

**United States Institute of Peace
Working Group on the Role of Women in
Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations**

*Charting Progress: The Role of Women in
Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations*
Companion Article to the Special Report

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INTRODUCTION: WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY

In 2003, 29 armed conflicts raged in 22 countries;¹ all but two were intra-state.² In nine of those conflicts, casualties exceeded 100,000 people, and the indirect costs in human capital, infrastructure, and impact on future development are beyond estimation.³

It is widely recognized that women and young people are the primary victims of internal conflict. Yet as survivors of conflict, women also bear the burden of reconstructing their destroyed communities and repairing relationships. In government and through civil society, women worldwide are contributing to all four generally accepted pillars of post-conflict reconstruction: security, governance, justice and reconciliation, and socio-economic development. Indeed, their leadership in the transition period can serve as a “window of opportunity” to empower women, promote gender equality, and advance women’s position in society.

The bulk of this article provides examples of women’s contributions to the four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction and details “best practices” of the international community, including the US government, to support their efforts. These examples support the need for an overarching strategy or mandate or program within the US government that ensures the inclusion of women in stabilization and reconstruction operations. To date, initiatives, funding, and projects remain ad hoc; research and “best practices” have not been consolidated; and much depends upon the individual knowledge, commitment, and insight of relevant staff at headquarters and in the field. Yet the “window of opportunity” has not passed to enact such a strategy.

PROVIDING GENDER-SENSITIVE SECURITY

The realm of security is where women are traditionally the most marginalized. But as the survivors of violent conflict, women have not only the right, but relevant information and knowledge, to participate in the design and implementation of programs to re-establish security at regional, national and local levels.

As this is increasingly recognized, women have begun to make their mark on four key processes to establishing post-conflict security:

1. International intervention and peacekeeping;
2. Ceasefire and peace negotiations;
3. Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and
4. Security sector reform.

International Intervention and Peacekeeping

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 specifically addressed the protection of women during armed conflict and their participation in peacekeeping missions and international interventions. Among its recommendations, the Security Council called for an expanded role for women in field operations and the integration of a gender perspective into peacekeeping missions.

In Focus: The Negative Impact of Peacekeeping on Women

Despite the international mandate to protect the most vulnerable, the presence of foreign militaries and UN peacekeepers has in some cases led to additional abuse of women and young people affected by conflict.

The United Nations faced widespread criticism following reports of sexual violence and misconduct by peacekeepers in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2004. The UN's Office of Internal Oversight presented its report to the General Assembly in January 2005, in which 72 allegations were investigated.⁴ All of the victims were Congolese girls under the age of 18; five out of six were under the age of 14.⁵ In most cases, victims had sex with the perpetrators in exchange for food or small amounts of money. Young men were asked to bring girls to the peacekeepers in exchange for similar goods. Despite the investigation and public attention, sexual interactions have continued.

In addition to sexual violence and exploitation, the rise in trafficking and prostitution associated with the presence of peacekeepers has led peace support operations to be labeled as "vectors for the spread of HIV/AIDS."⁶ With the influx of peacekeepers in Cambodia, the number of prostitutes increased in the capital from 6,000 to 20,000, and the country now has the highest rate of infection in Southeast Asia.⁷ In part, this is attributed to the fact that many of the armed forces of countries contributing troops to peacekeeping missions have high levels of HIV infection. In South Africa, for example, at least one-fifth of the military is HIV positive, according to official government figures.⁸ As of February 2005, South Africa had over 2,000 troops active in UN peacekeeping operations and participates in multiple regional operations under the auspices of the African Union, as well.⁹

The UN and member-states have begun to take action. In recognition of the growth in regional peacekeeping, the US Department of Defense allocated \$14 million in 2002 for HIV prevention and education within African armed forces.¹⁰ The UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations is developing new guidelines to prevent and address sexual violence and exploitation by troops, and in 2005, the Secretary-General requested a special report on the matter.

Women participate in peacekeeping missions in far fewer numbers than men. At the end of 2003, women made up 25 percent of civilian staff, 4 percent of police, and 1.5 percent of military personnel.¹¹ According to research, women bring specific knowledge and capacities to the table as peacekeepers, particularly in reaching out to local communities.¹² In Rwanda, an association of demobilized female combatants is actively lobbying the government in order to participate on Rwandan delegations to African Union peacekeeping missions, specifically in Darfur. The women note that they have the necessary combat experience and that because they have suffered similarly, they will be able to reach out to Sudanese women in a way that male troops cannot.¹³

The UN has also adopted specific structures and mechanisms to encourage women's participation and to address women's needs on the ground, including gender advisers, gender

focal points, and gender units within missions. The first gender affairs unit was established in the UN mission in East Timor and included training for peacekeeping forces, civilian police, and the East Timor Police Service. Activities of the gender affairs unit involved advising the constitutional commission, organizing nationwide consultations with women on constitution drafting, and training potential women political candidates.

To maximize the effectiveness of a gender unit, the UN recommends “establishing clear mandates; ensuring adequate training, access to information and to adequate and stable resources; and increasing the support and participation of senior staff.”¹⁴ Another means to integrating a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations is through targeted trainings of member-state militaries, police units, and civilian staff prior to deployment. That is, substantive training on the impact of war on women, their role in post-conflict reconstruction, and key international mandates for protection and participation should be a standard component of orientation and ongoing education for all relevant personnel.

Ceasefire and Peace Negotiations

The peace table is perhaps the most obvious—and most discussed—place where women are missing from the reconstruction process. Yet all critical aspects of the post-conflict environment are generally decided during the ceasefire and negotiations phase. The subsequent peace accord outlines the priorities of the new government, and if women do not have a voice at the outset, integrating their concerns at a later date may prove impossible. Despite a variety of obstacles to their participation, when women have an impact on peace agreements, their creativity and initiative have proven invaluable to the peace process.

