fear in populations to diminish opposition and/or provoke it. It is also a form of punishment and torture and it is used to affirm aggression.[25] The destabilization of families and communities can contribute to other forms of violence, including domestic violence. Sexual slavery, impregnation, forced marriage and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS are common consequences for women. Conflict and insecurity thus affect boys and girls, women, men in different ways.

It is deceptively easy to adopt dichotomies of men/public/war/protector and women/ private/ peace/ victim, and such polarizations are increasingly being criticized as an oversimplification. On one hand, women and girls experience armed conflict in the same way men and boys do. They are killed, injured, disabled, tortured, and suffer social and economic dislocation. They suffer the psycho-social impact as loved ones die or they witness violence against their families and

neighbours. They are affected by the resource depletion resulting from armed conflict. They join, or are forced to join, armed forces or insurgency movements.[26] While it is true women (and children) are victims of conflict, they are also perpetrators, combatants, survivors, protectors and peacebuilders. Appreciating this complexity is critical to understanding the role of women during conflict, and in conflict prevention, and post-conflict activities. Perceiving women primarily as victims overshadows their agency, undermines their efforts at progress and fails to capture their capacity.

Women play an important role in conflict outcomes. Since the early 1990s, peacebuilding initiatives have been building bridges with local civil society, and many of these organizations are headed by women, who organize themselves into groups and networks. Numerous case studies highlight the role women in conflict outcomes and reconstruction. To review just a few, women in Burundi had their demands for land law reform, access to education and rights included in the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement by mobilizing to define a common agenda for women through training, conferences, public debates and declarations.[27] In Côte d'Ivoire after the failure of the 2003 Linas-Marcoussis Agreement and the resumption of conflict, women lobbied for peace through media forums with the support of UNICEF[28] and later contributed to the 'Flame of Peace' – a public burning of stock piled weapons to launch the disarmament process.[29] In 1994, at the height of Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 war, women brokered peace between the government and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leaders through civil society groups and national networks.[30] Rebels used women they trusted to serve as communication conduits, effectively filling in the gaps between the two sides.[31] The success of Sierra Leone women led to the incorporation of comparable tactics in Guinea and Liberia. South Sudanese women have been contributing to reconciliation for years through song and dance, peace missions and marriage. Indigenous conflict resolution tools are invaluable and women are the key to unlocking them.

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Conflict transforms gender roles and post-conflict environments provide opportunity for women to play stronger roles in all aspects of public life. However, there are typically more challenges during this phase than opportunity. The challenges facing women during post-conflict reconstruction are associated with the impacts of amnesty agreements, psycho-social problems, reintegration, disarmament/demobilization, health, domestic violence, economic insecurity and sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), which can be structural or direct violence. Direct violence includes rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, and other prevalent forms of physical violence, which are linked to mental and emotional trauma as well as health related issues such as sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Direct SGBV also results in unwanted pregnancies that cause permanent stigmatization and stereotyping. These "bush babies" as they are often called also cause economic hardship as the women who have given birth are no longer chase and therefore considered undesirable potential wives. The corollary is that these young mothers will place an economic burden on their family as a result, which often leads them to reject her as well.

A key challenge associated with SGBV is under-reporting. In South Sudan, for example, only about eight per cent of women who had suffered violence reported it to the police.[32] One reason for this is the view that violence that occurs within the family is a 'private' affair. Fears of being stigmatized and weak technical and institutional capacity also contribute to under-reporting. In governmental offices that record SGBV cases, there is often a lack of forensic training, literacy and general knowledge. In South Sudan for example, illiteracy and language barriers are obstacles in the proper documentation and response to reports.[33] Poor roads and communication infrastructure also make it difficult for some to reach formal authorities. Further, the authorities to which the reports are issued are male, who embody patriarchal values in their handling of SGBV cases. In Eastern Equatoria State in South Sudan only 150 of the 2400 police officers are women.[34] This issue has a lot of policy relevance.

