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"The role of women in peacemaking and conflict prevention"

Narratives and Women
By Anas Talalqa, Islam Ennara, Tasneem Maabreh, Hasnaa El Jamali

Introduction

Narrative is a way of presenting or understanding a situation or series of events that reflects and promotes a particular point of view or set of values (Merriam Webster Dictionary) 1. It can be presented by words (spoken or written), images and videos. From the beginning of history, humans used narrative to present, persuade and advocate for their opinions and values.

Narratives are powerful because they shape the way we think as humans, and the way we understand the world, and therefore lead to action. Narratives also contribute in defining what is acceptable and what is perceived as normal in communities.

Narrative types can be summarized in three main categories. The common narrative, which is the most known and common in communities as it is not necessarily correct or logical. This type might even contain hate speech and discrimination. The second type is the counter narrative, which is used to de-construct and weaken violent narratives. The third narrative is the alternative narrative, which is based on human rights narrative that focuses on putting forward different accounts, presenting the world that we want to build and live in, and emphasizing positive alternatives that are not just the negative image of the narratives they seek to counter and do not reinforce them by focusing on them.

Speaking of counter and alternative narratives only makes sense in relation to what they are countering or being an alternative to. we focus on narratives, which counter and propose alternatives to hate speech and the violence and discrimination it seeks to propagate, justify or disseminate.

Why narratives around women?

Being part of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Fellowship program, we had the opportunity to have several in depth discussions about women and their role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution around the world. Those discussion happened at the level of policy makers, INGO's and NGO's. In every discussion we mentioned a "narrative" that we know, heard, or even believe in about women and their role. We discussed the narrative of women as victims, as perpetrators, as policy- makers, and as peacebuilder. There is always a narrative about women that shapes the way the world perceives women and their roles.
In this report, we will discuss different narratives about women and how we can build a new narrative.

Objectives

This report has three main objectives:
1- Presenting different Narratives on women in relation to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
2- Unfolding the debates around alternative narratives.
3-Providing a set of recommendations for alternative narratives about women that can be used both by the UN level and civil society organizations and media institutions.

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Victimization of Women
Anas Talalqa

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Introduction

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important end in itself. In addition, it is essential for the achievement of sustainable development. The full and meaningful participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household. In all parts of the world, women are facing threats to their lives, health and well- being as a result of being overburdened with work and of their lack of power and influence. In most regions of the world, women receive less formal education than men, and at the same time, women's own knowledge, abilities and coping mechanisms often go unrecognized.

From above, we understand that there are two dimensions we need to work on or tackle when we are working on women's related issues. One is protection of women and second is recognizing. Protection means the action of protecting, or the state of being protected. In our context here it means protecting women of all forms of violence against women which is a social and global issue, defined as the physical and/or psychological abuse of women because of their biological condition and their social role. The second dimension is recognizing women, their achievements and contributions. To recognize it means to acknowledge the existence, validity, or legality. In our context here what we mean by recognizing women is to highlight their achievements and contributions in our communities, countries and globally.

Changing Perspectives, Changing Reality

For decades now, civil society organizations, international foundations, inter-governmental and governmental bodies have been working on women empowerment with focusing only on one dimension, protection. Sadly, this approach did more harm than good.

For decades, the world has operated with a distinctly Western philosophy on how we go about the business of helping those "victim women". It is based on the idea that affluent people – successful members of the modern human race – know what is best for all women. This has led public and private organizations to develop programs that overly control on the way other cultures receive and implement programs related to women's empowerment. With the best of intentions, we have perpetuated generations of dependent women attached to government and nonprofit programs for survival, protection and recognition. This attitude has led to the disappearance of the unique role women play locally and globally.

By continuing to project our Western beliefs onto struggling women, we are creating more harm than good by crippling the very people we seek to help. We rob them of the opportunity to build the problem-solving skills they need, and we damage their confidence and their own ability to thrive. An illustration of this point would be, if you were watching your son or daughter playing a soccer/football game at a very young age and if their team were losing, you volunteered to substitute for your child to help their team win the match. You may win the match, but what did your child learn from this experience?

By working with third parties instead of working directly with the women in need, organizations have unintentionally created a different form of abuse against women which's all about labeling them with the victim label, prepare most women to be a set of issues need to be dealt with not as agents of change need to be recognized.

Recommendations to Radical Paradigm Shift

Actors should establish mechanisms to accelerate women's equal participation and equitable representation at all levels of the political process and public life in each community and society and enable women to articulate their concerns and needs and ensure the full and equal participation of women in decision-making processes in all spheres of life. Governments and civil society should take actions to eliminate attitudes and practices that discriminate against and subordinate girls and women and that reinforce gender inequality.

Actors should take every possible action to remove all gender gaps and inequalities pertaining to women's livelihoods and participation in the labor market through the creation of employment with secure incomes, which has been shown to advance women's empowerment and enhance their reproductive health. Legislation ensuring equal pay for equal work or for work of equal value should be instituted and enforced.

Creating local and global platforms to highlight the achievements of women in all aspects of life and recognize them as leaders and agents of change in building a better world for all of us not only as a cripple challenge to the international development.

Counter-narratives regarding women empowerment and participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

Islam Ennara

UN Security Council Resolution 1889 (2009) adopted by the Security Council at its 6196th meeting, on 5 October 2009, urged Member States, international and regional organizations not only to support female participation in peace processes and conflict prevention, as well as all aspects of political, economic participation and leadership, but also to counter negative societal attitudes about women's capacity to participate equally, a feat that cannot be achieved without promoting counter-narratives to women's roles in an accessible, effective way.

During the UNAOC fellowship, the discussion with several representatives of states and organizations focused on particular instruments that can help with applying women, peace and security agenda in different contexts and different countries. The meetings that fellows had in Spain emphasized the importance of advocacy and the focus on visibility for stories of women empowerment and counter-narratives. Furthermore, the international cooperation that Spanish organizations carry out with countries in the MENA region, such as Egypt, focuses, among others, on issues related to domestic violence, the visibility of female victims' stories in the public space, and its implications. The meetings in Germany, particularly the discussions with representatives of the Amadeu Antonio organization, focused on the double invisibility of women from different ethnic and racial backgrounds in Germany.

Gender portrayals in the media in different countries and the narratives that shape gender roles in each community are the main fuel for enduring social change, along with the formal education system and traditions passed on in a culture. The main narrative encountered in conflict-related contexts, as stated above, is the victimization of women. Countering it unfortunately may lead to seeing women as not only a factor of change, but also as a factor of threat to the established social order all too many times. Therefore, constructing counter-narratives for the labels that women bear in the media needs to be done carefully with the purpose to foster unity and support from both male and female enablers of traditional roles and weave societal unity and peaceful change, rather that more polarization and conflict.

Counter-narratives are born as a reaction deconstructing and contradicting the popular narratives about the role that women play in society – mothers, daughters, leaders, and decision-makers - what is the desired behavior, and the role that they play in conflict – victims, enablers, or agents. Particularly in relation to the narrative of victimization, there is a fear among conflict and trauma victims of being perceived as complaining, exaggerating, or causing another people trouble. This restraint in sharing their story and disseminating the narrative reflects gendered scripts for acting as the "good woman", rewarding women for minimizing their experiences of conflict and not disturbing others. The right approach in relation to this narrative is hard to pinpoint. Focusing on the vulnerability of women having suffered sexualized and physical violence strips them of their resistance, strength and agency in surviving and overcoming obstacles. On the other hand, shifting the focus of the story to their resilience can risk ignoring their pain and the consequences of trauma. Restorying women's experiences in a non-binary, complex narrative, including both their vulnerability and agency can lead to a more exact understanding of trauma and conflict as a whole. (Brown, 2013)
Counter-narratives should thus be disseminated in the same environments where the initial stories were shared and here media representation and restorying play a major role. The impact of the media in countering traditional gender roles should be seen in a broader sense of the

word, not only including the journalistic reporting of conflict and societal structures, but also cinema, television, advertising. In such milieus, the male gaze still plays a crucial part in the message, with women seen as either derived characters – mothers, daughters, wives, girlfriends of a male character – or an object of sexual desire. In the context of conflict, women are portrayed as passive characters, annexes to male fighters or terrorists, whether as their family members or as their victims. Their roles as fighters for peace within a conflict or even more so as perpetrators are mostly ignored. However, in the sections to follow, we shall present some of the existing counter-narratives to the victimization of women in different contexts, as well as examples of good practices of combatting mainstream narratives identified in our discussions during the fellowship.