In fact, women often conduct informal negotiations even as the fighting continues. In northeastern India, women bridge the conflict divide to carry messages between warring parties. They are relied upon as interlocutors, mediators, and facilitators and work to sustain the current ceasefire. In the conflict zones in Colombia, women establish informal agreements with armed actors to protect their communities.

In many cases, women are the force behind official peace negotiations as well. In Sri Lanka, a woman-led national campaign in support of peace pressured political leaders to begin negotiations in 2001. In Sierra Leone, women galvanized timely public demonstrations that culminated in the arrest of the rebel leadership and the first step toward peace.

When women participate as official negotiators, their unique background and perspective often lead to unique outcomes. In El Salvador, women impacted the reintegration process for combatants by ensuring women fighters were included in benefits programs and that non-combatant members of the opposition movement, its support base, would also receive land and other provisions. In Northern Ireland, women representatives were trusted as mediators during the negotiations based on their platform of respect for human rights, inclusion, and equality; their public campaigns subsequently kept the negotiations on track.

Finally, following the signing of a peace accord, women often serve as links to the community to ensure that implementation occurs at all levels. In Bougainville, Papua New Guinea in 1998,

women returned from the peace talks to their communities and were reportedly the only leaders to initiate an information campaign for the public to comprehend the decisions of the peace accord and the next steps in its implementation.

In recent years, as recognition of the importance of women's participation has risen, international pressure has proved a key component to facilitating women's inclusion. In Afghanistan, for example, the United Nations, the United States, the World Bank, and others were driven by civil society and the media to address women's rights and needs as a critical component of the rebuilding of the country. As a result, six women (out of 60) participated in the UN-led negotiations in Bonn in 2001. Their presence, and the pressure of the international community, led to a series of initial achievements for women, including:

- The restoration of the 1964 constitution, which delineated various rights for women, including the right to vote and to serve in parliament;
- The creation of a women's ministry;
- The appointment by the new president of two women to ministerial positions (out of 29); and
- The presence of women in other transitional bodies, including the Emergency *Loya Jirga* in 2002 (200 of 1,650 delegate were women—as recommended at Bonn and nominated by civil society).¹⁵

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR)

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) is frequently deemed the most critical phase of post-conflict security, as peace often hinges upon weapons collection and the peaceful demobilization and reintegration of warring parties. Only in recent years has women's participation in armed forces been recognized, and programming is just beginning to adapt accordingly.

Women's roles vary during war. They serve as cooks, messengers, spies, supporters, and weapons-carrying troops. In some cases, women freely join opposition forces; in other conflicts, young women and girls are abducted and forcibly recruited. Many of these girls are forced to serve as “wives” to rebel leaders and face severe forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

By participating in DDR decision-making processes, women can and have been able to bring greater attention to specific needs and concerns. In El Salvador, for example, women leaders at the negotiation table and in implementation committees ensured that the names of women, as well as non-combatant supporters of the opposition movement, were included in beneficiary lists for land.

The UN and other implementing agencies, meanwhile, have begun to integrate a gender perspective in DDR planning. In Haiti, a consultative process among the donor community, UN agencies, the women's ministry, and women's organizations, allowed the UN mission to incorporate women's priorities directly into its mandate, including the establishment of the DDR program. In 2004 in Liberia, certain DDR assembly points successfully met the requirements of Resolution 1325: The site was fenced; separate compounds were provided for women, men, girls, and boys; gender-specific assessments were taken; and counseling services were offered.¹⁶

With regard to reintegration and associated benefits, in general, men are still the primary recipients. Yet various organizations have begun to focus on providing incentives to the community as a whole or targeting marginalized groups, including former women and girl combatants. Save the Children, for example, works intensively with families in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to sensitize them to the needs of returning girl soldiers. Local women's organizations are often the primary groups reaching out to former women and girl combatants in countries ranging from Nicaragua to Sierra Leone.

In addition to assisting in reintegration, women's organizations are contributing to official and unofficial disarmament efforts. As the conflict continued in Bougainville, women's groups trained their members to walk alone in the jungle to seek out and persuade fighters to disarm. At the start of the official UN DDR program in Liberia in 2003, chaos reigned in cantonment camps, overwhelmed by fighters eager to disarm. Women's groups were called in by international staff to "calm the combatants, provide them with essential services, and safeguard the underage combatants," risking their own lives to ensure the process continued.¹⁷ Although the operation was suspended shortly thereafter, the new plan was created that included specific provisions for women and girls in the camps, as mentioned above.

In Focus: Women's Contributions to Weapons Collection

Not only are women contributing to disarmament as part of DDR programs, but they are also working worldwide to collect and destroy small arms and light weapons and landmines.

One of the first Weapons for Development projects was initiated by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) in Albania. Local women's groups worked in partnership with UNDP to raise public awareness of the importance and need for the initiative, encouraging many to hand over their arms. The pilot project in Gramsch collected 7,000 weapons and awarded 12 development projects in one district between 1998 and 2000.¹⁸

In 1996, the Mines Advisory Group began hiring and training women deminers. An all-female mine action team in Cambodia provides "a model for the whole of Cambodian society, empowering the women..."¹⁹ A mobile team, the women range in age from 22 to 45 and earn incomes that allow them to support their extended families.

Security Sector Reform

Of the four sub-categories on security, security sector reform is the area in most need of further research and documentation on the role of women. Very little is known, and thus few programs exist to support women's efforts. The few examples available exhibit the overwhelming importance that women participate in the redesign of the military and police forces, as their specific experience and skills may lead to distinct outcomes.

As female combatants compose up to one-third of some fighting forces, women may choose to join the new transitional army or police force as part of a negotiations package. Their numbers are generally few, however. In El Salvador women constituted less than 6 percent of the post-war police force, and in Afghanistan,²⁰ there were only 40 female recruits in the first class of 1,500 in the Kabul Police Academy.²¹

Where women have made a greater impact on security sector reform is through decision-making positions in government and in parliament. In South Africa, women parliamentarians promoted public participation in the reform process by consulting with civil society when formulating new policies. In addition, the female deputy defense minister in South Africa has initiated various projects within the department to promote gender equality, including a gender focal point and gender-sensitization training for troops.