In post-conflict societies, addressing the psychological and social concerns of women is a significant challenge – for those who went to war and are returning and those who stayed behind. Women who fought have very different re-integration needs than men ranging from the trauma

of war experiences, health, disarmament and demobilization. The women who did not go to war, but stayed home and became heads households, have separate circumstances as well. In post-conflict societies, social roles are mixed-up. The issue of reintegration in this case is quite different as these women experienced empowerment and economic security. When men return from war, these working women are often expected to return to their culturally gendered roles. Patriarchal societies seek to re-establish a patriarchal social order. Women often attempt to resist the pressures. The policy issues are complex around this type of re-integration and programs need to include men. As men transition back into the workforce and compete for limited employment, women often remain income earners for a period of time. Evidence indicates returning men who cannot find employment and rely on employed women to support them become violent toward them.[35] In 2011, Human Security Baseline Assessment report revealed incidences of domestic violence against South Sudanese women increased since 2005 when the CPA was signed.[36] Women are victims of social reproach – they are either encouraged to return to their traditional roles or punished for working at a time income is needed and their male counterparts struggle to find employment.

Amnesty agreements are often made during post-conflict periods. It is understood that conflict affects women differently, but the impact of peace processes on women is not well studied or appreciated. There is considerable debate about whether granting amnesty, whether blanket or limited, contributes to reconciliation or undermines it. For the perspective of women, amnesty agreements create cycles of impunity and leave gross mental, physical and sexual violations against them unpunished and unacknowledged. Amnesty may lead to cessation of active conflict, but it simultaneously gives rise to serious and complex questions about the nature of justice and the price for peace – namely who pays for it. Is justice a privilege? Is peace more valuable than justice? Does amnesty create or reinforce roles for women? Does granting amnesty equate to approving the abuse of women? Are judicial systems robust enough materially and legally to hold trails for perpetrators? How can retributive, restorative and distributive justice[2] address women's

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[2] *Distributive justice*, or economic justice, is concerned with giving all members of society a "fair share" of the benefits and resources available although there is often disagreement about what constitutes a "fair share." *Retributive justice* is a retroactive approach that justifies punishment as a response to past injustice or wrongdoing. The central idea is that an offender must be punished to establish balance. It is a form of revenge. While a

experiences? To what extent are women doubly victimized and unprotected? Many women report the social dilemma of encountering their abusers in society after the war ended and living in fear of this interaction.[37] This prevents their active engagement in society.

Post-conflict peacebuilding also relates to women on matters of health due to the prevalence of STDs and HIV/AIDS. The reintegration of women associated with the conflict as sex slaves, for example, requires accessible health care facilities, which suffer from inadequate material and human resources. Many returning males, exposed to STDs and HIV/AIDS, are encouraged to marry in the community to promote reconciliation.[38] Chastity is a requirement for women alone. The community must cope with the effects of the disease(s), expensive or unaffordable drugs, stigmatization, and the burden of care and deaths, which extend beyond the family unit to society.[39] The importance of addressing public health care at a basic, effective level cannot be overstated. Several studies indicate that invisibility and vulnerability of women post-conflict elevates their risk of HIV infection more than any other factor.[3]

Beyond this, there is clear evidence to suggest sexual violence continues in the post-conflict phases exacerbating the HIV/AIDs issue. The situation was captured well in the concluding remark in the West African Network for Peace Building (WANEP) study of the Liberian situation:

> *In the post-conflict environment incidences of sexual violence have continued to be observed. Rape victims may be rejected by their families and communities … [and] abandoned by husbands. With no prospects for the future, some women and girls are driven into prostitution. Victims of previous acts of sexual violence may be dulled to the dangers of entering the sex trade.[40]*

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retributive justice approach conceives of transgressions as crimes against the state, *restorative justice* focuses on violations as crimes against individuals. It is concerned with healing victims' wounds, restoring offenders to law-abiding lives, and repairing harm done to interpersonal relationships and the community. Victims take an active role in directing the exchange that takes place, as well as defining the responsibilities and obligations of offenders. Restorative justice aims to strengthen the community and prevent similar harms from recurring. At the national level, such processes are often carried out through victim-offender mediation programs, while at the international level restorative justice is in the form of truth and reconciliation commissions (Maiese, 2003).