Counter-narratives to traditional roles of women

When it comes to countering the narrative of women's role in society, an effective campaign with enduring results cannot simply come and show what is wrong with traditional gender roles, on the one hand, and on the other, cannot simply have programs on gender equality, particularly in communities where gender equality or representation is not an espoused or intrinsic value. As a recommendation based on the discussions had during the fellowship with various actors, it is not only the content delivered that matters, but also the ground it is planted on and one must admit that gender-related education is seen as disruptive of the social order in many communities. Therefore, an effective educational program against domestic violence, weaponizing sexual violence in conflict or against attacking or forbidding women from developing outside their prescribed role should include counter-narratives in a larger, more general programme related to values the community already upholds and has no bias against, such as family, economic development, or peacemaking. Within these programs and supporting these values, the model of female participation benefits and the consequences of excluding women from education or economy can be included as a counter-narrative in a more effective way, after thorough research, understanding, and sensitivity to the specifics of the culture in the given community.

Contexts of conflict can provide significant lessons to be learned for women's engagement. By dissecting and countering patriarchal views of gender roles, training programs can show participants how these views can fuel gender-based violence during conflict and how they can be deconstructed in everyday life. (OSCE, 2013)

There is now more focus on how women are crucial in countering the spread of violence by using the influence they have on their husbands, their children, and their communities, thus strengthening collective resilience. However, while there is a need to concentrate on women in policy-making in terms of leveraging their role in countering violence and peacebuilding, many of those policies often inadvertently instrumentalize and reinforce traditional roles for women rather than creating counter-narratives. Rather than seeing men and women in binary, separate roles and oversimplifying their roles in the context of conflict, there is a need for a deeper analysis of how gender roles interact, react, and respond to each other. (United States Institute of Peace, 2015) However, it could be a necessary step in the development of some communities and how they see women's contribution, a gradual approach that might facilitate acceptance.

Counter-narratives to women as passive in conflict

The main narratives on women in conflict-related contexts see them as victims or passive participants, annexes of fighters, perpetrators or peacebuilders. The few counter-narratives

presented in the media focus on singular characters, "tokens", but who are yet viewed as representative of the entire female community, rising from their trauma and status as a victims of conflict to become advocates, such as Malala Yousafzai. An interesting counter-narrative to both women's role as victims in conflict and also to the stereotype of women's shallow interests was Marie Claire's issue presenting not fashion items and icons, but rather female fighters wearing khaki jumpsuits and holding machine guns, members of the YPG, the main Kurdish group of the Syrian Democratic Forces – in Rojava, a de facto autonomous region in northern Syria. The world championed them for their bravery in combating ISIS. (Griffin, 2014)

A rather controversial counter-narrative to women's traditional roles as victims and passive participants, but equally important to an exact and complete perception of the power they can leverage in a community, is their presentation as perpetrators. In this context, there is much debate as to accepting the idea of viewing female ISIS members - so-called ISIS brides - as perpetrators and supporters of violence, within organizations that subdue women and use gender-based violence, when originally they are victims themselves. Accounts by female victims, particularly Yazidi women, paint an ambivalent portrait of ISIS brides and prove, if nothing else, that gender stereotypes and misconceptions hide the scope of women's participation in conflict and that there is an entire spectrum between victim and perpetrator that females can occupy. (Brown-Jackson, 2019) If social tensions are the premises for conflict, then one must observe the rise of the far-right in both Western Europe and the USA, where women occupy a surprisingly large part of the leadership and the public exposure. If the radical right has generally been dominated by men, in the world of American anti-Muslim activists one must note the dominance of women, such as Brigitte Gabriel, Ann Coulter or Pamela Geller. Authors and activists, they portray a view of Islamic strive for dominance in the USA and a need to reject and remove believers as dangerous, thus fueling social conflict. (Potok and Smith, 2015)

Good practices of promoting counter-narratives on the role of women in conflict prevention and peacebuilding

One of the NGOs involved in the dialogue during this fellowship, Soliya, developed a training programme with a focus on dialogue between the USA, Europe, and MENA region and an expanding global online team, striving to deliver a message of critical thinking, respectful and open intercultural communication, and inclusiveness, on various intersectional topics. One of these programs focused on "Gender (In)quality in the Media", the situation of women in different countries according to participants' perceptions, the narratives presented in the media and cultural expectation for each gender, as well as counter-narratives that can be found and created.

In an effort of mirroring popular stereotypical representations of women based on age-old traditional perception of their role and repurposing such stereotypes to depict them as professionals, a Women Acknowledged photo campaign was developed by a private entity. Building upon a disempowering stereotype, it then counters it by an empowered statement, related to women as professionals in their field, be it engineering, academia, accounting, architecture, law, medicine and dietetics. "She loves to argue" is one such stereotype. "Because she is a lawyer" is the explanation. The women portrayed belong to various ethnic groups and are actual professionals in their various fields, including fields where even in countries such as Spain and Germany there is a faint perception that women do not belong, such as engineering (Campaigns of the World®, 2018)

Recommendations

Narratives about female roles are pervasive and likewise, counter-narratives need to be dynamic, powerful, and delivered using creative methods so as to have a greater impact and reach. It is important that organizations promoting women empowerment and participation in peace processes be trained and equipped on how to shape their message in an effective manner, how to reach a greater target audience, and how to develop new advocacy strategies. Counter-narratives should be delivered using imagery and language that are suitable to the intended audience and shared through traditional channels and/or social media. (OSCE, 2013)

Running successful counter-narrative campaign on the role of women in conflict and in society means integrating them into a larger presentation related to values already existing in the community, such as family and peace instead of countering the traditional narratives directly. There is a need for a complex, non-binary view and understanding on women's role and for a dissemination of such views as natural. In a world where intercultural dialogue plays a more and more decisive role, counter-narratives are a necessary and essential component. The stories and voices of women involved in peace processes in any capacity need to be included in this dialogue, particularly those marginalized, as a precursor to conflict resolution and sustainable solutions for contemporary crises. (Mora, 2014)

Alternative Narrative:
" the obstacle to convincing people is often not what they do not yet know but actually what they already do know"
Tasneem Ma'abreh

The presence of women in particular roles, such as decision-making or peacemaking, is usually fought because of a particular narrative and previous perception of women, their abilities and the role they can play. From here comes the importance of building a new and alternative narrative, focusing on building a mindset to sustain the change we want to bring into societies.

For example, if in a certain society, people were made to think that a certain group of people is threatening them, they will tend to support security measures and even policies and legislation to prevent the group from harming them. During history, the narratives about women produced policies and legislations that harmed them (ex: preventing women from voting, from political participation.. etc).

Alternative narratives are actions (unlike counter narratives which are considered to be reactions) which aim to undercut narratives that contains hate speech, discriminating, Underestimation of women, by focusing on what we are "for" rather than what we are "against", and the world we want to build, by strengthening positive, inclusive and constructive ideas, and are based on human rights.

Building a new, positive narrative is not an easy, overnight achievement. it will take years and years to change the perception of communities. Years of advocation, community development and proper representation.

Women as Perpetrators and Peacebuilders
Hasnaa El Jamali

Participation of women in independence and armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon. As stated above, the narrative of women as uniquely "victims" and men as perpetrators of violence is not valid anymore. Not only women have played roles as combatants and fighters but also as active members in civil-society peacebuilding driven initiatives. Though Middle East and North African countries remain patriarchal and conservative societies, women have played important roles during revolutions and the recent uprisings. Women managed to break cultural norms by participating in revolutions and even armed conflicts.

Women's Role in Armed Struggle: Women as Perpetrators

Using gender and conflict approaches, revealed the various narratives and roles of many women combatants during conflict contexts. Many documented cases demonstrating women's participation in different liberation moments, whether as perpetrators or combatants actively engaged in the front lines, in Siri Lanka, Northern Ireland (Alison, 2009), the Russian Federation, Sudan, Rwanda, and Algeria.[i] (Turshem, 2002; Parashar, 2009) These female fighters challenge the perceived traditional stereotype that women are always peaceful and less aggressive (Alison, 2004; Shekhawat 2015). The protection stereotype has also shaped the role of women as being "protected" by the male "protector" thus he wages war to protect the most vulnerable woman resulting in an unequal relation (Wilcox, 2010). Gender studies and feminists also studied war from a gender perspective by focusing on victimization and peacemaking (Shekhawat, 2015). However, such an approach undermines the various experiences and roles women play in conflict and post- conflict scenarios.

The motivation of women to participate in the struggle was led by their willingness to take part in the liberation of their countries. For instance, experiences of injustices and discrimination also contributed in the participation of women in liberations struggle. For some women, the right to defend their country is a duty for both men and women alike. Independence and liberation wars and the need to overthrow an old regime and constitute a new one gave a greater scope where women can participate more effectively on the frontline.

