

## Helpdesk Research Report: The Impact of Conflict on Women's Voice and Participation

Date: 01.05.09

**Query:** Conflict has usually reduced the voice of the less powerful. This has generally included women. Is this effect universal?

**Enquirer:** DFID Iraq

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### 1. Overview

Conflict and power are closely interrelated. There is evidence from the literature to suggest that conflict may be partly caused by excluded groups using violent means in an attempt to gain control over their lives and express their voice. However, conflict can also exacerbate exclusion and the least empowered may lose out (i.e. women, children, certain ethnic minorities). Violence can operate in a mutually re-enforcing way with other forms of marginalisation (poverty, stigma, race, gender, geographical location). It breaks down the bonds of trust and social fabric of society and in some cases, this weakens the basis for excluded or less powerful groups to both articulate their voices and to have them heard. It undermines the relationships of accountability between citizens and the state (especially when the state is implicated in the violence) and all of this can contribute to enforcing exclusion.

Rebuilding social capital and encouraging participation in post-conflict reconstruction is a deeply *gendered* process. The usual barriers to female participation can apply in a post-conflict context (e.g. lack of confidence; cultural barriers; reluctance to voice an opinion; the logistics of balancing participation with domestic responsibilities). However, female participation is particularly difficult after a conflict due to the trade-offs that need to be made between responding quickly to the urgent needs of war-torn communities versus the longer socialisation phase needed to better understand the local context (especially critical where there are strong cultural barriers to women's participation).

However, this trend is not universal. The literature and experts consulted emphasised that there are historic, cultural and geographic exceptions, due to the differing causes and nature of the conflict and how it plays out in different situations. It should be noted that women assume varied roles during armed conflict, as victims, but also as perpetrators, as well as peace activists. There are sub-groups of women who may be particularly vulnerable as a result of conflict and are frequently invisible in post-conflict peace processes and community-driven development, for example: young women, female-headed households, widows, and women from marginalised groups. However, women are not necessarily the only, or even the most, excluded group in a given society. For example, the evidence suggests that youth are often excluded from peace processes and post-conflict development programmes and should be viewed as a positive asset for change to prevent frustration at exclusion leading to

renewed violence. The literature also cautions against assuming that female participation necessarily leads to positive outcomes for women. Not all women have equal voices or the same vested interests; other issues of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, and age can be equally important.

Findings from the literature review suggest that conflict can present new opportunities for women to assume different roles in society and get involved in decision-making. Women often secure important gains both within the family and local community (women often assume much more extensive roles during conflicts than are otherwise tolerated in male-focused societies) and in broader political participation. However, women's voices may temporarily retreat immediately after a conflict, as long-standing patterns of political representation and participation are re-established and men reassert their traditional positions of power. Once marginalised groups have been given a voice, however, it is unlikely that the gains achieved can simply be 'rolled back'. For example, case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda have shown how immediately following a conflict, women have marginal representation in post-conflict national legislatures. After a few years and partly due to external pressure, the percentage of women elected to national legislatures shows increases in subsequent elections. Indeed, post-conflict countries rank highly in the Top 50 countries of female participation in parliament (lower house or single house).

Although women leaders can be disproportionately targeted by illegal armed actors (e.g. Colombia and Afghanistan), it is also the case that the voices of marginalised groups, including women, can be amplified by support from international media, civil society organisations and UN agencies. At both the international and national level, there are examples of measures that open up space for marginalised groups to have a voice. For example, at the international level, UN Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 in 2000 (and the later agreement in 2008) aim to enhance the accountability of international security institutions to women. At a national level, initiatives such as the Community Development Councils in Afghanistan and the Justice and Peace Law in Colombia provide an opportunity for less powerful groups, including women, to express themselves. Civil society organisations can also be instrumental in helping women to gain a sense of citizenship and express their voice, for example *Conciudadanía* and *Amor* in Colombia and *Maya Kak'la* in Guatemala.

A prolonged period of conflict can also lead to a public desire for a change in leadership and decision-making styles. For example, findings from Cambodia suggest a growing public support for women's increased political participation, since they are perceived to be more trustworthy, less violent and better at solving conflicts verbally than men. To conclude, although conflict can reduce the voice of less powerful groups (including women), there are also opportunities for these groups to contest well-established social structures and divisions, and for new, non-traditional leaders to emerge.