[3] Becker *et al*., 2008; Whiteside *et al*., 2006; Spiegel *et al*., 2007; and McInnes, 2009

Progress and the Challenge of Consolidation

Encouragingly, it is in post-conflict societies that roles can be changed and practices reconfigured. Indeed, history reveals it is the best time for change. Historically, the largest gains for African women have occurred during post-conflict transition periods as government and constitutions are typically reorganized.[41] For instance, women's political participation increased in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide and its parliament now has the world's highest level of female representation. Post-war Liberia elected Africa's first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. South Africa now has one of the most gender-sensitive constitutions in the world, and constitutional reform after Kenya's post-election violence in 2008 enabled women to strengthen constitutional provisions. The Sudanese National Interim Constitution (2005) was an occasion to make progress on women's legal rights although cultural traditions impeded the implementation of these laws. Despite hurdles, 25% of South Sudan's parliamentary seats were allocated to women after the 2010 parliamentary election to redress historical imbalances. An important aspect of that election was that 60% of the voters were women.[42]

In Afghanistan, as an example among many, the post-conflict environment opened the door for improved legal status, political participation and representation. In March 2003, Hamid Karzai's transitional administration ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) giving legal legitimacy for protection of women's rights and their public participation.[43] In December 2003, a fifth of the delegates of the *Loya Jirga* were women.[44] In January 2004, Afghanistan's new constitution called for gender equality and established the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) to monitor and protect these rights. Today, basic health care reaches 80 per cent of the population compared to 8 per cent in 2001. Maternal mortality rates declined from 1,600 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 327 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2013.[45] Civil society organisations have spread and lobby for women's rights. By April 2012, 1,707 local NGOs and 3,100 social organisations were registered with the economy and justice ministries respectively.[46] In 2013, 40 per cent of schoolchildren were girls, compared to an estimated 3 per cent under the Taliban in 2001.[47] Yet, despite these gains women struggle to consolidate their progress. Too often, women cannot access the rights enshrined in new constitutions for cultural and social reasons.

Customary law often remains the rule of law, which poses a challenge to the consolidation of new rights and freedoms gained through conflict-induced change. Even when new rights are codified, customary law is still frequently applied to reproductive rights, marriage, divorce, education, and health care. In other cases, the customs are sanctioned by religious authorities. For example, a new draft law in Iraqi parliament may legalize the marriage of girls as young as nine, a custom rooted in interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence.[48] The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported that "…incidents of violence against women remain largely under-reported due to cultural restraints, social norms and taboos, customary and religious beliefs, fear of social stigma and exclusion, and at times threat to life".[49] Interpretations of Sharia and tribal customs supersede legal rights. The United Nations Population Fund 2011 report estimated that in South Sudan "over 90 percent of day-to-day criminal and civil cases are executed under customary law, which is inconsistent with international human rights laws, [and] favours men." [50] Beyond accessing rights, participation in public life is also subject to restriction. In 2012, there was a 20 per cent increase in female civilian casualties in Afghanistan often associated with claims women are violating tradition and religion.[51] According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), in the first six months of 2013 female civilian casualties increased by another 61 per cent compared to the same reporting period in 2012.[52]

The central challenge is how to contain cultural backlash to women's empowerment in post-conflict environments. After war, men seek to re-establish their control over women, family structures and decisions.[53] Re-establishing the status quo of gender relations is considered tantamount to the restoration of normalcy.[54] Modified gender roles created by conflict are often collectively treated as exceptions. The setbacks can be social economic, political and institutional such as the case of Afghan women's representation in provincial assemblies, which has contracted significantly since 2010.[55] There has also been a backwards drift regarding the enforcement of the EVAW as it is seen to be in conflict with strict Sharia principles. In periods of political transformation, too often concepts of civil rights and democracy are only nominally promoted.[56] Women who did not internalize the transformations allow social and economic losses in exchange for less friction.[57] History confirms that patriarchal societies do not defend the spaces women create during struggle and tend to devalue the "accidental activism." [58] Thus,

post-conflict change can be a double-edged sword for women.   The risk of old pattern reinforcement is real.[59]