Women in civil society have begun to partner with members of the defense community in post-conflict states with creative results. In southern Sudan, women's groups held a series of meetings with traditional leaders and civilian authorities in 2002, after which judges and the police began training programs on human rights.²² In Nepal, women's organizations actually conducted the human rights training for military personnel. In Fiji, women's groups and the women's ministry met with the government's National Security and Defence Review Committee as part of its review process in 2003. They identified security threats and discussed the incorporation of international standards and norms, including Resolution 1325. Women's groups subsequently recommended to the committee that the women's minister have a permanent seat on the body and that women be represented on provincial and district-level security committees. At the time of publication, apart from a cabinet paper on these issues and additional consultations, the government of Fiji has made no substantive effort to implement women's recommendations.²³

GUARANTEEING WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In recent years, significant resources have been devoted to understanding and supporting women's leadership in governance and political participation in post-conflict countries. Given the "window of opportunity," the transitional period serves as an important entry point for women. As noted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "the last five years have seen post-conflict countries feature prominently in the top 30 of the IPU's world ranking of women in national parliaments,"²⁴ and in 2004, seven developing countries, including Argentina, Mozambique, Rwanda, and South Africa, were among 17 countries with more than 30 percent women parliamentarians.²⁵

When women reach decision-making posts in post-conflict governments, research shows that they are leading efforts to promote "good governance" by fighting corruption, demanding accountability, and maintaining transparency in activities at national and local levels. In Cambodia, for example, two women National Assembly members drafted the first piece of anti-corruption legislation in 1993, although it has yet to pass.

Women are also using their leadership positions to reach out across conflict divides to form coalitions of women of all backgrounds and maintain their stand for democracy and respect for

human rights. In Rwanda, women formed the first cross-party parliamentary caucus, composed of both Hutus and Tutsis, addressing issues of concern to women from all political parties. This set the precedent for other cross-party caucuses to be established. In Afghanistan, it is hoped that women will prove a moderating force against political extremists, given their own victimhood under radical, anti-democratic policies. Already, women are the leading voices for minority rights; in fact, five of the 11 Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission members are women, and a woman heads the body.²⁶

Much of the impetus to promoting women's participation in governance is driven from within a country. Still, in recent years, the international community has effectively exerted pressure or influence on national governments to adopt mechanisms for their participation and a legal framework for women's rights. In addition, various bilateral and multilateral institutions, as well as NGOs, have devoted resources to training and preparing women candidates. These local-international partnerships are one means to promoting women's participation. Securing women's political leadership requires multiple approaches, including:

1. Guaranteeing their rights in the constitution, and
2. Promoting the election of women to official representative bodies.

Constitution Drafting

In many post-conflict countries, the formulation and drafting of the constitution has become a more transparent process, one that attempts to be inclusive and representative. It may include roundtable meetings, independent constitutional commissions, legislative commissions, national conventions, and public referenda, and civil society is increasingly consulted. In Afghanistan, for example, 178,000 citizens participated in 556 focus group consultations during the drafting of the constitution in 2003; 19 percent were women.²⁷ Women are contributing in both official and non-governmental capacities to create constitutions that will guarantee gender equality and facilitate a more sustainable peace.

In fact, women have been among the leading voices to demand a more transparent constitution-drafting process. In Cambodia, women called for public meetings and organized workshops to meet with legislators to incorporate their suggestions into the constitution. The final document states that men and women are equal and share the right to participate fully in the social, cultural, political, and economic life of Cambodia.

The East Timorese Constituent Assembly—described in more detail in the section on elections—was composed of 27 percent women and was responsible for drafting the new constitution. Constitutional commissions were established to consult with the population during the drafting process, and over 40 percent of commissioners were women. They implemented creative tools to engage women, including special hearings and the inclusion of recommendations from non-governmental women's organizations. The final document lists the promotion of gender equality as a “fundamental objective of the state” and denotes equal rights for women in all aspects of Timorese society.²⁸

In Afghanistan, a series of events led to women's constitutional guarantee of equality. Initially, President Karzai appointed seven women to the 35-member Constitutional Review Commission, whose initial draft did not explicitly denote women's rights. In response, Afghan women across the country came together to formulate a consensus Afghan Women's Bill of Rights. As a result, President Karzai pledged that half of his 50 appointees to the Congressional *Loya Jirga*—the body tasked with ratifying the draft constitution—would be women, and he openly supported the Women's Bill of Rights. Among the 500 representatives to the Congressional *Loya Jirga*, 102 were women of various languages, ethnicities, and political affiliations. Overcoming many obstacles, these women representatives obtained a guarantee of women's equality in the final draft, including a quota for women in the lower house of parliament. Despite this tremendous step forward, a clause denoting that no law can be contrary to *sharia* or Islamic law was also included, leaving a gray area of concern to many Afghan women.²⁹

Elections

Experts attribute the increasing number of women in post-conflict legislatures to the mechanisms established in the transitional period—quotas, reserved seats, political party lists, indirect elections, and other tools—and to the fact that women were present from the very beginning of the reconstruction process in these countries.

There is no “silver bullet” to ensuring women's political participation at local and national levels. Strategies vary given the cultural context, political climate and system, strength of the women's movement and individual leaders, and the needs of the post-conflict society. A variety of tools have been utilized to guarantee women's participation from Afghanistan to Cambodia to Rwanda.

Electoral System Selection

Overall, research shows that women advance more effectively in proportional representation (PR) systems, where seats are divided among parties based on the percentage of votes won, rather than in majoritarian systems, where one official represents each district. As of 2004, of 182 countries that hold elections, women averaged 8.5 percent of members of parliament in majoritarian systems, 11.3 percent in combined systems, and 15.4 percent in PR systems.³⁰

Within PR systems, “closed” lists, where candidate names do not appear, often lead to greater numbers of women representatives than “open” lists. In either case, the candidate's position on its party list is critical to their advancement, as those at the bottom of the list may not receive seats. Strategies to ensure women's names are well positioned include “zippering” where women's names are placed every third, fourth, or fifth slot, or in some cases, “zebra” style, wherein every other name must be a woman's.

