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**An Appraisal of Women and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Environments**

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**ABSTRACT**

Post-conflict peace building processes present major opportunities for advancing women's rights and gender equality particularly with respect to education, political representation and rights to land, property and inheritance. The experience of some post-conflict countries in advancing the rights and position of women and girls bears this out. Unfortunately, peace building institutions do little to create livelihoods and economic opportunities for girls and women or to empower them politically and economically. This paper therefore appraised women and peace building. The study asserts that after conflict, a framework for action, mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment goals in post-conflict peace building requires an integrated framework for action. This framework needs to address institutional and structural barriers to equality in both the political/security and socioeconomic realms. Women's capacity to participate in peace building is closely linked to their enjoyment of socioeconomic security and right; hence, poverty, unequal gender norms, impunity for – and fear of – violence taken together prevent women from participating in and benefiting from post-conflict processes. This is a major setback for peace, reconciliation and the long-term recovery of societies. Accordingly, governments and the international community must attend to the protection of women's economic and social rights in post-conflict settings, and integrate this with efforts to build the political and military order.

Keywords: Women, peace-building, post-conflict, challenges, setting.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Post-conflict peace building processes present major opportunities for advancing women's rights and gender equality particularly with respect to education, political representation and rights to land/property/inheritance. The experience of some post-conflict countries in advancing the rights and position of women and girls bears this out. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda, some female small scale land holders and entrepreneurs have gained newfound rights to land, property and equal inheritance. Girls have also shot ahead in the education system, where previously over 40% of women were illiterate [1]. The experience in Rwanda demonstrates that the political, economic and social status of citizens – and women citizens in particular – can be improved during the rebuilding of societies after conflict. However, a gender perspective needs to be operationalized in post-conflict institutions and peacebuilding processes in order to bring about lasting and gender-equal peace. Such a perspective is necessary to illuminate the relational basis of women's oppression and inequality with men. Gender relations are "characterized by negotiation, bargaining and exchange between different actors", and men and women are positioned variously within constructions of masculinities and femininities "with different access to economic and social [and political] power" [2]. This gender perspective requires that physical/ political/military and economic/livelihood/societal insecurities be addressed as part of the same integrated framework in postconflict and peacebuilding contexts.

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### Challenges and opportunities

A key challenge for the UN and member states in progressing the women and peace building agenda in post-conflict settings is bridging the gap between the interdependent political and economic security pillars of peacebuilding. Gender mainstreaming objectives are often undermined by the political economy context, which reinforces structural gender inequalities between men and women in employment, the informal economy, and participation in decision-making roles. There is a major disconnect in post-conflict settings between establishing political-military order and planning socioeconomic stabilization. Military security and the reinstatement of political order and the rule of law are enacted without consideration of their social and economic impacts and prioritised over social and economic aspects of security. The lack of integration of military and socioeconomic security has had a disproportionately negative impact on women's rights in post-conflict societies. This is manifest in the failure to mainstream gender in post-conflict budgets and in the sizeable deficit in women's representation in decision-making processes. Peacebuilding institutions typically do little to create livelihoods and economic opportunities for girls and women or to empower them politically and economically after conflict [3]. To be effective, they must be able to transform the structures of socioeconomic inequality that affect women's insecurity and vulnerability to violence and poverty after conflict.

### Women's Representation in Post-conflict Governance

The UN secretary-general's 2010 seven-point plan on women's participation in peacebuilding [4] sets admirable goals for institutionalising women's participation in all post-conflict strategy and planning processes and providing technical assistance to support women's participation as decision-makers in public institutions such as through temporary special measures. Currently, however, there are major barriers to achieving these goals due to the lack of concrete accountability mechanisms supporting their implementation. Thus, governments should be required to compile data on the presence/number of women and men (and their positions) at every low- or high-level governance meeting concerning elections/constitutions, post-conflict planning, economic recovery, transitional justice and reconciliation. This data should then be analysed annually in a census of women's participation in post-conflict governance, with interventions planned, implemented and supported where women's presence is below one-third [5].

The goals also do not highlight an important difference between women's descriptive and substantive representation – the “quantity” and “quality” of their representation. They tend to focus only on increasing the number of women, rather than their capacity for making “quality” contributions to governance and representing women's particular interests and concerns in post-conflict contexts. To improve women's substantive representation in maledominated post-conflict governance, donor governments and the UN should provide direct technical and capacity building support to women members of parliament and civil society leaders to facilitate their involvement “at the table” in the peacebuilding processes. Women's presence is not enough: to meaningfully participate and to be able to address sensitive and urgent crises of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women need an enabling environment and capacity-building support at both the national and local levels. Responsiveness to SGBV against women SGBV is a major barrier to women's participation in peacebuilding and recovery as mandated by UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. Violence against “political” women speaking up in public, defending human rights or seeking political office is very common in postconflict countries and strongly dissuades women from participating in public life, let alone seeking political office. In Afghanistan, 70 of such women in leadership positions have been assassinated [6]. In many post-conflict countries new laws to eliminate violence against women are in place, but are not enforced. Resources need to be prioritised to operationalise the protection of women and girls and to support gender training, sensitising and capacity-building for police, judiciary and social services professionals to enforce the law.