## 2. Key documents

**World Bank, 2005, 'Gender Conflict and Development', World Bank, Washington D.C.**  
[http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/11/15/000090341\\_20041115142901/Rendered/PDF/30494.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2004/11/15/000090341_20041115142901/Rendered/PDF/30494.pdf)

This World Bank review looks at the connections between gender, conflict and development. Chapters 4, 5 and 9 are of particular relevance to this question:

Chapter 4: Gender and formal peace processes (pp 49-58)

This chapter focuses on women's and men's positions in formal peace processes throughout conflict and examines their roles in democratisation processes, elections, and political

processes during and after conflict. There is a quantitative and qualitative difference, with women less likely to participate in the peace process, but when they do their contributions are different. For example, “women are more likely to put gender issues on the agenda, introduce other conflict experiences, and set different priorities for peace building and rehabilitation, and they may bridge political divides better. Women’s increased participation may also generate wider public support for the peace accords.” (p.49) However, the authors caution against making universal claims that all female politicians are gender-sensitive, while all male politicians are not.

The chapter notes that additional analysis is required to determine whether conflict causes increases or decreases in women’s participation in formal political processes. It highlights ‘conducive factors’ (e.g. a decrease in stereotypical gender divisions of labour and the absence of males) and ‘impeding factors’ (i.e., an increase in domestic burdens and the absence of functioning political bodies). These factors are important in clarifying how conflict changes women’s voice. The authors note that while women’s roles in public and social life generally expand during conflict, prevailing social structures and gender divisions tend to accompany the return of peace, leading to a retreat from political and public life. However, this trend may be temporary and is often reversed due to external pressure to establish democratic systems and open political space for women. Indeed, there is an opportunity for an increased voice for women and other marginalised groups in post-conflict peace processes and elections.

#### Chapter 5: Informal peace processes and rebuilding civil society (pp 49-58)

This chapter looks at informal peace processes and notes that more women than men tend to be involved. These informal processes can act as a ‘springboard’ for women to gain experience and confidence to enter public and political arenas. The authors note that conflict offers women an opportunity to expand their voice, initially on issues directly related to conflict and peace, but slowly expanding to cover broader issues. It is argued that these informal CSOs can form the foundation for a strong and more inclusive society after conflict, and it is a key development challenge to support these efforts.

Women are often perceived as ‘not political’ and may be able to use this to their advantage to pressure authorities to provide services and minimise the impact of conflict on the civilian population. However, the authors observe that when such work is seen as an extension of women’s ‘natural’ ‘caring’ role, it can be “taken for granted, it goes unrecognized, is stripped of its political meaning, and is rendered invisible. When does capitalizing on women’s strength in informal peace processes become tantamount to perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes that rationalize inequality and domination?” (p.68)

#### Chapter 9: Community-driven development (pp 123-128)

This chapter argues that rebuilding social capital and cohesion after a conflict are deeply *gendered* processes. Women-headed households and widows can be particularly invisible groups in post-conflict reconstruction. The usual barriers to female participation in community-driven development (CDD) can apply in a post-conflict context (e.g. lack of time due to domestic burdens; lack of confidence; cultural reluctance to voice an opinion; and the logistics of attending meetings after dark).

However, female participation in CDD after a conflict is particularly difficult due to the trade-offs that need to be made between responding quickly to the urgent needs of war-torn communities versus the longer socialisation phase needed to better understand the local context (especially critical where there are strong cultural barriers to women’s participation). This chapter also warns against assuming that women’s vulnerability can be addressed by having female participation on local committees or councils. It cites the example from Sierra Leone (Richards et al. 2004) where women from powerful lineages (such as the wife or sister of a paramount chief) are more likely to participate and speak up than women from weak lineages or unmarried women. The former is more likely to act in the interest of their lineage

rather than of their gender. In this way “apparently successful examples of gender empowerment and voice may mask more complex cleavages based on class, lineages, religion, or ethnicity” (p.131)

The chapter concludes that “much of the experience with CDD and women’s participation in conflict settings is anecdotal and not as yet systematized. Although there is a growing body of work on engendering participation and empowerment in development activities more generally, there is little systematic analysis and documentation of experiences in conflict-affected countries. There has been little effort to develop an evaluation framework and to benchmark these processes.” (p.132)