Women's roles in conflict and post -conflict took different shapes from cooks, nurses, fundraisers, porters, combatants to peacebuilders etc. For instance, in Syria, the Tunisian Government estimated that about 1000 women travelled to Syria to take part in the conflict. However, the number cannot be confirmed as little reliable information is available (El Jamali and Vinatier, 2015). Women go to Syria to marry, to join their husbands, or to support fighters. Even more, there is a women exclusive brigade known as (*Khansaa* Brigade) in Raqqa, Syria (El Jamali and Vinatier, 2015). Women used to their benefit some social and gender constructions. The way women dressed helped them hide weapons that aided the revolutionaries. At the same time, given that women were not searched by the police at checkpoints they were able to carry and transport weapons to the rebels.

Women's' Status Post-Revolution: Women as Peacebuilders

Throughout the different meetings in all of the United States, Germany, and Spain, all of the participants and shareholders agreed on the "full and meaningful participation of women." There was a common sense that this participation should not only be about tokenism or "add women and stir" it should be about ensuring that their voices are heard and it is rather about the "quality of participation." Many activists from civil society organizations in the three countries, expressed that the emphasis on the quota to include women is not seen as a valuable

agent to shape change, but just to fill gaps. There is still a skeptical view on the significance of including women in the process. However, the evidence showed that where women are involved in the peace process, there is a high probability of success and sustainable peace.

Recent calls have been strengthening the inclusion of women in decision-making and their full participation in peacebuilding discussions. Women play an important role in violence prevention as agents of change; their roles in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is enshrined by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325[ii] which affirms the important role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. For instance, on Libya's efforts to implement women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) investigated in 2016 the efforts being made. Though a 10 per cent quota was set for women in civil service employment and a 1 percent representation in municipal council, the implementation is rendered challenging. On the local level, civil society and NGO's efforts in the implementation of WPA agenda has been focused mainly on political engagements and peace process (ESCWA, 2017).

Regarding armed and security forces, the increased participation of women has been seen as one of the most noticeable signs of a shift towards greater gender equality. When it comes to peacekeeping, however, although there are efforts to increase the participation of women in peacekeeping missions, the female presence in peacekeeping, especially the military section, is not significant.

Women play an essential role in society-driven disarmament initiatives and peacebuilding. Their societal roles as mothers and wives often give them a unique access to children and families. Empowering women to take on leading responsibilities when it comes to violence prevention initiatives should thus be a primacy. In fact, many participants in the fellowship stressed on the importance of individual initiatives and taking actions at the local level.

In fact, women have led many community and local initiatives aiming to foster peace and mediations. Their involvements can take many roles from negotiating to mobilizing actions to fostering and reinforcing peace processes. For instance, in Libya community tribal leaders established what is referred to as the "National Movement for Libya" for reconciliation purposes. The Movement is composed of 80 female members who participate in all processes related to reconciliations and dialogue who succeeded to push warring factions to sign ceasefire agreements and negotiations for peace and conflict resolution. Some women also established what is called 'Tent Movement' where women from different parts of Libya gather to share and discuss their experiences and promote dialogue.

Women have a great role in changing social norms regarding gender and mainly attitudes to the use of violence and endorsing new attitudes. During the fellowship programs the issue of masculinity was brought up in many discussions. For instance, in many countries (if not all) guns are symbols of masculinity bringing the assumption that man is tough, strong and should behave in a certain way. Such sign defines the status of not only the man but also the woman. To face such narrative and gender stereotypes, women should participate in correcting these stereotypes and to counter narratives that affected the image of women. Women need to help in changing such social norms defining the roles and status of men and women.

Conclusion and recommendations

Women were involved in supporting roles and some exceptional women took part in the front line helping the rebels in their struggle for liberation. Their journey in the battle was challenged by the traditional role women play in the society and the patriarchal and masculine roles of man which have shaped their experiences. Therefore, Women should take the lead in helping changing social norms about gender especially attitudes to the use of violence against women. Women have a significant role to play in peacebuilding initiatives at the local and national levels. However, their involvement need to be meaningful and influential; and it should not be

limited to endorsing gender-related issues. It is not so much the quantity of women involved but rather the quality of their participation that should be the focus.

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[i] Algerian women took the lead starting in the 1950s in the armed struggle against the French; 11,000 women, known as *mujahidat*, participated in the liberation war in 1974 accounting for 3 percent of the fighters. Women participated as "combatants, spies, fundraisers, and couriers, as well as nurses, launderers, and cooks.", in Turshem, 2002, p.893
[ii] Women and the resolution of 1325 focuses on four main pillars: participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery.

The role of women in peacemaking and conflict prevention
Rana Al Sharif • Abdelrahman Ibrahim • Jessica Kastoun • Ghada Zribi

1. On peace and security: Violence against women and young girls.
2. The role of education.
3. On Development: Women in Grassroots and civil society organizations.
4. Future conflicts and strategies to include.

The Authors' Note

As youth leaders who have been accustomed to generational narratives and fatalism beliefs within the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, we shoulder the additional responsibility to resist the attitudes of pessimism and cynicism which understandably permeate the individual and collective fabric of our war-torn and conflicted nations. The MENA region has battled for generations sentiments of helplessness and destitution in our individual fights for sovereignty and justice up against a domineering system of patriarchal power and control. As leaders of the next generation, we have the responsibility to build an empowered narrative for our women and girls that is not based on victimhood mentality: a narrative based on hope and belief in institutional reforms and tangible SDG-led actions to influence our futures and liberate our women and girls from patriarchy, violence, discrimination, and pessimism.

On Peace and Security: Violence Against Women and Girls
By Jessica Kastoun

Prologue

For eons, women and girls have been experiencing systemic violence in both the public and private spheres. This is especially pronounced during the contexts of crises, war and conflict -– leading to violations of her basic security, human rights, and dignity.
SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda conceives of sustainable development and peaceful societies in working towards the goals of realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.[1] There is a proximate connection between the protection of human rights and the preservation of peace and security in the work for gender equality and elevating the status of millions of women and girls' who are survivors/victims of violence in both the private and public spheres.

To effectively address and prevent violent conflicts and crises and for this to be sustainable long-term, the active inclusion, participation and decision-making of women is essential in *all* phases of the conflict cycle in tackling violence against women/girls.[2] Systematically and equitably integrating a gender perspective into all aspects of development/humanitarian programs and policy operations, within the peacebuilding and peacekeeping contexts, is crucial to successfully enable post-conflict transformation and reconstruction of societies from war and conflict and for the realization of gender equality.
Integrating a gender-sensitive approach is especially important during the early design of an in-country humanitarian/development resilience program in which survivors/victims of (Sexual) Gender-Based Violence ("SGBV/GBV") require multi-stakeholder and holistic approaches: to first protect and support the safety and basic security needs of women and girls experiencing violence, then to empower her through various programs to experience a sense of healing, belonging and self-actualization.

International Instruments

In 2000, the United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security (UNSC Res 1325) declared the significance of women's participation in conflict resolution and political processes and in post-conflict reconstruction, emphasizing the disproportionate and severe impacts armed conflicts has on women and young girls. UNSC Res 1325 is predicated on three central principles: prevention, participation and protection; it has been supplemented by seven further resolutions to date.[3]
UNSC Res 1820 (2008) distinguishes the concerns of women and girls within crisis and conflict areas as a distinct vulnerable category of becoming victims of extensive and systematic sexual violence, including within the contexts of displacement. UNSC Res 1820 advocates for an understanding of sexual violence and other forms of gender-specific violence as part of a wider spectrum of violence, being a fundamental attack on the human rights of women and

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[1] United Nations, *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2015) available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld.
[2] The German Federal Government, 'Action Plan of the Federal Government on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security for the Period 2017 to 2020' (2017) at 4.
[3] Resolutions 1820(2008), 1888(2009), 1889(2009), 1960(2010), 2106(2013), 2122(2013) and 2242(2015): For an overview of reference documents refer to above note 2, at 35.

girls.[4] UNSC Res 1820 acknowledges that the elimination of all forms of violence, in both the public and private spheres, requires a gender-sensitive prevention approach for the greater protection and security of women and girls. Further complementary measures to combat SGBV and improve the protection of women and girls are declared in UNSC Resolution 1960 (2010) which addresses impunity, providing mechanisms to bring perpetrators to justice: it introduces the system for criminal prosecution of war crimes and violent crimes and comprehensive support and remedies for survivors of violence through psychological, legal, medical and economic measures.[5]

Combating SGBV/GBV – a real time case of the plight of Syrian women and girls

Currently, across the MENA region uprooted Syrian women and girls living in protracted situations face increased risks and multiple forms of violence resulting from the Syrian conflict and their displacement. UN agencies and INGOs have documented women and girls' testimonies on their daily reality of violence: women and girls express their fears of sexual exploitation and harassment; increased incidents of domestic violence at 'home'; and early and forced marriage within the context of displacement and dwindling resources[6] – to name a few concerns. Moreover, returnee women and girls face additional fears and stigmas from their receiving communities and the public – particularly survivors of rape or sex trafficking.[7]