Policy Recommendations

A review of women's roles in conflict, its prevention and stabilization efforts afterwards reveals a great deal of depth and complexity while also shedding light on several areas where policy can be developed. To begin with, there is some blurriness surrounding the concept of gender and how to apply it to policies and programs. A starting point then is to clarify that a methodical framework grounded within socially assigned roles and identity of men *and* women is the only credible framework possible.[60] Gender must be understood as relational. Connected to this issue is the need to improve the contextual understanding of peacebuilders working in conflict environments. [61] Training on how to conduct gender analyses will help illustrate links between issues, the experiences of men and women during conflict and peace as well as to assess needs. It is an important part of gender mainstreaming, a concept also subject to misunderstanding. Rather than an "add women and stir" approach, the starting point for gender mainstreaming is that a policy already exists. The policy process then needs to (re)organized to enable the integration of a gender perspective into activities.[62] Policy effort should focus on removing variance in purpose, scope and objective from initiatives. Gender mainstreaming activity must be consistent in all areas of development programs, regardless of technical focus and it must be integrated into whole development programs.[63]

There are some practical polices that will improve the implementation of UN Resolution 1325, the first of which is for organizations to include gender perspectives in *initial* appraisals, mission statements and action plans so they permeate procedures, guidelines, manuals, and management responsibilities. Moreover, professional accountability of this dimension should be required of all staff. When gender is integrated into all peacebuilding activities, practitioners will think differently. Importantly, since the connection between women and networks is well understood, the gap regarding the lack of communication between them locally and

internationally requires attention. A database of women's groups and networks in conflict countries should be created and training on how to use it as part of peacebuilding programs.[64] Women's networks are also an excellent way to include women in peace agreements. These networks are excellent policy tools that so far have been under-utilized. Including women in peace negotiations and agreements makes them more durable and it serves as a conflict prevention strategy. To further enhance prevention strategies, working and funding priorities need to be shifted toward *practical* gender interests that would enhance the effectiveness of Track III gender and CR approaches on many levels. Attention needs to rest on laying the foundation to build capacities that enable the conceptualization of women's activism, which if nurtured will be expressed as political activism.

Understanding what women want is critically important, as is appreciating their unique needs. Re-integration is a pillar of post-conflict recovery and includes women, who have very different re-integration requirements than men. The re-integration challenge is twofold for women. There is a need for strategies to support those that went to war and those that stayed behind. Many peacebuilding programs fail to understand the bigger picture of re-integration issues and consequently do not cater to women's special circumstances.[65] For those that stayed behind, a different set of policies is needed. Beyond provision for women in the "rebalancing" transition, such as strategies to reduce incidences of domestic violence, there is a need for programs that encourage economic and political participation, which limit the extent of the confinement of women to their traditional roles. It is essential that men must be sensitized and educated to the benefits of empowering women economically. Policy development in this area must be holistic, integrated and carried out simultaneously. There is a need to target men and gain their acceptance of modified gender roles and reach out to women to build capacity through practical business training and skill development such as sewing and craft making. Economically empowered women tend to have fewer children and prioritize their education. Therefore, this is a conflict transformation strategy toward ending cycles of poverty.

On the other side of re-integration is the returning women, who are subject to societal stigmatization, familial rejection, marriage exclusion, economic insecurity, poor health due to STDs and HIV, fragile emotional states and powerlessness at times associated with amnesty

agreements. For women who went into war, policies aimed at establishing truth and reconciliation commissions, training female counsellors, providing livelihood opportunity for "abandoned" women, and staffing health facilities with adequate resources and effective staff are all good starting points. The sensitive issues around amnesty agreements require policies that give women a voice. A way of acknowledging the experiences and sacrifices of women in their cultural context must be formalized. There is a need to safeguard women more and take their psycho-emotional concerns into account as an independent, valued matter when peace agreements are negotiated preferably by including them as participants in the process. Developing gender sensitive programs, conducting public education initiatives and publicly recognizing the immense act of emotional bravery for victimized women at the level of government would all be steps in the right direction.

