

Women in Peacebuilding

We live in a fundamentally unequal world. People's quality of life, the opportunities they have and their experiences of the world differ dramatically based on factors such as their place of birth; economic standing; age; marital status; disability; sexuality and gender. Women and girls continue to bear the brunt of gender inequality: more likely to experience violence because of their gender; less likely to be ever start school than boys; and disproportionately carry out the majority of unpaid care and work. Women around the world are on average paid less than men, more likely to be employed in insecure or part time work, and are penalised if they seek to raise children and work at the same time¹. Around the world women have less legal rights than men, are prevented from accessing justice, and own significantly less land and property than men². On top of these factors that put women at a disadvantage, women are also prevented from accessing decision making structures, and their voices blocked by cultural and structural factors. Globally only 22%³ of women hold positions in the national Parliament of their countries, and hold significantly less management and board positions than men.

One area in which women's voices are blocked is in formal peacebuilding, and processes seeking to end violent armed conflict. Whilst women are disproportionately affected by many aspects of conflict, their voices are not being heard during peace processes, and their unique needs remain unrepresented. Between 1992 and 2011 only three percent of signatories to peace agreements were women and between 1990 and 2010 only 16% of peace agreements contained references to the specific needs and experiences of women. Time and again, we hear stories of women being purposefully excluded from formal aspects of peace building, from the British Government cancelling transportation for women to attend peace talks in 1915, to recent peace talks in Syria, where women were excluded as the warring parties refused to allow them in to negotiations.

Despite their experiences, women should not be viewed as passive victims of armed conflict. Women can be powerful actors in peacebuilding, and dynamic drivers of peace. In fact they have a hugely positive impact on the quality and duration of the peace, when they are involved, with studies showing that when women are involved in formal peace processes, the chance of a peace agreement lasting at least 15 years increases by 35%⁴. A study from Sierra

¹ http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/infographics/?doing_wp_cron=1488894585.8706500530242919921875

² [7] World Bank Findex, Financial Inclusion

Data. <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/financialinclusion/topic/gender>

³ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

⁴ Stone 2015

Leone found that around 55% of former combatants said that women in their community had helped them reintegrate after conflict. In some communities women have access to spaces which men do not, often custodians of culture and history, which are powerful tools in establishing peace after conflict.

Mothers' Union has sought to promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children; and to support those whose lives have met with adversity for 140 years. Around the world, many of our 4million members in the 83 countries in which they live and work, are confronting women's roles as peace builders and reconcilers head on. Many of our members are directly affected by the everyday realities of war and violence, and are working hard for peace, at the individual level, in families, within their communities, and by advocating with decision makers and those involved in formal peace channels. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mothers' Union practically supports women affected by sexual violence in conflict, and advocates on their behalf with decision makers at national and international level. In South Sudan, Mothers' Union members have been actively involved in getting women's voices heard throughout the peace processes, and in disseminating and sensitising those at the grassroots level on issues of peace and security. They also provide practical support to those displaced because of conflict, and have been involved in facilitating community healing and reconciliation processes. Mothers' Union is also looking at how as an international network, and one of the oldest women's organisations in the world, we can work together in a coordinated manner to advocate for peace. When we look at the need around us, and see our communities devastated by violence and conflict, our response must be to act, and to make sure that we speak up for, and raise the voices of women around the world!