These cases illustrate how essential it is to partner with survivor women and girls to realize solutions to the violence she is experiencing in order to mitigate and minimize it within her family, community and society at large. We are still far off from realizing how to empower these women/girls to reconstruct and recover their lives, and enable the criminal prosecution for all the atrocities committed (namely rape and SGBV related crimes) with the provision of appropriate reparation, remedies and compensation to assist with these women and girls' social integration.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):[8] State reservations and implementation anomalies – Lebanon

The cycle of endemic violence can be viciously fueled by domestic legal governance systems that maintain discriminatory practices and patriarchy which run contrary to SDG 5. Several MENA countries uphold national laws and practices that detract from the pursuit of gender equality – including member state reservations made to CEDAW. This presents legal and social barriers to women and girls already experiencing violence by maintaining and enabling the gender asymmetries – in effect declaring to citizens the notion that 'a woman is less than a man'. This is blatantly demonstrated in countries like Lebanon, where women still do not enjoy equal rights with men and legal status to keep and change their nationality, and to grant their nationality to their children: the nationality law confines kinship to fathers.

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[4] The German Federal Government, note 2, at 3-8.

[5] UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1960 (2010) [on women and peace and security]*, 16 December 2010, S/RES/1960(2010), available at https://www.refworld.org/docid/4d2708a02.html.

[6] International Rescue Committee, 'Are we listening? Acting on our Commitments to Women and Girls Affected by the Syrian Conflict' (2014) available at https://www.rescue.org/report/are-we-listening-acting-our-commitments-women-and-girls-affected-syrian-conflict-0.

[7] International Civil Society Action Network, Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration from Violent Extremism (2019), available at https://www.icanpeacework.org/2019/01/11/invisible-women/.

[8] UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13, available at https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3970.html

Moreover, such anomalies exacerbate situations where a woman/girl is already experiencing family/domestic violence causing her to be fearful for her life and safety – to which she cannot seek proper and equitable legal recourse and protection to her situation. For example, Lebanon does not have a unified civil code governing issues such as divorce, property rights, or the care of children. Instead, it has multiple religion-based personal status laws that enable religious courts to apply laws and procedures in such a way as to discriminate against women across the religious spectrum/confessions.[9]

Besides direct discrimination, the system facilitates violence experienced at the home in the application of confessional divorce laws with the criteria for women to access divorce being more stringent than that for men; For instance, under the Christian Personal Status laws grounds for desertion on spousal violence is in itself *insufficient* to obtain an immediate termination to a marriage,[10] making it harder for women to escape situations of domestic violence.

A UNFPA– KAFA supported study on access to justice for people experiencing family violence found that around a third of the Lebanese population think that turning to the family to address violence is a better option than filing a formal legal complaint.[11] The level of trust in religious courts varies with the public expressing an attitude of low confidence in the courts reaching fair results, due to corruption.[12]

Recommendations/Action Plan

In view of the aforementioned and in line with the UNSC Res 1325 framework, the following recommendations and measures are put forward to effectively tackle violence against women and girls and to enable them to live with security and dignity:

- UN agencies and humanitarian and development cluster organizations must collaboratively consult with survivor women and girls on what *they* identify as their priorities and designing programs to that end.[13]
- Cross-border safe spaces must be established and monitored especially within camps, urban areas and ITS settings to relocate women and girls that are at higher risk of SGBV/violence;
    - o Deploy multiple entry points so that survivor women/girls feel safe to disclose the incidents of violence without fear of zealous over-questioning and stigmatization.
    - o Implementing partner cluster organizations should set strategic priorities together for coordinating and monitoring sexual exploitation and abuse mechanisms – transnationally.
- Prioritize humanitarian and development funding targeted to domestic violence programs – designing interventions to assist women/girls escape imminent threats of family violence and SGBV programs;

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[9] Human Rights Watch, *Human Rights Watch Submission to the CEDAW Committee of Lebanon's Periodic Report 62nd Session* (February 2015) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/01/human-rights-watch-submission-cedaw-committee-lebanons-periodic-report-62nd-session>

[10] Ibid.

[11] United Nations Development Programme, Lebanon Gender Justice: Assessment of laws affecting gender equality and protection against gender-based violence (2018) at 11-12.

[12] Ibid 11.

[13] International Rescue Committee, above note 6.

- o National Governments must demonstrate greater accountability and transparency to civil society around funding received and allocated to women/children violence portfolios without obstructing donor aid and coordination efforts.
- Rollout age appropriate multidisciplinary programs and life-skills services (incorporating modalities from Maslow and the Gottman Methodologies) for identified survivors of violence.
- Engage both men and women, including community leaders, to lead public discussions that raise awareness on returning women/girls who have experienced violence/SGBV to reduce the stigma they face and foster their acceptance within their respective families and communities[14] (leverage online technology platforms –the UNAOC Fellows can partake in facilitating those discussions);
  - o Leaders should work at targeting systems of oppression and mentalities that work at sexual commodification of women involving men and boys within a community in breaking down discriminatory attitudes and violence-related stereotypes about gender roles that seek to maintain gender inequality and patriarchy;
  - o Gender-sensitive planning, awareness training and outreach sessions should target both the hosting/receiving and residing refugee communities to address any inter-intra social tensions between these communities.
- Sensitize women and girl refugees/asylum seekers/undocumented persons on the importance of her individual registration as distinct to household registration so that she receives sufficient protection and access to health/financial supports from humanitarian partners notwithstanding any breakdown of intimate-partner relationship.
- Mainstream gender into all phases of humanitarian and development programming and develop SOPs that streamline the information sharing on victims' testimonials of rape/sexual violence *in confidence* between sections responsible for the justice and protection divisions – to ensure survivors of violence do not re-experience repeat trauma being subject to arduous reporting.
- Challenge entrenched cultural and generational practices that perpetuate harmful patriarchal and discriminatory norms and practices that exclude women from participation in leadership and decision-making – in the private family life and the public sphere – within the contexts of displacement and in developing countries where women's rights are curtailed:
  - o Negotiate stronger legally binding national government commitments on quotas for women's involvement in decision-making and leadership roles across the military, law enforcement, judiciary and political spheres – supplementing those commitments under respective National Action Plans and the CEDAW –steering away from tokenism.
  - o UNSCR 2250 resolution on youth, peace and security must be aligned with UNSC Res 1325 in recognizing the role of young women and girls within their experience/s of violence and conflict to participate and contribute to peacebuilding and the Peacebuilding Commission (UNAOC Fellows can take part in facilitating those discussions).
- Continue to advocate for the full domestic implementation of the CEDAW working towards the removal of any member state reservation anomalies to the Convention within domestic national laws (The UNAOC hub can act as the mobilizing force for UNAOC fellows with subject matter expertise to leverage domestic partnerships and to assist the CEDAW Committee and the Special Rapporteur to meet their mandates).

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[14] International Civil Society Action Network, above note 7, 15.

Education, Gender and Peacebuilding
By Rana Al Sharif

Context:

On average, a school student spends 1,000 hours a year in school. It is the place where children and adolescents not only learn how to read and write, but also where they gain social and emotional learning skills such as forming relationships and regulating personal behaviors and emotions as they interact with teachers and peers outside their immediate family. Inside the classroom, they are required to utilize critical thinking, engage in dialogue with classmates, and work collaboratively with them. Schools highly influence the formation of children's personalities and identities into fully grown adults with the agency to contribute to their communities.

Schools and the educational institution are seen as a pillar of the community that bring different families and children together. During times of crisis and internal or external displacement, humanitarian organizations, after providing shelter, food and water, gather their efforts to provide displaced boys and girls with education and encourage them to attend school. The logic behind this being that schools provide children with a sense of normalcy, protection, and psychosocial support to begin recovering from trauma. Education is a universal right for all children regardless of their gender, race, religion, ethnicity or ability.