**UNDP, 2007, ‘Donor Proposal for the Eight Point Agenda for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis’, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, UNDP**

[http://www.undp.org/cpr/documents/gender/8\\_pa\\_donor\\_proposal.pdf](http://www.undp.org/cpr/documents/gender/8_pa_donor_proposal.pdf)

This paper observes how conflict creates a “different yet similarly brutal set of circumstances for women. Consider, for example, how women who have survived sexual violence, or been active in peace movements, are routinely excluded from peace talks to end the conflict. Then, as the country moves towards stability and democratic elections, women’s recovery and development concerns continue to be overlooked so that opportunities are missed to build itself “back better” along different, more inclusive lines” (p.2). The paper calls for UNDP and its partners to challenge the social norms that exclude women from the recovery and peace building process. It argues that women should not be seen only as victims, but as problem solvers, decision makers and a key resource for sustainable peace. The paper notes that post-conflict, there are opportunities to challenge longstanding exclusionary biases and for new, non-traditional leaders to emerge.

The UNDP’s Eight Point Agenda for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality in Crisis Prevention and Recovery (8PA) offers an opportunity for women to have a voice in the recovery process and is outlined below:

1. Strengthen women’s security in crisis: Stop violence against women
2. Advance gender justice: Provide justice and security for women
3. Expand Women’s Citizenship, Participation and Leadership: Advance women as decision-makers
4. Build Peace with and for women: Involve women in all peace processes
5. Promote gender equality in disaster risk reduction: Value women’s knowledge and experience
6. Ensure gender-responsive recovery: Support women and men to build back better
7. Transform government to deliver for women: Include women’s issues in the national agenda
8. Develop Capacities for Social Change: Work together to transform society

**International Committee of the Red Cross, 2001, ‘Women Facing War’, ICRC, Geneva**

[http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0798/\\$File/ICRC\\_002\\_0798\\_WOMEN\\_FACING\\_WAR.PDF](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0798/$File/ICRC_002_0798_WOMEN_FACING_WAR.PDF)

This ICRC study explores the impact of armed conflict on women. Pages 27-28 focus on women mobilising for peace and the paper notes that women have been at the forefront of activities for peace, just as they can be both victims and perpetrators during conflicts. It cites examples from the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. The ICRC argues that women should not be seen as powerless; indeed their position as victims of violence can help in the “reconciliation process and prevent violence in the future if they are fully included in the reconstruction process. Thus women and men need to be equal partners in the establishment of peace.” (p.28)

**Weill, C., 2003, 'A Hierarchy of Protection? Intrastate Conflicts and the Role of Women', International Women's Day presentation at the Embassy of the Republic of South Africa, Washington, DC, March 2003.**

[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apo\\_research\\_citation/0/7/3/7/2/pages73721/p73721-1.php](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apo_research_citation/0/7/3/7/2/pages73721/p73721-1.php)

This paper uses country case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda to highlight how women's voice often declines immediately after a conflict, with marginal representation in post-conflict national legislatures. However, after the initial retreat from political participation, the percentage of women elected to national legislatures shows increases in subsequent elections, which the author observes is largely due to donor pressure. For example, a recent tabulation of the percentage of women in parliament (lower house or single house) shows that post-conflict countries rank highly with Rwanda at the top of 176 countries (49 percent women). Other countries in the top 50 include: Mozambique (30 percent), Timor-Leste (26 percent), Uganda (25 percent), Eritrea (22 percent), Nicaragua (21 percent), and Burundi (18 percent). Women's representation in national ministries and local elections has also improved over time. The author notes that "All too often women's rise to decision-making power during periods of conflicts is short lived and men expect to re-assume their own positions of power, reassert their traditional social roles, and relegate women back to the hearth and home. In many cases, the number of women in elected bodies, ministries, and armed forces goes down rather than grows in the immediate post-conflict phase. Nevertheless, the gains achieved in gender awareness and capability rarely are rolled back, and many of the grass roots efforts and other advances made by women can be sustained if adequately supported."(p.13)

**United Nations, INSTRAW, 2008, 'Filling the Gaps: A Virtual Discussion of Gender, Peace and Security Research', Summary of Dialogue, October 13 – 31**