A PR system was mandated in Iraq with the passage of the Transitional Administrative Law in March 2004, which set a target of 25 percent women in parliament. In January 2005, Iraqis voted using “closed” lists with a “zippering” mechanism; in this case, a female candidate was listed as every third candidate. Women won 86 of 275 seats, or 31 percent, in the new National

Assembly, which will draft the constitution, appoint government officials, and pass national legislation.³¹

This approach can be difficult to institutionalize and to maintain. In fact, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the initial “zippering” mechanism, whereby a female candidate was listed as every fourth candidate, was abandoned for a different and lower requirement. Subsequently, in 2002 elections, women were elected to only 7 of 42 seats of the lower house, or 16.7 percent, and none in the upper house.³² Still, while the mechanism was in place, the international community applied significant resources and political will to building women’s capacity and experience, which was not a wasted effort. In essence, women made an attempt to participate in a broken political system, but have since transferred their skills into positions of leadership in other arenas—education, business and management, and an expanding civil society. It is important to note that getting women on the ballot and elected is only half the battle; the other half is to ensure they are able to participate effectively and assume leadership positions in government and civil society.

Quotas and Reserved Seats

The most discussed, most effective, yet often controversial mechanism to promote women’s leadership is through quotas that reserve seats for women. These include quotas at the national or sub-national level mandated by constitutions, legislated by parliaments, or adopted by political parties. In nearly all cases, they are designed as temporary mechanisms to promote women’s participation.

Afghanistan mandated a quota in Article 83 of its constitution and passed electoral laws stipulating that at least two of each province’s representatives to the lower house of parliament be women—a quota of approximately 25 percent for women. The constitution also mandated that the president appoint one third of the seats in the upper house, of which 50 percent of the appointments must be women—a quota of approximately 17 percent.³³ In the upcoming parliamentary elections, 68 of the 249 seats in the lower house must be women.³⁴ Women on the general ballot who receive the most votes will obtain the reserved seats.

Post-conflict countries with **constitutional quotas** for women’s participation in national parliaments are listed in the following table:³⁵

Country	Women Elected	Total Elected	Women As Percentage of Total
Afghanistan	68	249	27.3%
Eritrea	33	150	22.0%
Iraq	86	275	31.0%
Rwanda	39	80	48.8%
Tanzania	61	274	22.3%

Uganda	75	304	24.7%
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Post-conflict countries with **election laws** stipulating quotas for women’s participation in national parliaments are listed in the following table:³⁶

Country	Women Elected	Total Elected	Women As Percentage of Total
Armenia	6	131	4.6%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	42	16.7%
Iraq	86	275	31.0%
Macedonia	21	120	17.5%
Rwanda	39	80	48.8%
Serbia and Montenegro	10	126	7.9%
Sudan	35	360	9.7%
Tanzania	61	274	22.3%
Uganda	75	304	24.7%

In countries that do not institute quota systems, some political parties opt to promote women internally and establish quotas to do so. The African National Congress of South Africa utilizes the “zippering” mechanism; thus every third name is a female candidate on its party list. As of 2003, women hold 32.8 percent of parliamentary seats in South Africa.³⁷

Post-conflict countries with **political parties** choosing to utilize quotas for women’s participation as electoral candidates are listed in the following table.³⁸

Country	Women Elected	Total Elected	Women As Percentage of Total
Armenia	6	131	4.6%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	7	42	16.7%
Cyprus	6	56	10.7%
El Salvador	9	84	10.7%
Haiti	3	83	3.6%
Macedonia	21	120	17.5%

Mozambique	75	250	30.0%
Nicaragua	19	92	20.7%
Rwanda	39	80	48.8%
South Africa	131	400	32.8%

Post-conflict countries with constitutional mandates or election laws stipulating quotas for women’s participation at sub-national levels, such as provincial, district, or local elections, include: Rwanda, Serbia and Montenegro, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Other Creative Mechanisms

Some post-conflict countries have created custom-designed tools to promote women’s participation, particularly at sub-national levels. Rwanda, which now has the highest percentage of women parliamentarians in the world at 49 percent, established a unique system at the district and sector levels. The “triple balloting” technique was designed to bring previously marginalized groups—women and youth—into governance structures. Three ballots were placed before voters at the sector level in 2001—one for general candidates, one for women candidates, and one for youth candidates. Through a subsequent indirect election, a district council was chosen from among the winning candidates of the sector elections, including all winners from the general ballot and one third from the women’s and youth’s ballots. This system led to district councils composed of 27 percent women in 2001.³⁹ Furthermore, as noted by one expert: “Not only did this system set aside seats for women and youth, it also required that the entire electorate vote for women. In this way, Rwanda’s decentralisation programme began to make the election of women more socially acceptable.”⁴⁰

Supporting Women Leaders with Training

In East Timor, although there was not a formal mechanism to include women in the Constituent Assembly, the gender affairs unit of the UN mission and the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) conducted training for potential women candidates from all districts, political parties, and non-governmental organizations. Of 991 candidates on political party lists, 268 were women, and of the final 88 members of the Constituent Assembly, 27 percent were women.⁴¹

This strategy of training women candidates is becoming more common and is partly a result of the oft-given excuse of some national officials that women are not prepared for leadership positions. In some cases, where severe discrimination of women has been entrenched in society—Afghanistan, for example—this may be true. In a southern province, for example, there was not even one female civil servant to run the women’s affairs department as of 2004.⁴² As a result, the UN Development Programme teamed up with the Afghan government to launch a six-month training course in leadership and decision-making skills for female civil servants and qualified Afghan women.⁴³ In other conflict areas, women may be much better prepared, yet training facilitates networking and honing of skills. In the Cote d’Ivoire, for example, parliamentarians of the recently formed Women Leaders Caucus participated in a US government-led training in leadership skills and political campaigning. Ellen Sauerbrey, US

ambassador to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, facilitated a session and noted that the parliamentarians were “well-educated professionals—professors, scientists, lawyers, pharmacists, etc. living in the capital city. They were highly motivated to run for political office and have an impact on the kind of society they live in.”⁴⁴