Linked to the issue of re-integration is access to health care to combat STDs and HIV/AIDs. Firstly, programs and policies need to be more robust in their support of rudimentary patient record keeping, follow up, communication and basic training. Serious gaps exist in this area. Furthermore, health tends to be considered a private matter, public education must be done to remove stigmas around visits to facilities. In another vein, the causes of transmission need to be reviewed and broken down. As returning men tend to marry in the community, there must be a reversal of the trend whereby programs to support the health care for returning men are less rigorous than those for women in order to avert the consequence of unrelenting transmission in post-conflict communities. This is tied to the prickly issue of pride and masculinity, a chief reason for the susceptibility of women to HIV post-conflict and needs to be addressed, albeit sensitively.[66] As highlighted earlier, when women are not clearly "seen" in post conflict environments, their risk of contraction grows. In this way, women need to become a distinct criteria of evaluation and monitoring. Work remains to be done on creating programs that focus on susceptibility and vulnerability factors to sexual violence, prostitution and involvement in the sex trade among women in post-conflict transition contexts. There is a lack of data on the incidence of rape and other sexual violence.[67] Research that disaggregates sex across multiple categories would be beneficial for designing prevention and impact mitigation programs better targeted at the most-at-risk groups.[68] A lack of health care is a problem-multiplier. The best way

to control sexual violence is to empower women with legal rights, educate men to support their equality and provide sufficient food and economic opportunities to gain agency of their own lives.[69]

Special attention was given to the challenges associated with consolidating progress made for women. Despite international and national policy frameworks, women face enormous challenges translating legal instruments into concrete change. Patriarchal culture is a significant aspect of the challenge. Perhaps the real challenge is to retain more than is lost. Research indicates that of all the gains women make as a result of modified gender roles, access to the labour market and economic independence seem to be the easiest advances to maintain their traction. It is far more difficult to achieve lasting changes to women's roles in the family or to modify traditional decision-making structures.[70] It would be erroneous to attempt to re-write history. To consolidate gains made, policies that grant women improved access to credit, micro finance at low interest rates and training, underpinned by governmental support and constitutional protection are useful. Women would benefit by having improved communication between their networks so resources such as computers, paper, desks, chairs, and the internet, if possible, would go a long way to support their agency. Aid money should be spent on paying wages for local women who volunteer at these women's organizations rather than foreign workers. If local women had a basic income, their valuable work would spiral upwards and ripple outwards. The key measure of success is whether a policy or program helps women support themselves. Agency is linked to educational opportunity. Rates of school drop-out and illiteracy are high among women due to discriminatory practices such as early marriage, multiple pregnancies, poor health care, and financial credit schemes do not reach them. Education and illiteracy are structural issues linked to a lack of agency.

In sum, the policy concept running through these issues is the need to link the core to the periphery. The following ten policy-relevant statements capture the web of conflict, peacebuilding, women's roles, and transformation. Gender issues are not "women's issues." Public education is a crucial aspect of long-term recovery and conflict mitigation, including the transmission of STDs and HIV/AIDS. Programs aimed at reducing sexual violence need to address

more than individual behaviour; they must be integrated and extend to social and economic vulnerabilities. Cultural notions of masculinity and institutionally embedded patriarchy make it difficult for women to consolidate positive post-conflict changes. Many gender-sensitive policies are not implemented as a result of inadequate human and physical resources and/or weak political. The latter can only be durably created across sectors and within hierarchies. It is essential that conflict transformation activities address different types of violence simultaneously. Women are a stabilizing force in their societies and represent the backbone of reconstruction and rehabilitation. Community mobilization needs to be systematically incorporated into partnerships that provide opportunity, resources and services to women. Women are active in informal networks, which represent a way to include them in formal peace processes. The creation of negative peace is just a precondition for further work, if the root causes are not addressed.