[www.un-instraw.org/en/gps/general/gender-peace-and-security.html](http://www.un-instraw.org/en/gps/general/gender-peace-and-security.html)

This document details the virtual discussion between members of UN-INSTRAW's directory of over 130 different research institutions that are actively engaging in gender, peace and security issues. Some participants observed that simply including women in decision making processes does not guarantee a prioritising of gender equality or perspective. They also highlight the lack of research that recognises the intersections between peace, security, gender and other forms of identity such as ethnicity, race and class. For example: "One of the most glaring gaps identified is the need for a more inclusive approach to security studies. To understand inclusion, participants highlighted what is currently excluded from research, namely, the voices of those being 'protected,' experiences of marginalized populations and groups, and a range of perspectives of all of those involved in security processes. It was also noted that there is a continued lack of comprehensive gender analysis or perspective in academic disciplines and research." (p.5)

The virtual dialogue also highlighted the importance of 'intersectionality', emphasising that gender is only one aspect of women's identities (e.g. race, ethnicity, socio-economic background, religion, ability/disability, sexual orientation etc). One of the participants, Ximena Jimenez, noted the importance of 'intersectionality' with an example from a women's conference in Ecuador where participants from indigenous and black descendents organizations' concerns were completely excluded and the participants were suffering 'two kinds of discrimination: ethnicity and gender'.

The theme of formal vs. informal power was also discussed in the virtual dialogue, with one participant, Niamh Reilly, noting that women's voices are strong in 'informal' local level organising, but can be marginalised during 'formal' political peace processes. She called for "radically rethinking the ways in which formal power is organised and held to account, and giving informal, civil society engagement real space and clout - so that women's leadership,

presence, and impact...is promoted rather than stifled - is essential to creating conditions where 1325, CEDAW and other 'norms' can be meaningfully applied in transitions from conflict." (p.7) Overall, participants concluded that participatory approaches to peace building are the best method to ensure that the voices of marginalised groups and populations are included.

**McLean Hilker, L. and Fraser, E., 2009, 'Youth Exclusion, Violence, Conflict and Fragile States', Report prepared for DFID's Equity and Rights Team**

This report looks at the evidence of links between youth exclusion, violence, conflict and fragile states. The authors note that in many countries young people are increasingly unable to attain the social and economic statuses required for adulthood. This trend has been termed 'the blocked transition to adulthood' and is also known as the 'waithood' in the Middle East and 'youthmen' in Rwanda. Youth exclusion is particularly widespread in countries with rigid and conservative power structures, which exclude them and other marginalised groups in society. For example, the radicalisation literature makes the point that young people in the Middle East see their governments as unelected, unaccountable, corrupt and providing no legitimate outlet for youth discontent. Islamist discourse can appear a more appealing alternative to young people than the 'old nationalism'. The authors also observe that where young people feel excluded from power structures, "violence can provide an opportunity for youth to have a voice, to lead and make an impact and to gain control over their own lives." (p.4) Their review of the youth and development literature emphasises the importance of decision-making mechanisms that empower young people by giving them voice and allowing them to exercise agency.

The authors note the importance of not assuming that post-conflict development programmes will automatically benefit youth – "Indeed, the evidence suggests that like women, youth are often excluded from development programmes worsening their situation" (p.43). One of the most under-represented groups is young women, who often fall between the cracks as gender programmes target children or women, but ignore the different needs of female youth. Post-conflict, there is a need to engage young people, directly in democracy and peacebuilding activities that empower them, harness their energies as a force for positive change and to prevent them from being drawn into renewed violence. Youth and peacebuilding programmes have included peace education, training in rights, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, and the direct involvement of youth in elections and human rights monitoring and voice and accountability programmes. Although several youth, voice and empowerment projects have been developed at the community level, there is a need to link these to wider governance, decentralisation and voice and accountability programmes.