The US government supported numerous trainings of Iraqi women political candidates and civil society leaders in the lead-up to national elections. The \$10 million Iraqi Women’s Democracy Initiative distributed grants to various organizations that provided training to 2,000 women as of August 2005 on topics including democracy, leadership, coalition building, organizational management, entrepreneurship, and the media.⁴⁵ A representative of the Office of International Women’s Issues (IWI) of the Department of State noted that, in some cases, women trainers from other countries in the Middle East were asked to conduct the workshops. In addition, representatives from the US Congress have participated in training exercises, sharing their own experiences, and returning to the US legislature as strong advocates for Iraqi women. In addition to providing important preparation, trainings have facilitated networking and information sharing, and Iraqi women have been very positive about their experiences thus far.⁴⁶ Regarding a follow-up training in July 2005, Representative Kay Granger (R-TX) noted, “Twelve-hundred women sent in applications to attend the conference in Jordan, but only 150 were selected to attend. The vast amount of women wanting to attend the conference is evidence of the Iraqi women’s desire to have a stronger voice in their government and in society.”⁴⁷

ENGAGING WOMEN IN JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION

Despite a relatively minor focus by most actors in the peace process, transitional justice and reconciliation are fundamental to the success of all aspects of post-conflict reconstruction. This area is of particular concern to women, given widespread acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed in wartime. In addition to the need for justice, many women are key actors in conducting healing and reconciliation processes, noting their concern for their children’s future as a strong motivating factor.

International Tribunals

Women have made critical advances in international law to obtain justice for victims of sexual and gender-based violence during war. First, in large part, an international advocacy movement of women’s and human rights organizations led to the creation of tribunals for Rwanda and for the former Yugoslavia as well as the newly created International Criminal Court. Once these fora were established, advocacy continued to ensure adequate redress for women victims, leading to the explicit recognition of rape as a war crime in both tribunals and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The participation of women in official positions within the tribunals—as judges, investigators, lawyers, and staff—and the inclusion of gender expertise have led to significant advances for women in international law. At the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, various mechanisms were created to mainstream a gender perspective in the work of the tribunal. First, a gender advisor was appointed to the Office of the Prosecutor; second, a temporary field team was established to specifically investigate gender-based crimes; and third, women judges were elected to the bench. Gender-sensitive judges and staff drafted rules of procedure to protect

and counsel victims of sexual violence, and a woman judge was on the bench in every court case that resulted in significant redress of sex crimes (against men as well as women).⁴⁸

Despite these advances, various obstacles for women's engagement with international tribunals remain. Although Rwandan women parliamentarians played a key role in denoting rape as a "category one" crime, requiring trial by the international tribunal or national courts, few trials have been conducted. At the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, rules and procedures for women's protection were drafted, but many continue to fear testifying and do not participate. In practice, gender-based crimes continue to be underrepresented.

National Mechanisms

At the national level, post-conflict countries implement a variety of mechanisms to pursue transitional justice, including national legal systems, truth commissions, reparations, amnesty, and lustration. Approximately 25 post-conflict countries have convened a truth commission with varying degrees of women's participation. In only two instances have women chaired commissions: East Timor and Sri Lanka.

Before the recognition of sexual violence as a war crime, most truth commissions did not investigate the issue. In El Salvador, for example, the Commission on Truth did not include reports of rape in its final report because it was seen as outside of its mandate to document "politically motivated acts."⁴⁹ In general, cases are underreported, and women's testimony is not often explicitly sought.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa is the most celebrated example of these mechanisms, yet the contributions of women to its formation and process are less well known. First, 41 percent of truth commissioners were women; women held an equal percentage of committee seats; and a significant percentage of TRC staff were women, including 75 percent of regional managers.⁵⁰ Second, civil society, including women's organizations, were extensively consulted during the TRC's establishment, and their input led to an open and transparent process dependent upon public participation to achieve its goals. Third, in addition to the presence of women in the process, South Africa introduced special hearings for women and gender training for all commissioners. Fourth, of 21,227 testimonies, 56.5 percent were presented by women witnesses of all races.⁵¹ While most men spoke of their own experiences, many women specifically chose to testify about the experiences of their husbands, sons, and family members as a deliberate strategy to connect with women on the other side of the conflict so that they, too, would engage in the reconciliation process. As noted by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, member of the Human Rights Committee of the TRC, "This illustrate[d] that public testimony can be used as a tool of engagement with others, to get people to vicariously experience the pain that others felt, and to enable them to find the language to speak about the unspeakable. This was the essence of the TRC..."⁵²

Subsequently, truth commissions in Sierra Leone and East Timor have held special sessions for women and actively sought to include their testimony. Sierra Leone also stood up a Women's Task Force that enabled women to help design the truth commission and the special unit to investigate war crimes; the Task Force comprised representatives from UN agencies, the police

force, women's organizations, and other civil society groups.⁵³ UNIFEM has also conducted training for commissioners and staff on how to ensure gender sensitivity in the process. The participation of women in the design of the truth commission led to several important advances, including a witness protection program for victims of gender-based crimes, witness choice of venues (private or public), and submissions by women's organizations to the truth commission.

Legal and Judicial Reform

Discrimination against women often occurs through the letter of the law, as well as its application. During peace processes, the opportunity arises to revise or re-write laws to guarantee women's equality, in areas like domestic violence, citizenship, marriage and divorce, and property and inheritance. In Croatia, for example, the rape law was amended to expand the definition to include spousal rape. Mozambique also passed a law in 2003 to set the marriage age at 18 and allow women who live with partners for more than a year to inherit property.