Despite this widely agreed upon importance of the educational institution in our societies, it receives little support and direction to catch up with the demands of the current age. Teaching as a whole is not seen as a desirable career path as teachers are underappreciated and overburdened. While children of different backgrounds attend schools and participate in learning, the educational institution itself suffers from gender imbalance as teachers are predominantly female and those drafting policies are men. In the US, according to the National Center of Education Statistics, during the scholastic year of 2015-16, about 77% of public school teachers were female[15]. Alternatively, women made up about 54% of school principals.[16] Inside the classroom, students are understimulated as they are bombarded with distractions from social media and technological innovation. Outdated curricula and pedagogies do not address today's nuanced topics such as gender identity. Classrooms can also promote exclusion when children with disabilities or special needs are often times not allowed to attend school with able-bodied children. Schools can also be the place where violence and bullying against marginalized groups occurs. Unskilled teachers may exacerbate matters rather than resolve them. In times of crisis, when host communities welcome refugees, displaced children and asylum seekers, schools are unprepared and lack the resilience to support these new students. As a result, graduating students, rather than positively and productively change their future, continue to contribute to the structural systems of inequality that uphold our society, or lack the skill to critically question extremist and violent ideologies, and opt to join such groups' ranks, or, some students might engage in violent protest against inequalities, all with the misguided belief of positively contributing to their societies.

Reactive Measures:

We have seen positive examples of education and raising awareness utilized as a tool to rehabilitate individuals who have fallen victim to violence and conflict, or, as a mitigating response to local tragedies. Based in Washington, D.C, the International Center on Nonviolent

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[15] "Characteristics of Public School Teachers." *The Condition of Education*, Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_clr.asp.

[16] "Characteristics of Public School Principals." *The Condition of Education*, Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cls.asp

Conflict (ICNC), see the impact violent conflict had on communities, and share information and raise awareness at schools and events on the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance to achieve rights, justice and freedom. In New York, Soliya, provides virtual exchange programs to university students to build their sense of empathy and build more peaceful connections between people around the world. In Cologne, Germany, 180 Grad Wende provide peer and mentoring support to at-risk youth. These youth then become "multipliers" who distribute knowledge in their community. Finally, in Madrid, Spain, Mujeres Jovenes Federacion provide workshops to young women about their bodies, their rights, and their capabilities.

The impact of these projects is that they address local needs. They are a *reaction* to already preconceived negative ideas on gender, violence, dialogue, and conflict resolution. Rather than instilling such positive values in children and youth from a young age, these positive interventions are present on the sidelines of the mainstream system. They are an informal pathway to youth to learn more about dialogue, critical thinking, their rights, and the power of building inclusive sites for marginalized groups. These organizations are available to those who *seek* them, and not necessarily those who *need* them.

What's the Role of Gender in Education?

As we grow up, gender is an identity marker that we construct and negotiate with ourselves to shape our identities and the role we play in society. Not only that, our gender identity informs the relationships we form with the men and women we interact with on a daily basis. Gender dynamics are, "integrated into institutional educational, economic, and political processes."[17]

The gender identities we construct are further developed by the education we receive in school and the interactions we have with our peers. Images in curricula and subjects taught may uphold the patriarchal society's ideologies in which we live. Extremist and violent groups also use their own ideas of gender as a core for their ideology and a beacon to attract recruits. "Regardless of the region, one of the core ideological messages of such [extremist] movements is the promotion of patriarchy and the subservence of women. They create legal and physical boundaries between men and women and promulgate rigid understandings of religious texts that define what it means to be a good wife, daughter, or woman."[18]

Recommendations - Schools as Sites for Peacebuilding

Building peace requires acknowledging the existence of differences and conflict. Building peace is a long term process that requires the parties of the conflict to accept each others' differences and become allies working together towards sustainable peace.

As schools are pillars of the society where families gravitate to build relationships with other community members, they have to become the sites where the concepts of peacebuilding, gender, and intercultural communication and inclusion are mainstreamed and taught. While this is an ambitious recommendation, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals have shown that countries are able to commit to global priorities as each country is accountable for its own progress. Similarly, creating Global Educational Standards for countries to invest in in their formal school system can bring everyone one step closer towards a more peaceful and equitable society. Suggested standards include:

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[17] Kuehnast, Kathleen. "Why Gender Matters." *Charting a New Course: Thought for Action Kit, Women Preventing Violent Extremism*, United States Institute of Peace, 2015, pp. 7–8.

[18] Naraghi-Anderlini, Sanam. "Listen to the Women Activists." *Charting a New Course: Thought for Action Kit, Women Preventing Violent Extremism*, United States Institute of Peace, 2015, pp. 17–18.

1. Hire and invest in diverse faculty and staff where teachers, principals, admin and policy makers are representative of people from different races, religions, genders, ages and ability.
2. Collaborate with grassroot organizations and community leaders to learn how the school building and classroom design can be improved as a space utilized by all children and youth of different races, religions, genders, ages and ability.
3. Gender identity, politics, dynamics and history are taught as mandatory topics in schools similar to subjects such as history and religion so that children wrestling with their gender identity are more informed and have a healthier relationship with their bodies.
4. The school environment promotes inclusion and the fostering of relationships between students of different backgrounds. Additionally, children are exposed to intercultural differences and commonalities as a normal aspect of this global world.
5. Teachers and admin are provided with professional development opportunities that equip them with tools to peacefully resolve bullying and violence at school so children learn these skills for conflict mediation in the future.

The aforementioned recommendations might seem extreme. They require unlearning the patriarchal structures of our society. Real change and progress, requires us to *really* change and progress. Extremism can only be countered when we are willing to go the extra mile.

On Development: Women in Grassroots and civil society organizations
By Ghada Zribi

In the realm of international development, the term *grassroots* is often misplaced at a lower level compared to terms like *decision makers, policy makers*, or *politics* despite its deep enriching within the political arena. With this being said, achieving meaningful development is usually linked to decisions and discussions coming from government offices and forums gathering few countries that represent the majority of the global net wealth and gross domestic product (GDP) although changemaking heavily rely on local efforts in the world.

This intrinsic denial of the paramount importance of qualitative change achieved by grassroots is indeed attracting numerous debates that push toward legitimizing and supporting such initiatives to advance the agenda around development in all corners of the globe. Simply put, development cannot be achieved if it is not *holistic*.

This section will frame the situation of women-led grassroot initiatives in Washington DC, New York City, Berlin, and Madrid. This will be assessed and supported by the experience acquired during the UNAOC fellowship's field visits and thoughtful discussions held with government officials and different organizations' members and leaders.

Grassroots: Accelerators of filling the development gaps

By definition, grassroot movements are local efforts initiated and led by individuals who mobilize community members to take action and achieve a common local goal. Such movements usually rely on networks and organizations that utilize a "bottom-up" approach to represent local situations to high-level policy makers (Seyfang and Smith, 2007; p-585). Grassroot solutions usually advocate for sustainable social benefit rather than profit-driven benefits. Mainstream examples of grassroot solutions are the movements to mobilize citizens to vote, campaigns against domestic violence, and promoting diversity, etc.

Although this decade incepted contemporary multi-sided civil wars that resulted more than 70 million refugees and displaced people around the world, it also spotted prominent transitions of democracies and emergence of spontaneous civil organizers that hold decision-makers accountable. Civil societies in the MENA region for instance connected multiple stakeholders to renowned international platforms to deliver their realities and reclaim the driver's seat of change after decades of dictatorship and isolation. Unquestionably, one of the most important stakeholders are *women*.

The nature of grassroot initiatives automatically gives us the idea that their plan of action usually differs depending on the priorities that locals set for their well-specified challenges. Indeed, grassroots in Madrid, Spain may be working on a different target than those in Washington DC, USA, but what we personally learned is that they can be fighting a similar battle as their counterparts in Tunisia, for instance.

Tracing this correlation is trusted to go back to the complex socio-political climate that the world has been witnessing in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2010. In fact, grassroot actions are more and more pronounced in the agenda of the leading networks and governments we visited in the three countries. This increasing attention to community leaders and local solutions was perfectly explained by a representative of the *International Center on Nonviolent Conflict* (ICNC). Mr. Chase shared a story of how history repeats itself between Rosa Park's use of

community to denounce segregation and Bin-El-Sudan who used her community to amplify her voice against the dictatorship of Omar Al Bashir in 2019.

Grassroot leadership in this regard is ought to be used carefully as it is a double-edged sword, especially in social or political unrest. When people lose faith in their governments, they turn to sub-identities like groups with whom they share interests, religion, economic ties, or common causes. It is only when we bring grassroots at the table of dialogue and decision-making, that we can achieve sustainable results in the long run.

Women in grassroots - Case studies from EUNA (European Union and North America)

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, women comprise more than 49 per cent of the refugees worldwide[1] mostly as a result of conflict. Gender in such situations has also proved to affect the magnitude of hardships experienced by women compared to men. Meaning, peace for women is not only defined by the absence of war, but also the eradication of horrific practices exercised and imposed on their physical and mental health. Unfortunately, conflict spurs a sense to vulnerability of women to sexual harassment, poverty, unequal access to opportunities, destruction of assets, and high maternity mortality rate of 2.5 times higher on average in conflict and post-conflict countries (UN Women).[2] Generally, to survive the hardships imposed on them, women usually looked to those in positions of high authority to listen, empathize, and act.

