

Women, Peace and Security – The need for Women's Meaningful Participation in Peacebuilding

Men and women have different experiences of armed conflict. Whilst men tend to make up the majority of armed combatants, women are disproportionately affected by many aspects of conflict and are at greater risk of certain forms of violence from combatants, such as rape, slavery, forced pregnancy, and deliberate infection with HIV/AIDS, amongst others. Forms of violence such as rape, often used as an attempt to destabilise communities and families, are often direct tools of warfare, but women are also disproportionately affected by the vulnerabilities that conflict affected or fragile contexts bring.

Women, along with children, make up the majority of persons displaced by conflict, leaving them vulnerable to hunger, disease, forced prostitution and gender-based violence. Maternal mortality is approximately two and a half times higher in conflict or post-conflict affected countries, with over half of global maternal deaths occurring in conflict affected or fragile states.

Whilst women and girls clearly have a unique set of experiences and needs as a result of conflict, they are often completely excluded from peace processes. 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. The lack of women's involvement in peace processes has a range of negative effects, not only on the women and girls themselves, but also on the duration and stability of the peace. Whilst often excluded from formal channels of peace and security, women tend to play a vital role in peace-building in reality, with research from Sierra Leone finding that around 55% of former combatants said that women in their community had helped them reintegrate after conflict. Women's involvement in peace-building also increases the likelihood of peace lasting, with evidence suggesting that when women are involved in peace processes, the chance of a peace agreement lasting at least two years increases by 20% (Stone 2015).

On 31st October 2000, the United Nations Security Council sought to address the issue of women's involvement in peace-building by unanimously adopting resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution recognised that women and men experience conflict differently, and that women have a vital role to play in building sustainable peace.

The resolution calls on states to:

- Increase the representation of women in decision making at all levels on issues of peace and security, as well as greater participation of women in

field-based roles, such as military observers, special envoys and civilian police

- Include a 'gender perspective' - pay special attention to the impact of gender - into peacekeeping operations, and provide training for military personnel on the rights and needs of women in conflict situations
- Incorporate a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, that pays attention to the needs of women during resettlement, protects their human rights, and involves local women in the process.
- End impunity and prosecute perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity and sexual violence

Since the adoption of resolution 1325, some progress has been made around women's involvement in peace-building. However, there is still a way to go. In 2014 half of all signed peace agreements included references to women, peace and security, which is a positive step considering that between 1990 and 2010 only 16% of peace agreements included such references. However, the international community, national governments and civil society must continue to keep the issue of women's experiences of conflict and their role in peace-building firmly on the agenda in order to create lasting change.

Case Study: Mothers' Union in South Sudan and Women's Involvement in the Peace Process

In South Sudan, as well as providing practical support to those affected by conflict, Mothers' Union members have been actively involved in peace-building through the South Sudanese Women's Network for Peace (SSWNP).

To ensure that the voice of women was heard throughout the peace process, for which a peace agreement was signed in August 2015, the SSWNP created a "Women's Agenda for Peace", which addressed the unique needs of the women of South Sudan in relation to the conflict. Many of the recommendations in the Women's Agenda for peace were adopted in to the final peace agreement. The SSWNP also ensured that communities throughout South Sudan were aware of and understood the final peace agreement and its implications, as well as the need to continue campaigning for the implementation of the peace agreement and a peaceful end to the conflict.