Women's organizations are often the catalyst behind these advances, and the international community can play an important supporting role as local groups call for these changes. In Rwanda, for example, UNHCR partnered with the new government and women's groups funded by the Rwandan Women's Initiative to jointly draft new legislation to secure women's rights to inheritance.

Local Processes

Justice processes are also conducted at the local level through traditional mechanisms. Although local systems vary by country and region, in most cases, women are not leaders in these fora, and they may be reluctant to come forward as witnesses, particularly with regard to sexual violence. Rwanda provides a unique example, however, as women were elected to 35 percent of judges in the *gacaca* courts, a system of community-based conflict resolution and justice, adapted to address genocide.⁵⁴

Reconciliation is most vital at the community level, where perpetrators and victims continue to reside in close proximity to each other and interact on a regular basis. In many conflict areas, women act formally and informally as mobilizers for reconciliation, reaching across conflict lines in support of peace. In El Salvador, women's organizations conducted psychosocial programs for all members of the population because the formal post-conflict assistance did not address trauma. In Rwanda, a woman directing the Ministry of Women and Family Affairs instituted a national program whereby women of all ethnicities served as foster parents for nearly 500,000 children orphaned during the genocide.⁵⁵ In Sierra Leone, women conducted healing rituals for returning child ex-combatants to facilitate their acceptance into the community.

PROMOTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As in other areas of post-conflict reconstruction, the transition period offers an important opportunity to transform the socio-economic environment of the country. The influx of donor funds and technical support following a peace agreement can move the peace process forward by addressing historical inequalities and root causes of conflict. Women are affected directly by the

priorities of donors and transitional governments; without their engagement, the process will not be as effective.

In addition to women's underrepresentation in official fora and positions, challenges to their participation in socio-economic development are many. First, the legal framework is often a major impediment. In many countries, women are not allowed to own or inherit land or property—making it extremely difficult to gain from reconstruction programs. Second, reintegration programs for former combatants often result in the displacement of women from jobs held during the war. Third, due to the devastation of the war, women in the agricultural sector may be unable to maintain their land and source of basic needs. Fourth, childcare and other responsibilities of the household may inhibit women's ability to take jobs in the formal sector. Fifth, conflict often interrupts formal education, thus many women may lack certain skills necessary for employment. Finally, women's organizations that seek to engage in reconstruction are often locally based and may lack the capacity to formally apply and meet the demands of donor grant processes.

However, it is important to comprehend the critical impact of reaching women with post-conflict assistance. Data shows that income in the hands of women benefits families and communities significantly more than men. According to experts, "Increases in female income improve child survival rates 20 times more than increases in male income...Likewise, female borrowing has a greater positive impact on school enrollment, child nutrition, and demand for healthcare than male borrowing."⁵⁶ In addition, having control over resources helps improve women's social status, as they become more active in the economic and political life of the community, become increasingly aware of their rights, and are more involved in decision-making in the home. Similarly, partnering with women's organizations helps to ensure that funds will reach the target community, while meeting the goal of women's empowerment.

Capitalizing on women's contributions to socio-economic development can take two major forms: targeting women for support as a priority of reconstruction and promoting gender equality in socio-economic development projects and programs.

Supporting Women as a Priority of Reconstruction

Immediately following the ceasefire and peace agreement, implementation committees, donor conferences, and other fora are initiated to begin the reconstruction process. The international community has a particularly strong role at donor conferences. These gatherings can serve as an entry point for elevating women's voices at the very start of international programming and priority setting. In preparation for the April 2005 donors' conference on Sudan in Oslo, UNIFEM, together with the Norwegian government and the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, conducted a consultative process with a diverse group of Sudanese women, culminating in a common platform for action and a series of recommendations.⁵⁷ UNIFEM also provided two gender advisors for the Joint Needs Assessment, on which donor commitments were based. At the time of publication, organizers note that donors have become more sensitized to the need to monitor funding to ensure implementation of commitments to gender equality; however, more concrete results were not yet identifiable.⁵⁸

It is important to include women at the outset of planning, in part, simply because women's priorities may be different than men's. In the West Bank and Gaza, for example, the World Bank supported community development projects, but found that primarily men participated and benefited from the program. The men generally chose to develop infrastructure projects, rather than social, economic, or health programs. Women were subsequently required as participants in the local project committees and as community development managers to ensure the priorities of all community members were addressed.⁵⁹

In some cases, all that is required for the prioritization of women's participation is exactly that—someone to raise the flag that post-conflict reconstruction will not be effective if women are not included. In Angola, for example, the first half of the peace process systematically excluded women from the peace table, the relief effort, and other projects and programming. It was brought to the attention of the international community, and a gender adviser from the UN was subsequently assigned. The second half of the process brought in women's organizations to run the relief effort; programs were devised for women's health in communities of returning combatants; and domestic violence programs were started. Women's needs and concerns became a priority.

The Bosnian Women's Initiative (BWI) and the Rwandan Women's Initiative (RWI) are two successful examples of prioritizing women as a group at the outset of reconstruction. The United States government donated \$5 million to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1996, earmarked specifically for supporting Bosnian women. Since then, 60,000 women have benefited from 650 projects implemented throughout the country—99 percent by local non-governmental organizations.⁶⁰ In 1997, UNHCR and donor governments launched the Rwandan Women's Initiative to promote women's empowerment as part of post-conflict reconstruction efforts; it supported local projects in education, income generation, skills training, psychosocial services and helped establish women's centers and shelters. In addition, as a long-term development goal, RWI advocated on behalf of Rwandan women and supported the Ministry for Gender and women's non-governmental organizations. As noted in a project evaluation, "RWI and other internationally sponsored women's projects represented an innovative step during the post-conflict period... Many of these efforts [toward capacity building and partnership] represent an important, although perhaps underestimated, foundation to the future of development in that country."⁶¹

An important, and perhaps recently discovered, tool to prioritize women's participation in socio-economic development is that of contract language and vehicles. In 2004, the US Department of Defense instated a requirement that all contractors in Iraq ensure participation of local women in its projects and tied this mandate to the award fee the contractors would receive.⁶² Specifically, of the award fee for the corporation, a clause requiring capacity development to ensure sustainability included language on ensuring the participation of Iraqi women.