**Hudson, H., 2009, 'When Feminist Theory Meets Peacebuilding Policy: Implications of Gender Mainstreaming and National Action Plans' Paper presented at the annual meeting of the ISA's 50th Annual Convention 'Exploring the Past, Anticipating the Future', New York, Feb 15, 2009**

<http://convention2.allacademic.com/one/isa/isa09/>

This paper explores gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding, with a focus on Security Council Resolution 1325 and the increasing number of national action plans formulated to implement its commitments. Hudson argues that "the Resolution is enshrined within a narrow neo-liberal problem-solving approach, in which gender roles ascribed to are rather one-dimensional and unproblematised. Women are 'added' to the peace building discourse and power relations are left unexamined. Similarly, the essence of gender mainstreaming dissipates when national action plans draw only on women's experiences as a resource in peacebuilding and lose sight of the importance of gender as an analytical tool for rethinking

peacebuilding policies, thus potentially exacerbating inequality and prolonging the conflict” (p.2).

**UNIFEM, 2009, ‘Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability’, Progress of the World’s Women 2008/2009**

<http://www.unifem.org/progress/2008/>

UNIFEM’s 2008/2009 report examines how women, including the most excluded women, are strengthening their capacity to identify accountability gaps and demand redress. It observes that ‘voice’-based approaches are often the most promising way for women to get accountability, particularly poor women. However, the report also notes “women’s frequent disadvantage in using accountability systems is based on their subordinate status in relation to men at home (husbands, fathers, brothers) or men as decision-makers and power-holders (traditional leaders, local council members, party leaders, judges, police), which constrains women’s ability to assert or exercise their rights.” (p.6)

It highlights the importance of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325 in 2000, as well as the agreement in 2008 to Security Council Resolution in enhancing accountability of international security institutions to women.

The report highlights examples of good practice, where women have used their voice to lobby for stronger accountability for gender equality in the aid effectiveness agenda:

- “In Kyrgyzstan, women’s-rights campaigners succeeded in integrating the National Action Plan for Achievement of Gender Equality (2007-2010) in the key development results of the Country Development Strategy (2007-2010), with corresponding costing estimates and indicators for measuring progress.
- In Cambodia, where gender equality was made central to achieving the MDGs at the national level, the National Strategic Development Plan includes specific gender targets and indicators.” (p.97)

### 3. Case studies

**Hossain, N., 2007, ‘Baseline Study for Supporting Women’s Engagement in Peace-Building and Preventing Sexual Violence in Afghanistan: Community-Led Approaches’, Report to UNIFEM Afghanistan**

This report presents findings from a baseline study of organisations and interventions working in peace-building and preventing sexual violence in Afghanistan. It highlights examples of how “women who attempt to champion women’s rights or are publicly visible and vocal appear to face growing insecurity and hostility towards their public role” (p.6), for example assassinations of female parliamentarians and journalists.

Hossain notes how in Afghanistan, “women’s participation in peace-building and conflict and violence prevention may be both threatened by, and a threat to, the privileges and powers of warlords and other local powerful groups. This implies a trade-off between efforts to promote peace and efforts to promote women’s participation in peace-building, conflict and violence prevention.” (p.7)

However, there are signs of progress, indicating an increased voice for women in Afghanistan after the conflict. An example of this is Afghan women’s participation in the August 2007 Peace Jirga with Pakistan in Kabul. Although the participation of women was initially contested, as women do not traditionally participate in tribal jirgas, 25 women delegates were sent (7% of the total), compared with Pakistan’s 4 delegates (1%). At the local level, there are also a wide range of ongoing activities designed to increase women’s participation in

decision-making processes, for example the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). 6,786 women are currently involved in community-based decision-making through the NSP, primarily around local infrastructure projects, through Community Development Councils (CDCs). However, the NSP experience shows “substantially more gains in women’s participation in single-sex than in mixed groups. While some observers are critical of increasing women’s participation in separate fora as a ‘false measure of achievement of gender goals’, others note that even the limited achievement of participation in women-only fora represents a marked change towards gender equality in many communities.” (p.17)

**Pearce, J., 2007, ‘Violence, Power and Participation: Building Citizenship in Contexts of Chronic Violence’, Citizenship DRC / Institute of Development Studies**

<http://www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/violence/WP%20274.pdf>

This paper explores civil society participation in two of Latin America’s most violent contexts: Colombia (war-torn) and Guatemala (post-conflict). It argues that understanding ‘conventional forms of dominating power’ are critical to addressing violence. Loss of power and powerlessness can lead to violence, especially where social constructions of masculinity reward men when they exercise violence.