The following section will illustrate women leadership and collaboration between the grassroot and high policy level for the local benefit of Spanish women.

Madrid, Spain

The meeting at the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs represented by H.E. Mr. Juan Manuel González de Linares, Ambassador at large for Peace Keeping Missions and for the Alliance of Civilizations, revealed to us the other side of the public-grassroot partnerships. Interestingly, the ministry is keeping *SDG5 on gender equality* a linking factor in their conversations around education, peace keeping, and security, among other burning issues.

Stressing on the successful example that Colombia had with having women on the table of the peace negotiations, Ms. *Clara Cabrera Brasero, Deputy Head of the Human Rights Office* at her turn also acknowledged the ministry's determination to strengthen the multilateral advocacy dialogues between women-led civil society organizations, unorganized movements, and UN agencies. *"Development is no longer a numbers game. Only through a meaningful participation of women that we will succeed in the initiatives we launch."* Expressed Ms. Cabrera Brasero.

While much of the work on women, peace, and security is guided by eight UN Security Council resolutions—1325[3], 1820[4], 1888[5], 1889[6], 1960[7], 2106[8], 2122[9] and 2242[10] and related frameworks within the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, the resistance against contemporary conflicts is very much a holistic process that should simultaneously be conducted at the private, public and grassroots level. Many of the efforts undergo collaborative actions to sustain peace and, to mainstream gender-related discussions.

Such inter-connected collaborations was noticed among the different parties that we have paid a visit to, such as the one between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and women-led grassroot organizations like the Association of Women Diplomats in Spain, and Instituto de la Mujer

(Institution of Women) that advance taking high-level policies to the general public of women and youth in local communities and schools.

Another level of change-making emerges from media outlets that is reinforcing a gender-aware approach. El Diario, 7-year-old journal tackled the controversies around Spanish women's rights and concerns through the employment of a female Gender Editor. With 50% of women journalist harassed, this position sought to mainstream new discussions on *wording* and terminology used in storytelling conducted by and aboutwomen. This is not exclusive to feminism, violence against women, and sexual harassment. The gender lens also covers the role masculinity and race in deconstructing the narratives around women journalists inside the newsrooms.

However,

With all of this effort being done by civil and civic societies to advance the development process, it must be recognized that grassroots development is an organic milestone that does

Certainly, this does not solely rely on donors. Grassroot organizations that enjoy high-level support also have a responsibility to advocate for the representation of the most underserved members of the civil society. Such multipliers do play an undeniable role in building and maintaining the peer-to-peer support system as well. In this way, local ownership can flourish with the training and tools for autonomy in order to preserve sustainability in all ambitious initiatives.

Finally, questions that marked my personal journey with the UNAOC fellowship were captured: *Is this the world we would like to welcome future generations to? Does everyone have a place on the table to answer this question? Are we doing anything to help? Are we maintaining or changing the status quo?* Indeed, the answer to these questions remain the fuel to my day-to-day drive for advocacy and social work.

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[1] 25 years of Global Forced Displacement, UNHCR, USA, https://www.unhcr.org/54cf99109.html
[2] https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures
[3] Resolution 1325 (2000) Adopted by the Security Council at its 4213th meeting, on 31 October 2000 https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000)
[4] Resolution 1820 (2008) Adopted by the Security Council at its 5916th meeting, on 19 June 2008 https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1820(2008)
[5] Resolution 1888 (2009) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6195th meeting, on 30 September 2009
https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1888(2009)
[6] Resolution 1889 (2009) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6196th meeting, on 5 October 2009
https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1889(2009)
[7] Resolution 1960 (2010) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6453rd meeting, on 16 December 2010 https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1960(2010)
[8] Resolution 2106 (2013) Adopted by the Security Council at its 6984th meeting, on 24 June 2013
https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2106(2013)

[9] Resolution 2122 (2013) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7044th meeting, on 18 October 2013
https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2122(2013)
[10] Resolution 2242 (2015) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7533rd meeting, on 13 October 2015 https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2242(2015)

Future Conflicts and strategies to ensure the meaningful participation of women
by Abdelrahman Ibrahim

Introduction

Conflicts have always been and will always be a part of human history. These conflicts can take many shapes or forms, they can start for various reasons and last for a short or long time. The one thing we can predict is that the future will hold conflict. This can be because of lack of resources or climate change or numerous reasons. We also have the experience of the effect of conflict and the subsequent peace building efforts on women and girls.

Therefore, we have to look to our past experiences in conflict and during the peace building process. This is in order to begin putting in place now the infrastructures and frameworks to include the meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process from talks to implementation on all levels. For this purpose we will briefly examine the Colombian peace process, it's advances and shortcomings and finally what can we do to avoid its shortcomings in the future.

The Colombian peace process as a launching pad

Colombia is a pioneer in legislation and jurisprudence with respect to women's rights and, more recently, in developing a comprehensive approach to addressing violence against women[19]. On paper, women in Colombia enjoy a broad range of rights that have been the product of decades of struggle. Colombian laws on violence against women are consistent with its international obligations in forums such as the United Nations and Organization of American States (OAS).[20] The Colombian State has designed a progressive normative framework for gender equality and its National Policy for Comprehensive Gender Equity (2012) promises greater attention to violence prevention and the needs of victims of sexual violence. In Colombia, then, progressive legislation, judicial decisions, and executive decrees back women's rights and promise to address sexual and gender-based violence. Nonetheless, centuries of structural discrimination, mistreatment, and gender-based violence, have been exacerbated by a history of colonialism, racism, homophobia, and poverty. In practice, Colombian women have yet to achieve full political participation and economic equality. Colombia ranks 70th out of 190 countries in terms of female political representation in the Congress.

[21]

As such when the peace negotiations in October 2012 started in Norway not one woman was present at the table. Later on, when formal peace talks started in Havana one month later, there was only one women what of the 10 negotiators chosen by each side. The exception was Tanja Nijmeijer (aka Alexandra Nariño, the "Dutch guerrilla"), who briefly joined her nine male

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[19] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

[20] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

[21] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

colleagues at the table. [22]However, women's presence was felt around the table or rather behind the table. Colombian women have accompanied and advanced the peace process, shaped public opinion, supported a negotiated solution to the conflict, generated analysis and organized inputs, and built their capacity to engage. Through civil society, UN system in Colombia and the Center for Reflection and Monitoring the Peace Talks ("Centro de Pensamiento y Seguimiento al Diálogo de Paz") of the National University (Universidad Nacional). Women participated in working groups (mesas de trabajo regionales) in nine regions of Colombia organized by the Peace Commissions of the House and Senate in Colombia, with the support of the United Nations System[23]. The recommendations of these working groups were made available to the negotiating teams in Havana.

The most important change to the dynamic and the biggest push for the inclusion of women in the process came after a landmark National Summit of Women for Peace in October 2013, initiated by a consortium of nine Colombian women's organizations representing different ethnic, regional, cultural, and political backgrounds. The Summit had the backing of UN-Women and the United Nations system in Colombia, as well as key embassies and development partners present in the country, including Sweden, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland, as well as OXFAM. The messages from the summit were also largely pushed forward in New York when Colombia's CEDAW obligations were under review. In November 2013, the Government appointed two women as negotiators. Some months later, the peace delegation would also establish a sub-commission on gender, and solicit the direct engagement of victims, women, and LGBTI persons at the peace talks. By the end of the first year of peace talks, FARC women also secured greater participation and visibility on their peace delegation. The quote by Juanita Millán believes being a woman in the military gave her a different perspective: "Yes, it changes the perspective because gender is not visible to them [the men]. If we had not been next to them, the gender perspective would not have entered the Agreement. Because the priorities are different, for example, for me it was a priority to include gender violence as a form of violation of the ceasefire, men did not see this as a priority"[24] shows that women inclusion in not only important but makes can make the difference between life or death.
Women inside the peace process have considerable power through a series of mechanisms that have been established during the peace process. These include commissions, sub commissions, thematic working groups, and a drafting commission.

Now, two years since the signing of the Peace Agreement, President Santos' Government has been succeeded by a government of ultra-right idealists that came to the presidency promising to bring an end the Peace Agreement. Moreover, there has been slow to no progress in the implementation of the Agreement. Reports from institutes like the GPaz group, claim the creation of commitments focused on gender do not exceed 20%, and highlight the main obstacles include: a lack of budget for the implementation, little technical expertise and training of government officials, and vast ignorance of rural contexts.[25] Congresswoman Victoria

[22] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

[23] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

[24] https://revistas.uniandes.edu.co/doi/full/10.7440/colombiaint94.2018.04

[25] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

Sandino reiterates this, stating: "Another frustration is everything related to sexual and gender differences has practically disappeared throughout implementation"[26].