One contractor noted the exact language in their agreement was vague; they were required to "maximize opportunities for Iraqi women in reconstruction." But s/he also noted that they were forced to carefully clarify their obligations and goals regarding women, the benchmarks for their progress, and what would constitute "good performance"—activities not previously standard to their process.⁶³

Reportedly, contractors began to subsequently request information on how to find women to include in their work, and this was a lesson learned for all involved. Although USAID had constructed a database of Iraqi businesses for subcontracting, nowhere was it noted which were women-owned or employed women. Thus, the Department of Defense is building a database to track the training of women and their employment to determine if contracts are meeting their requirements.

Despite these examples, the vast majority of donor funding for post-conflict reconstruction is not targeted at women nor does it promote gender equality. In some cases, a gender budget analysis—a comparison of spending in different sectors vis-à-vis women’s priorities—of humanitarian aid and donor funding can assist the international community in determining the amount of support that is or is not flowing to women. Various members of the US Congress, for example, have suggested that the Women in Development (WID) office at USAID conduct an agency-wide “gender audit” during the appropriations process to determine the extent to which women’s needs are integrated in its programming.⁶⁴ Similarly, a UNIFEM analysis of the \$1.7 billion UN 2002 reconstruction plan for Afghanistan found that only .07 percent was allotted for women-specific projects.⁶⁵ Given the high priority of the international community to advance women’s rights in Afghanistan, this figure would clearly denote that support does not meet the critical objective and subsequent budgets should be adjusted.

In Focus: “Gender Budgeting”

In the post-conflict transition, the opportunity exists to re-write macroeconomic policy to promote gender equality. The term “gender budgeting” encompasses the process of integrating a gender perspective into government budgets and promoting gender equality through public expenditure. Civil society and post-conflict governments are beginning to utilize “gender-responsive budget initiatives” at national and local levels to analyze how the new budget responds to the different needs of women, men, girls, and boys and recommend more appropriate measures.

In Uganda, the non-governmental organization Forum for Women in Democracy has partnered with international donors and the national government to make the national and local budget and expenditures more responsive to the needs of men and women. Their activities have included:

- Training on “gender budgeting” for local councilors and researchers at the district level;
- Gender budget analysis of district budgets to substantiate their demands for equitable resource allocations in the budget process;
- Public awareness-raising activities and fora; and
- Meetings with development partners, senior district leadership, parliamentary committees, and other relevant actors.⁶⁶

The outcomes have been significant. Across the board, there is greater recognition and attention to the need for a gender-balanced budget and resource allocation. Specifically, gender is now a category of analysis in the planning and budgeting cycle of local government. In addition, based on information gathered in the gender budget analysis, districts are beginning to collect sex-disaggregated data, allocate contracts in a more gender-balanced manner, and hire more women for decision-making positions. At the national level, the government has earmarked funds for districts that promote gender equality, accessible only after demonstrating how projects will accomplish that goal. Finally, the Ministry of Finance, together with the Ministry of Gender, began a gender-responsive budget initiative to be conducted in 24 districts between 2002 and 2008, focusing on agriculture, water and sanitation, health, education, and roads.

Promoting Gender Equality through Socio-Economic Development

In addition to targeting women directly with support, reconstruction programs in general can capitalize on the opportunities of the transition period to promote gender equality in all development programs.

Physical Infrastructure

Although consulting women in the design and implementation of physical infrastructure projects has not been standard, international organizations are increasingly realizing the value of doing so. In fact, a United Nations study notes that, regarding water and sanitation projects in particular, those “designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and

effective than those that ignore women.”⁶⁷ This is not surprising, given women’s role in many countries as the primary users of these facilities.

In other aspects of physical infrastructure development, such as transportation or construction, women are even less involved, although there are encouraging trends. In Iraq, few businesswomen initially attended bidding conferences for US contracts due to their discomfort with the male-dominated bidding process. The Army Corps of Engineers responded with a special bidding conference for women.⁶⁸ In Afghanistan, German funders of a Kabul road construction project suggested that women be urged to apply as laborers—a recommendation eagerly supported by the city’s women’s affairs unit. Eighteen women began construction along with 40 male colleagues despite risks and threats. The opportunity to participate in Afghanistan’s reconstruction along with the higher salaries than traditional women’s jobs motivated many female heads of households.⁶⁹

Health

As survivors of armed conflict, meeting the health needs of women through the restoration of medical services is a priority of post-war reconstruction. Victims of rape and gender-based violence—both men and women—face particularly difficult circumstances. Without access to healthcare, survivors may face long-term injury, unwanted pregnancies, sexual dysfunction, post-traumatic stress disorders, sexually transmitted infections, and HIV/AIDS.

During reconstruction, international agencies work with national governments and civil society to promote reproductive health, prevent and treat gender-based violence, and reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. The World Health Organization, with Finnish funds, is conducting a gender-based violence program in Liberia to build local capacity of health workers to support survivors and to strengthen existing medical services, ensuring that care will be provided beyond the country’s transitional period.⁷⁰ In Eritrea and Ethiopia, UNFPA, with Danish funds, trained demobilized soldiers in HIV prevention and counseling with the long-term goal that, upon their return home, they can educate and serve others in their communities.⁷¹

In many cases, women are disproportionately represented among social workers, medical providers, and traditional healers—meaning their involvement in international efforts to restore health services following war is critical. In addition, local women’s organizations are often conducting health programs at the community level; their networks and strategies can be tapped into as part of national health reconstruction efforts. In Bosnia, for example, the women’s organization Medica Zenica assists women survivors of rape; it operates mobile clinics and includes counseling and therapy for trauma. In El Salvador, women’s groups filled a gap in official programs by offering counseling for post-traumatic stress, as well as a variety of projects to combat post-war domestic violence and prevent and treat HIV/AIDS.