It is important to remember that in many contexts, security forces are the perpetrators of SGBV. The need for improving legal accountability and prosecutions is thus crucial for the legitimacy of post-conflict institutions. Local women's NGOs in post-conflict countries could be involved in the monitoring, documenting and publishing of the human right violations of women and the gender training of professionals. At the same time, however, they also need financial and material support to provide medical, psychological, economic and legal assistance and to open new or improve existing shelters for survivors of SGBV, which in some accounts “spikes” after conflict. Former combatants and security forces are often the perpetrators of SGBV against women. No longer able to wield small arms in public, they may use them as an expression of their power in the private realm in acts of violence against intimate partners or other family members [7]. Thus the public reintegration of soldiers into peacetime civilian life must address their adjustment to changed family and gender relations destabilized by war.

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### Gender and Economic Recovery

Post-conflict conditions tend to exacerbate women's already unequal economic and social status relative to men, and add-on measures do little to change this situation. Often, dire economic conditions after conflict foster corruption and criminality, while marginalised groups of women experience extreme income inequality, working in the informal economy and the most precarious employment positions in the labour market. They also suffer from pre-conflict legacies of poor investment in gender-equal economic and social development with respect to education, health, housing, food security, water, property and land rights. The 2011 World Bank Development Report concurs that while the impact of armed conflict falls directly on young males, who make up the majority of fighting forces, women and children suffer disproportionately from war's indirect effects [8]. Increases in female heads of households; gender discrimination in employment; exploitation in incipient sex industries and trafficking networks; female displacement and resettlement in urban slums; and gender bias in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes are all part of a pattern of gendered marginalisation after conflict that constrains economic recovery in post-conflict settings and women's participation in that recovery. The preference for employing men is widespread in post-conflict countries, and if the UN suggests that employment programmes should specifically target women as a beneficiary group and that neither sex should receive more than 60% of positions created by economic reconstruction programmes, then donors and the international community will have to lead the way in supporting programmes that are culturally sensitive (for instance, in Afghanistan, women would be ostracised if they engage in road building, but in Kenya it is acceptable) [9]. In post-conflict countries where there are usually few income-generating alternatives, unless plans for women's economic empowerment are prioritised, peacebuilding processes tend to create new forms of gendered exploitation (early marriage and sex trafficking, for example).

#### Securing Women's Economic and Social Rights

If women's and girls' rights to security and justice are to be systematically promoted and longer-term efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV are required, then women's economic and social rights must be prioritised [4]. At present these rights are not at all operationalised in peacebuilding processes so as to create more economic opportunities for women. In many post-conflict countries there is a lack of information to assess the status of women's economic and social rights and loss of resources during conflict. Legislation to ensure economic protection, compensation and labour rights is also often not in place in post-conflict contexts. Yet the marginalisation experienced by women in post-conflict societies is the result of gendered economic discrimination, exploitation and violence as much as any other single factor. Gendered socioeconomic inequalities make women more vulnerable in conflict and post-conflict situations, exclude them from participation in security decision-making, and reinforce a culture of impunity for violence against women. [10] stresses the need to support women's socioeconomic rights in post-conflict settings [4]: para. 10), but it does not provide specific mechanisms or a plan of action for realising these rights through peacebuilding institutions. Policy frameworks such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP)'s Eight Point Agenda for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery is a starting point [11]. If key economic and social rights such as those to land and housing, to transact in one's own legal name, to equality in marriage, and to freedom of mobility are not secured early enough after conflict, then many women who are already poor and marginalised will be denied opportunities for both economic and political participation in peace and reconstruction [12]. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda the 70% of households headed by females fell into poverty at greater rates than male-headed households because they lost their access to or ownership of land [13]. Lastly, designing reparations programmes that address community development in a future-oriented way is a crucial strategy for addressing the unequal gender dimensions of recovery and peacebuilding. Thus, reparations targeted at women survivors – widows and family members of deceased combatants, as well as combatants themselves and victims of conflict-related SGBV – should be designed for the long-term economic development and empowerment of women and their families. Individual compensation or the delivery of basic needs through social welfare institutions will not address existing gender inequalities and deficits in women's post-conflict participation [13]. In Timor-Leste, where 40% of the population lives in poverty, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (known by its Portuguese acronym CAVR) framed reparations and its recommendations in broad recovery terms with key measures for women [13]. Social services, material support and economic empowerment through livelihood activities, group counselling and community education were all conceived as reparations programmes. Women-friendly recommendations that emerged from the CAVR process included support to single mothers and victims of sexual violence, and scholarships for their children; support for the disabled, widows and torture victims; and support for the most affected communities. Specific measures were suggested to encourage women's participation and were largely successful.

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### CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

An integrated framework for action mainstreaming gender equality and women's empowerment goals in post-conflict peacebuilding requires an integrated framework for action. This framework needs to address institutional and structural barriers to equality in both the political/security and socioeconomic realms. Women's capacity to participate in peacebuilding is closely linked to their enjoyment of socioeconomic security and rights. Poverty, unequal gender norms, impunity for – and fear of – violence taken together prevent women from participating in and benefiting from post-conflict processes. This is a major setback for peace, reconciliation and the long-term recovery of societies. Governments and the international community must attend to the protection of women's economic and social rights in post-conflict settings, and integrate this with efforts to build the political and military order.

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