Future Conflicts

What did we learn from the Colombian experience and avoid its shortcomings?.

Firstly, we can see that although the pre-existence of legislation is important and certainly helps, it doesn't ensure the inclusion of women in a peace process. Second, we have seen the importance of having strong civil society engagement. This engagement ranges comes from local organizations, universities, INGOs and all groups that both contribute to the process and advocate for the presence of women at all levels of the talks. Third, the essential role played by friendly governments and embassies in mediating the talks and supporting and advancing the inclusion of women. All these actors support women's inclusion through various mechanisms like conferences, working groups, providing access to expertise, funding and access to the negotiating teams.

Where does this example fall short?.

First, we can see that the patriarchal society and cultural norms in Colombia despite all the laws available have prevented women from being part of this process from the start. Second, the unequal representation of women in government and military positions contributes to the exclusion of women from the formal peace talks. Third, the lack of clear guidelines for the implementation of the agreement leaves a lot of space for not only push back from conservative groups but also lack of accountability. Fourth, the integration of ex-combatants in the community both in the family and the community at large. Research shows that their return can be ill-received and that after their return we see an increase in gender based violence Finally, how do we ensure implementation and hold both governments and armed groups accountable. What incentives do they have implement the entirety of the agreement not just the stop in fighting but also the adherence to all clauses including the ones addressing women's issues.

Recommendations to avoid these shortcomings in the future may include :

First, the implementation of national commitments of governments under 1325 UNSCR and all subsequent resolutions along with CEDAW and all over frameworks governments have signed pertaining to the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The UN and the international community need to hold all governments accountable and follow the implementation of their National Action Plans (NAP) more vigorously. We have seen how the CEDAW review in the case of Colombia has pushed the issue front and center and led to not only the inclusion of more women in the formal negotiations but also to the more meaningful participation of women groups and rural women in all tiers of the process.

Second, Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programs that use gender-aware policies and strategies can provide opportunities for creating new models of masculinity and femininity that are based on fairness, respect, and dialogue, rather than force and violence.[27]

[26] https://nacla.org/news/2019/01/10/women-contradictory-peace-colombia

[27] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

Increasingly, the literature is examining the role of both men and women in this process. The UNSCR resolutions mandate not only women's participation, but also the integration of gender perspectives and gender analysis, in the design and implementation of conflict prevention initiatives, cease-fire agreements, peace accords, DDR (demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration) strategies, reparations programs, and post-conflict reconciliation initiatives and budgeting. DDR process, a differential approach that recognizes the needs of girls, boys, men and women is essential.

Third, Designing new models of "masculinity" and "femininity" that reject violence and gendered or radicalized hierarchies of power in favor of respectful, democratic relations will be key to breaking the cycle of violence. Men and women will need to work together to negotiate new identities and to create new understandings about what it means to be a man or a woman in a society at peace. Here the focus is on building a new culture the respects and empowers women, this includes women in leadership positions. This work should start now in all countries as it not only addresses conflict zones but all societies and it will build a culture where if violence breaks out women will not be particularly targeted or unequally suffer from the conflict.

Fourth, re-integration of ex-combatants in the family and communities at large. Women are often key to determining how ex-combatants will be received when they return home. They are also effective partners on all humanitarian issues included in ceasefire and peace agreements.

Fifth, male and female ex-combatants are more inclined to violence in the aftermath of war, though each group is socialized to handle this violence differently, with women often turning the violence inward or toward their children, and men more often lashing out at their partners. As such violence prevention programs need to be put in place by local governments well before any conflict has arisen and in tandem with the peace process.[28]

Sixth, countries should be required to build mechanisms to investigate, prosecute, and punish human rights violators; satisfy victims' rights to truth, justice, reparations, and guarantees of non-repetition. This not only applies in conflict zones but rather in any country at anytime. In addition, when violence breaks out the existence of such mechanisms will help mediators to push for their full implementation and will give the negotiating parties an existing framework to work under.

Seventh, we must utilize the existing expertise put forward by various organizations like the Guidance on Gender and Inclusive Mediation Strategies United Nations Department of Political Affairs. Then we must build on it and add to it from the new experiences we have.

Conclusion

In conclusion, at this point in human history we must be able to build a consensus around the inclusion of gender mainstreaming in all existing and new laws , constitutions and frameworks.

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[28] https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2017/women-colombia-peace-process-en.pdf?la=en&vs=17

We must make use of all expertise and human experience to implement the NAPs and push governments to implement their obligations in both peacetime and wartime. We have learned that wars cause dramatic cultural shifts, therefore we must use the opportunity of peace building and conflict resolution to aggressively push for the inclusion of gender aware policies and UN recommendations. Moreover, we must push in peacetime for these cultural shifts and the understanding of masculinity and femininity in all societies and cultures.

We have to not only increase the number of women in international, regional, national and local organizations but also mainstream their presence and meaningful contributions. We have to hold all International organizations like the UN accountable both in their efforts towards governments and crisis situations but also internally within their agencies.

The way forward for us most include establishing frameworks to deal with conflict when it arises on all levels, international, regional and national. We can not wait until the conflict begins, ends and then the conflict resolution work starts. The existence of these programs will help all stakeholders hold the warring parties accountable even during the conflict.

The most important aspect however is the cultural norms in any given region or country towards women and girls. Therefore, work must be done now supporting women and women's groups in all countries and cultures. This work must cover all aspects identified by women in any given culture or region or country. Women must lead this work designing and implementing programs to mainstream gender equality and work with members of the community to engage everyone in this conversation. The only way to shift cultural norms is through painstaking work with all groups over a long period of time, through discussions and exchanges, through education and advocacy. Thankfully, there is a great wealth of writing on how to start this process by various experts where we can learn how to ask the right questions so that we can begin this process giving the tools and experience to the local actors as they are the best equipped to address this issue in their own cultures .We need all the mechanisms and routes available in order to reach our goal where discrimination on basis of gender is a thing of the past both peacetime and wartime.

What women want
By
Mohammed Al-Azemi and Fidaa Alaraj

When peace making and conflict resolution is the topic of speech, it is usually here that women are mentioned. Bringing women to the table, women participation, women adding the values usually missing, etc. While when it is a talk of war, conflict and clashes, gender gets to the bottom of the priorities' ladder. The argument behind that is a war machine is gender blind, a killing bullet or missile will not distinguish a man from a woman, so gender is irrelevant!

I tend to disagree. I find it doesn't make much sense that looking through a gender lens can apply to one side of conflict/ peace but not to the other side. I believe that the motivation behind the invitation to increase women participation in peace making and conflict management is a gender based discrimination, for the notion behind it is regarding women as the "softer", weaker, more tender sex with motherly instincts to restore peace and solve problems that men are too full of masculinity righteousness to solve!

In a situation of life and death, how much does gender matter? It is a question I've been asking myself for a while and have been taking a quest after a quest to try and find a convincing answer. It does matter, because participating in any conflict or its resolution has different motivations and different consequences for women and men, and if these gendered differences are not taken into account, then managing any conflict to a satisfactory outcome will be lacking.

What I believe to be a very important thing which is usually overlooked in that line, is the role women might have in making, participating in or fueling conflict. When I encounter a female solider, fully armed just to stamp a paper for me to get into my own country, when I and my people get killed and assaulted violently by fighter jets operated by 18 years old female soldiers, I wonder what do people think promoting the traditional discriminatory image of women as the soft hearted sex incapable of violence! This is not an invitation to see women as villains or trouble makers, this is a call to a more balanced regard of the gender issue in relation to conflict and subsequently to peace making. We need to have a constant view of women roles throughout the whole chain of events consisting conflict and peace if we hope to understand what is missing and how to remedy it. We need to look at the structures governing conflict and peace, the dynamics of power and decision making processes within these structures and the surrounding factors that affect them in order to put our fingers on where the balance goes missing. Is it a problem of women participation in public life in general? Is it the social norms defining women roles and limiting them to the domestic and reproductive domain? Is it the lack of capacity, knowledge or political will of women to meaningfully participate and have a say? Is it the legal scene and availability – or absence- of enabling environment to support this participation? Once we can find answers to these questions, then we can start to know where work is needed to be done and this is a very strong, well informed start we need in the quest for peace by achieving gender equality.

In the year 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) implemented a new resolution called UNSC Resolution 1325 concerning women, peace and security. The resolution consists of four ground pillars which are prevention, participation, protection and peacebuilding and recovery.

This resolution followed after the recognition that women are to a large extent often excluded from the peace process in the aftermath of a conflict.