Education

Due to research and data, it is now well accepted that educating women and girls leads to a more productive, peaceful society.⁷² With education—especially at higher levels—women are more empowered and more likely to become decisionmakers in the home and community. They are

more likely to enter the labor force and begin earning income. Educated women are more likely to marry older, have fewer, better educated, and healthier children, and obtain a higher level of reproductive health themselves—including a lower rate of contracting HIV/AIDS. Women with higher levels of education are even less vulnerable to experiencing domestic violence. As a result of this information, one of the Millennium Development Goals is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

As recognition of these issues increases, education for girls and women has become a priority in post-conflict programming. In Afghanistan, through intense efforts by the international community in partnership with local women's organizations, 40 percent of children attending school in 2003 were girls compared with only 9 percent before the war.⁷³ International initiatives to assist women with education following war are also on the rise. USAID, for example, supports the Afghan Literacy Initiative of the Women's Teacher Training Institute in Kabul—a \$4 million program of the US-Afghan Women's Council—which operates literacy projects for women in 200 rural villages.⁷⁴

Women are also recipients of vocational training, although in many cases, it is limited to traditional gender roles. In Guatemala, for example, the UN Children's Fund offered courses in dressmaking, textiles, crafts, embroidery, hairdressing, and cake decoration. The Bosnian Women's Initiative also emphasized traditional jobs, such as sewing, knitting, typing, and hairdressing—in some cases leading to market saturation and lower profits for women. When able to design their own programs, women's groups often choose more diverse options. In El Salvador, the women's organization Las Dignas recruited women for workshops on carpentry, masonry, and auto mechanics. They provided childcare and stipends along with the training.

In addition to teaching skills and literacy to women, these organizations are often at the forefront of re-establishing educational systems in general following war and are an entry point for post-conflict education reform. In El Salvador, women's groups have a particularly long history with regard to literacy programs, many of which began during the war when there was no public schooling. In 1997, five years after the peace agreement was signed, just one such organization—Movimiento de Mujeres—conducted 92 educational programs in 38 municipalities throughout the country.⁷⁵ In Sierra Leone, the Forum for African Women Educationalists mobilized funds to physically rebuild schools—some exclusively for girls. It is one of very few organizations to accommodate pregnant girls and young mothers, providing childcare and accepting them in the classroom.

In Focus: Property and Inheritance

In some cases, the post-conflict “window of opportunity” has been utilized to reform existing laws regarding women’s right to ownership of land and property. In Rwanda, UNHCR partnered with the new government and women’s groups funded by the Rwandan Women’s Initiative to jointly draft new legislation to secure women’s rights to inheritance. In South Africa, the post-apartheid constitution included women’s right to housing and land reform; in the new land affairs department, a sub-directorate for gender affairs was established.

A United Nations study notes that legislation may not be sufficient to ensure women’s equal access to land and property, as obstacles re-surface during implementation due to customs, tradition, and lack of enforcement mechanisms. These experts recommend: “Rather than merely including a gender perspective into existing paradigms and legislation (which are normally grounded in patriarchy), land reform must have, as its starting point, the goal of empowering women and fundamentally transforming gender relations in the household and the economic, social, and political spheres.”⁷⁶

Other activities must accompany legislation, including:

- *Targeting support to women’s organizations:* Women’s groups are the leading advocates for women’s access to land and property in various countries, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.
- *Conducting education and awareness rising among men and women:* Women’s organizations funded by the Rwandan Women’s Initiative complemented the passage of the inheritance law with consultation forums for grassroots women and other public awareness efforts.
- *Connecting with male leaders:* In Guatemala, women’s organizations worked with the all-male Permanent Commission of Guatemalan Refugees to support the goals of the commission, while insisting upon the inclusion of women’s rights to land ownership.

Economic Opportunities

When considering economic opportunities for women following war, the most common strategy across the board has been the provision of microcredit for self-employment. In fact, in 2002, approximately 79 percent of 67 million borrowers in 2,500 institutions worldwide were women.⁷⁷ The US government estimates that of the \$130 million it has distributed for microcredit programs in recent years, approximately 75 percent of the beneficiaries have been women.⁷⁸ The Office of International Women’s Issues describes these as “wise investments,” as in the Palestinian territories, for example, US microcredit loans to women maintain an average repayment rate of over 90 percent.⁷⁹

Although varying by context, benefits of microcredit to women are many, including the fact that women’s income often benefits the family more than men’s. In some cases, women’s organizations may be strengthened through a microcredit group-lending program, whereby the organization lends to its members or other women. In Cambodia, women make up 95 percent of group-lending participants, facilitating the start-up of projects in farming and petty trade.⁸⁰

It is increasingly understood that other tools must be distributed along with microcredit to ensure its success, including skills training in business practices, management, accounting, marketing strategies, and production techniques. Some experts voice other concerns, noting microenterprise can add to women's workload, cause decision-making disputes within the household, or lead to resentment by male family members. In addition, targeting women with microcredit may actually marginalize them from broader development efforts.

Thus, the international community can offer other economic opportunities, such as loans for small and medium-size businesses and training for women business leaders. For example, the US Department of State supported Iraqi women's participation in the Global Summit for Women in Mexico in June 2005 to network with 800 other women entrepreneurs.⁸¹ In addition, pressure and influence can be exerted to ensure that national governments adopt policies and laws that facilitate women's economic success, including the right to own and inherit land and property. In Rwanda, for example, following their successful advocacy and the passage of such laws, UNHCR and local partner organizations supported workshops through the Rwandan Women's Initiative to raise the public's awareness of the new laws, facilitating greater implementation. The post-conflict transition provides an opportunity to bring about these changes and promote gender equality as a component of socio-economic development.

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