As part of the paper, the author asks: “If men are the main agents of violence, how does that impact on women’s participation in particular?” (p.19) Pearce also questions: “Is it possible to talk of the effects of violence on participation, as if violence is a universal, sociological category? If a society in question does not view something as ‘violent’, or sees it as sanctioned rather than punishable, then how will it affect participation? Is our discussion around violence merely a reflection of Western, Anglo-Saxon social constructions of the meanings of violence which we then universalise?” (p. 20)

The paper notes that violence does not make participation impossible, but can repress it by “sealing space, freezing social relationships and homogenising populations” (p.52). Several case studies are highlighted where civil society organisations, such as Conciudadanía and Amor in Colombia and Maya Kak’la in Guatemala, have helped women to recover voice after conflict and to gain a sense of citizenship.

Pearce concludes that “by disseminating a sense of rights, CSOs enable people to feel they can legitimately challenge violent actors as well as those who use dominating power over them ... However, without a ‘discursive consciousness of power’ (Haugaard 2003), there is no guarantee that it will not reproduce dominating power and thus perpetuate a source of future violence. There was much less evidence that such discursive consciousness was emerging amongst the CSOs who were part of this fieldwork. While many had a critical consciousness towards dominating power, this was not very often self-reflective, and its gender dimensions were often absent. New thinking around power as potentiality was more apparent among the women peace activists of Amor in Colombia and the Mayan women peace activists of Guatemala” (p.53).

**Pampell Conaway, C. and Martinez, S., 2004, ‘Adding Value: Women’s Contributions to Reintegration and Reconstruction in El Salvador’, Women Waging Peace/ The Policy Commission**

<http://www.iiav.nl/epublications//2004/AddingValueWomensContributions.pdf>

This study looks at the experience from El Salvador of female members of the armed opposition, Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and their participation in the peace process and other post-conflict activities, particularly DDR programmes. Women played a key role throughout El Salvador’s struggle, both as combatants and *tenedores* (non-combatant supporters of the armed opposition party Farabundo Martí National Liberation

Front (FMLN) and internally displaced people in conflict-affected areas). After the conflict, “women faced immense pressure to return to traditional roles ... [but] were pivotal in the reintegration of former fighters, both men and women. Despite constraints, they continue to be active in their communities, leading reconstruction and development efforts” (p.2)

Key findings include:

- “Women’s participation in negotiations had a significant impact on reintegration through
  - ensuring the inclusion of women fighters in benefit programs;
  - recognising and including non-combatant members of the opposition movement
- Women played an important stabilizing role in the early phases of reintegration;
- Despite socio-economic constraints, women played a leading role in reconstruction efforts;
- Women have been most active, and gender roles most transformed, in communities that received continual and systematic support. These communities are among the success stories in terms of overall development;
- The lack of significant systematic support for women has been detrimental to the country’s overall development and is a missed opportunity with regard to social capital”. (p.1)

**Rojas, C., 2004, ‘In the Midst of War: Women’s Contribution to Peace in Colombia’, Women Waging Peace/ The Policy Commission**

[http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/16\\_in\\_the\\_midst\\_of\\_war\\_women\\_s\\_contributions\\_to\\_peace\\_in\\_colombia.pdf](http://www.huntalternatives.org/download/16_in_the_midst_of_war_women_s_contributions_to_peace_in_colombia.pdf)

Women have been both victims and actors in the conflict in Colombia. This paper examines women’s contributions to peace. In 1999, women’s groups and civil society pressed for peace talks between President Andres Pastrana and the guerrilla movement FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) and gender issues were considered for the first time. After the 2002 collapse of the peace dialogue, women’s organisations are “leading new efforts, raising awareness of the human costs of conflict and calling for negotiations that include civil society”. (p.vi).

The authors note how women’s groups developed a process to build consensus and create common agendas that address the root causes of conflict, such as political, social and economic exclusion. The agendas cross racial, geographic and class boundaries. The author notes how local authorities are replicating women’s consensus building model in the constitutional assemblies of Antioquia, Narino, Cauca, and Huila.

Although women have been targeted during the conflict, through violence and repression, they are leading local resistance efforts in Colombia – establishing informal agreements with armed actors and forming ‘peace zones’ to protect their communities. Women’s organisations have also used UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) to demand inclusion in future negotiations.