Women play a prominent role in bringing about peace in post-conflict societies. Women's contribution to peace processes are often underemphasized or ignored in conflict management research and praxis. It was not until the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and seven other related resolutions that critical attention was given to women's role in the peace process.

The question "Why" we need women in conflict resolution is a primary one. Throughout history, negotiations about war and peace have been exclusive processes dominated by male political and military leaders. Not much has changed since and new set of challenges emerges: that of the disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration of men, women, boys and girls associated with violent extremist. Article 1325 successfully promotes a theory of change; that civil society – especially women's – participation in the promotion of rights, peace and security in countries affected by conflict and crises, leads to a higher chance of successful peace and sustainability.

The Article pushes for mainstreaming gender perspectives in peace operations by · appointing Gender Advisors to all UN peace operations, considering the specific needs of women and girls in the development and design of policy in all areas. Also, by incorporating the perspectives, contributions and experience of women's organizations in policy and program development.

Many violent extremist groups have co-opted the message of women's empowerment, in addition to promising better socioeconomic conditions to recruit women and girls. They tap into ideology and identity to offer a sense of purpose, meaning and belonging that vulnerable women and girls are missing in their lives. National and international entities involved in reintegration programming must take these tactics into account when designing Preventing Violent Extremism programs. Disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration should not be reduced to only material subsistence—it needs to address the "push factors" of misogyny, injustice and deficit in dignity that women experience in their own societies.

We can't forget of course the consequences of conflict on women, for as I said earlier, those consequences are deeply gendered and therefore very different for women. I have been born in a refugee camp, one that was established after the Palestinian Nakba of 1948 and which was still there when I was born more that 35 years later, and still exists today more than 70 years later! It is a protracted crisis, an ongoing occupation, armed conflict with bloody and destructive consequences, and as a woman I do experience it differently. When a girl in a mostly patriarchal conservative community such as ours is socially shamed for not committing to a certain dress code or for refusing to marry a relative or to marry young, for travelling alone, for taking "untraditional" job for a girl but in the same time is encouraged and revered if she participated in demonstrations against occupation, if she was arrested and imprisoned by occupation or if she was martyred in combat, while a boy is regarded and treated differently. This gives me pause to think, has conflict provided our community with double standard views of women? Is this separation between conflict with occupation and between social life a coping mechanism? Is women participation in a collective cause something different from achieving personal advancement? Why is a woman

martyr accepted and revered while a woman judge or minister is cause for stir, discussions and questioning?

I am still in the process of seeking answers for these questions, but I do believe that women suffering and burdens of gendered responsibilities are usually exacerbated by conflict, which leaves women situation and the gender issues multi-faceted, complex and layered with social, political, economic and personal considerations that all need to be unraveled and well analyzed to be able to address the matter of women in conflict and turn it into: women in peace.

Current policies and programming tend to either ignore women and girls associated with violent extremist groups or oversimplify the issues. They frame women and girls in binary terms, either as victims or perpetrators of violence. Yet in most instances, women and girls' association with violent extremist groups is complex. It can be due to a mix of factors including coercion, co-option, enslavement or kidnapping, or subjugation in their own communities and unfilled aspirations for belonging, purpose, adventure and empowerment. In order to design effective responses for this cohort, we must understand and address the initial drivers, conditions and motivations of their association with violent extremist groups. It is also imperative that state responses do not perpetuate or contribute to further victimization of those who have already experienced profound violence and trauma. In drawing attention to women, it is essential that women and children who have been victims of the violence perpetrated by violent extremist groups are not forgotten. There are widows and female-headed households on all sides. They are often becoming breadwinners for the first time because their husbands and sons are either incarcerated or killed. Enabling them to have independent livelihoods can help them heal from trauma and restore their identities, providing them and their children with the resilience that is essential for preventing re-recruitment. If rehabilitation support is only provided to the families of former fighters, then it can fuel injustice, anger and retribution among women and other community members who were innocent targets but have received no support.

What does women want? A question that's always been asked and many stakeholders have been trying to answer with different approaches. I have a problem with categorizing. Putting "women" as a category and calling this gender sensitive programming, identifying women as "vulnerable groups" based on their gender and assuming that women are the "victims" in need of help and saving. These notions might have good intentions behind them and might be tries to answer the question of what women want by specifying responses to women. The problem with this is that women are not a homogeneous group. Women are simply different from each other and different women need different things. What women want is simply what they lack. Women suffering from lack of access to services need facilitation of this access, women suffering from discriminatory laws need legal reform to have better justice legislation, women suffering of having no control over their bodies need their voices heard and social norms and attitudes to be shifted to accommodate their right to full bodily freedom and women suffering from the deadly consequences of conflict need to be able to participate in decision making processes of running this conflict and any efforts as might be towards conflict resolution and peace building.

Women through the organization of workshops and other initiatives should establish benchmarks to measure progress in the implementation of relevant strategies and programs these governments

are making. Governments should Invest in education from an early age to ensure that children have access to curricula that promotes tolerance and mutual understanding. And in policies related to youth, integrate young people in decision-making and consider policies and programs involving and targeting women. Also, facilitate the involvement of civil society in strategies and programs to prevent misreading or misunderstanding the situations in conflict zones to raise better women fit for leadership in their local areas and zones.

Civil societies and NGOs should also develop media content, including through the creation or strengthening of websites to raise awareness and tackle cyber bullying. Using texts and messages accessible to a wider audience and provide answers to challenges related to social exclusion, annihilation, and hatred. Using of media influencers also to Use their influence to persuade those with whom they hold influence.

We should help also promote and help develop coalitions of civil society organizations to work with individuals and communities. One essential element in fostering this is to develop public-private partnerships at all levels of Government, including State, local and provincial.

Investing in gender-sensitive research and data collection on women's roles in preventing violent extremism as and when conducive to terrorism.To produce coherent reliable data as eveidence for this newly proposed theory. University campuses and academia should hold more invents educating and teaching their students about the role of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

Develop a global communications campaign to foster mutual respect and understanding, which will contribute to enhancing media awareness. More importantly to invest in education from an early age to ensure that children have access to curricula that promotes tolerance and mutual understanding.

The knowledge of how to know what women want is not enough. This knowledge needs to be employed to inform actions and interventions aimed at advancing women status in any domain. We are often faced with the frustrating fact that despite the many actors working on women rights, gender equality and the advancement of women the progress made is barely noticeable. It is true that the kind of change we seek to achieve is a very slow process being it on the level of thoughts, attitudes, social norms and structures, but we also need to pause and take stock of our own approaches and ways of working to assess and try and put our fingers on the problem in hopes of improving our interventions and seeing more encouraging results. I think using participatory, women centered approaches is a good start, but far from enough. After different actors started asking women what they want and how they want it done, now is the time to let women lead the way not just participate in its design. I believe what is needed is to give more room for women owned solutions, what women themselves see as their answer and to give the space and enabling surroundings for women to actually do what needs to be done. In the thirteen years of my work with an array of different organizations, I was always able to see change in certain "success stories" where women identified the problem and did something to solve it without waiting for organizations to write it down in their risk assessments, log frames or reports and without thinking to link it with this UN resolution or that international treaty. What we lack as organized actors is this link. We tend to operate on a more theoretical level committed to certain frameworks and conceptual grounds, trying to capture what we try to do into tools, documents and references

because we are part of a bigger domain of NGOs, civil society and human rights actors. We try to have evidence, to be able to measure and report that change we achieve. But amid all this we forget that it all starts and ends with the women we are working so hard for. We don't need to invite women to come and tell us what we need to know. What we do need is to go and see for ourselves what they want, what they are doing to get it and what works for them so that we might learn new styles and new approaches that will lead to revolutionary results.

We need to acknowledge the fact that Engaging women in decision making about conflict and extremism, as well as protecting their safety and security don't often make it to the headlines. Stories of women peacebuilders, women who work on peacebuilding on the ground and lead grassroots local organizations question social dynamics and engage with different parties in order to create social change at all levels. This puts them in particularly risky situations.

How do we achieve a Better Peace? By including civil society, especially women, in peace negotiations and peace building and ensuring gender sensitivity in all processes.
How do we make the Peace sustainable? By implementing peace agreements and ensuring that thematic topics addressed, such as transitional justice, devolution, and security sector reform are gender sensitive and inclusive.

We should also widen the focus of disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts beyond the individual terrorism offender to include all those affected by violent extremism, including children who were kidnapped by violent extremists or conceived in captivity, female abductees and internally displaced persons.

Conduct gendered reviews and analyses of policy and practice across all relevant sectors, recognizing that women and men, boys and girls may face different circumstances and have different needs in the processes of return and reintegration. This will ensure that initiatives draw on the best practices and lessons learned from the failures of previous relevant initiatives, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, and rehabilitation programs developed for general prisoners and gang members.