Conclusion

The issues associated with women are complex. Their roles can be diametric. They are combatants, perpetrators and suicide bombers as well as tolerant, strong, forgiving, capable forces of peace and transformation. It is important to understand women as victims and peacebuilders. They suffer in unimaginable ways in conflict environments, and paradoxically they also have the most to gain from them. Conversations on gender are timely and relevant, but too much of the 'gender discussion' occurs in offices and at conferences. It needs to be taking place 'on the ground.' In fact, a case can be made for less talking and more doing. The nature of gender is organic and therefore the process of integrating it cannot be top-down, rather it is necessarily the reverse. Governments, international organization and major donors are accustomed to the arrogant habit of prescribing; the assumption – that those connected only through narrow lenses have the capacity to adequately independently understand foreign culture, gender dynamics, history, society and geography well enough to make good policy judgments is immensely incorrect. Peace programs cannot be applied, they are crafted. They cannot be imported, they must be local. The context changes in each country and conflict, which requires a variation in large scale programs and strategies – most of which are currently quite rigid and unadaptable. If

one is listening, this criticism is heard loud and clear 'on the ground.' Is anyone listening? The real policy issue here is: how can current capacities 'on the ground' be leveraged in existing organizational structures? Through which structural inversions can powerful agency be brought to bear?

The article examined gender issues in conflict prevention and peacebuilding highlighting challenges and opportunities, and there are plenty of both. The battle for women's empowerment and peace is not going to be won with a gender strategy. It is also not "our" battle to fight. But, when conflict erupts and action is required the best that can be done is to help those who are able to help others prevent, mitigate and build, but also empower and develop. It is a war of numbers won through determination, patience, insight, and innumerable small victories. In a sense, new scholarly research is not needed on understanding more than what is conceptually understood now; the width and breadth of literature on women and conflict is staggering. Remaining gaps in knowledge can largely be filled by asking those who know- namely, the women themselves. Insightful intellectual judgment dictates the adoption of a more pragmatic approach to gender and CR. It is time to de-elevate the field of inquiry ironically in order to gain enlightenment on how to get over the barrier of the seemingly intractable challenge of integrating gender mainstreaming in peace and conflict.

The impact of many UN Resolutions, policies, programs and initiatives geared toward progress on gender is simultaneously observable and inadequate. The needs and priorities of women 'on the ground' are most often unheard; rather they are told what they get. The obvious need for direct, clear engagement with women on the ground as primary stakeholders remains piecemeal. As a group, they are massively under-represented from decision-making, marginalized during peace negotiations/agreements and many important gender issues are still ignored in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. It is clear that since women have uniquely valuable contributions to make that gender mainstreaming has an integral role in effective policy and programs whether they are developmental or CR-oriented. It is known that gender mainstreaming must be integrated and approached holistically from the onset, yet the waters are muddied with existing, overlapping programs, agendas and national priorities. Many policy makers have attempted to 'go back' and add gender considerations to programs already running, which is pragmatic but it

largely fails because the concept is wrong.

The role of government and international organizations is to make room for agency and break down barriers, promote inter-sectionality, weaken differentiation among specific peace and conflict categories and facilitate the inversion of paradigms, which saves valuable financial resources. In short, loosen the reins, empower the actors at the grassroots level and facilitate, not dictate.   The women, who are subject of gender mainstreaming policies, need to be instrumental in the creation and execution of them. Gender mainstreaming is best done at the grassroots level and that is where material and financial resources must accumulate. Women are very resourceful, if they are asked how resources and support can trickle, ripple and bubble throughout their communities, they will answer. They know. Women are more motivated to solve their own problems and they know better than anyone how to navigate the complex pathway to peace. This agency itself is empowering and powerful.

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