**Moncrieffe, J., 2008, ‘Making and Unmaking the Young ‘Shotta’ [Shooter]: Boundaries and (Counter)-Actions in the ‘Garrisons’’, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton**

<http://www.drc-citizenship.org/docs/publications/violence/Moncrieffeshotta.pdf>

This paper provides a series of life-stories from two of Jamaica’s reputedly violent ‘garrison’ communities. It conveys “important messages about some of the relationships that exist within contexts of inequality; how such relationships can breed violence; how this violence

can, in turn, exacerbate inequalities; and, significantly, how both relationships of inequality and violence can be transmitted across generations.” (p.44). Deep-rooted economic and social inequalities, coupled with perceptions that gun violence is means of obtaining ‘power’ and manhood, have contributed to conflict in some of the garrisons studied. The author describes how “as these corner crews become increasingly desperate, illegality and violence become more common and the children who depend on the group are also sucked into these practices ... this is a natural and common progression. However, children’s route to violence may be much more forced, since some, from an early age, are being taught to fire guns. They are told that this is important for defending the community or that this is a sign of manhood. Parenting may not be sufficient to prevent this socialisation, particularly when it is forced by more powerful men” (p.44-5).

**McGrew, L. et al., 2004, ‘Good Governance from the Group Up: Women’s Roles in Post-Conflict Cambodia’, Women Waging Peace / The Policy Commission**

<http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Cambodia/WWPCambodiaFullCaseStudy.pdf>

Like other conflicts, the conflict in Cambodia affected men and women differently, not least in survival rates. Immediately after the conflict, women made up between 60 and 64% of the population. The paper notes that conflict has not reduced the voice of women; instead, Cambodian women have contributed to good governance by working to: include human rights in the constitution, urge accountability in government, establish government-civil society partnerships, and advance women’s political participation.

Cultural perceptions of women’s participation have changed in a positive way as a result of the conflict, although there is still a belief that women are more gentle and submissive than men. However, this perception has worked to women’s advantage as politics has been characterised by mistrust and this study reveals that women are seen as “more trustworthy and competent as decision-makers in the political sphere; less violent; and inherently adept at solving conflicts verbally, thus decreasing the chance of escalation to bloodshed. The skills attributed to women in the domestic sphere are considered valuable in rebuilding the nation” (p.viii).

The paper notes that women are breaking new ground, appealing for cross-party cooperation and are at the forefront of promoting peaceful resolution of local disputes. Women are also establishing new patterns of public consultation, for example NGOs have partnered with the Ministry of Women and Veteran’s Affairs (MWVA) to develop legislation and programs that address social needs.

**Moser, A., 2007, ‘Women Building Peace and Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict-Affected Contexts: A Review of Community-Based Approaches’ UNIFEM**

[http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/WomensBuildingPeaceAndPreventingSexualViolence\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/WomensBuildingPeaceAndPreventingSexualViolence_eng.pdf)

This paper reviews community-based peace-building initiatives in six countries: Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda. The author notes that women encounter several barriers to engagement at the community level, for example: exclusion from male-dominated decision-making forums, lack of funding, exclusion from formal peace-building processes, resistance to initiatives that challenge cultural traditions, and security risks. Nevertheless, female participation in community forums is starting to have an impact on the nature of dominant institutions and identities. The examples provided in this paper illustrate how women can take advantage of the perceived gender role of women as peace-makers, although the author notes that the “approaches accessible to women are in most cases small-scale and informal, and... women must act carefully to avoid community backlash.”

#### 4. Additional information

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Cathy McIlwaine (QMU)  
Joanna Wheeler (IDS)  
Naomi Hossain (IDS)

##### **Websites visited**

Google, Google Scholar, GSDRC, UNIFEM, Alertnet, UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, World Bank, Women War Peace, Hunt Alternatives, Development Research Centre, [www.peacewomen.org](http://www.peacewomen.org), UN-INSTRAW, ICRC

**About Helpdesk research reports:** Helpdesk reports are based on 2 days of desk-based research. They are designed to provide a brief overview of the key issues; and a summary of some of the best literature available. Experts are contacted during the course of the research, and those able to provide input within the short time-frame are acknowledged.

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