
2. Women, Conflict and UNSCR 1325

The role of women in conflict and post-conflict countries

While much of the literature on women in conflict situations traditionally focused on them in a narrow capacity as victims, recent research has uncovered the multidimensional impact of conflict on women. Although women are severely affected by war – vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence including rape, forced conscription, sexual slavery, abduction and forced impregnation among other atrocities – they are not simply victims but can play more proactive roles as well (Moser & Clark 2001). On the one hand, women are sometimes advocates of violence, inciting men to fight as well as themselves playing principal roles in fighting (McKay 2005; Cohen 2009). On the other hand, they often also play instrumental roles in advocating for peace and maintaining community stability (Bennett et al. 1995; Sørensen 1998; NUPI & Fafo 2001; Anderlini 2007). Many women take on the role of household head and primary income earner for their families in the absence of their men folk and become responsible for ensuring the economic and social welfare of their families. In addition, women have become an effective part of peace-building initiatives, engaging in post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation and being actively involved in peace processes in countries including Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

Good practices of women advocating for peace take a variety of forms. Among other activities women have met and spoken with rebels in an effort to get them to lay down their arms; they have organised and participated in mass protests on the streets; they have spoken out over the airwaves about peace; and, despite no formal invitation, they have attended meetings where conflict resolution efforts were underway. Through civil society alliances and NGOs women have been instrumental in trying to make sure that women's opinions and needs are placed on the national agenda, especially their desire for peace.

However, notwithstanding women's active roles in conflict resolution and peace-building they continue to remain largely marginalised from the formal processes of peacemaking, with their work often not receiving recognition in these channels (Boyd 1994). Many women, including fighters, are expected to return to domestic

or traditional roles following conflict (Hale 2001) and are left out of peace-building processes that take place at the level of the state (Mugambe 1997).

Despite the 10-year existence of United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (discussed below), women's engagement in conflict resolution and peace-building has yet to be institutionalised and the recognition of the importance of including women in peace processes has not resulted for the most part in their increased visibility across all sectors. Women continue to face barriers that impede their full political participation and representation (Norville 2011). They remain underrepresented in peace talks, peace settlements and peacekeeping missions; post-conflict rehabilitation measures still fail to take women's needs into account, including disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes and relief and general development interventions; and physical insecurity plagues women both during times of conflict as well as in the ostensible 'post-conflict' period when rates of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence remain high.

A report from the United States Institute for Peace notes the following troubling statistics culled from various sources: 31 out of 39 cases of active conflicts were ones that recurred after peace settlements had been signed, and none of these recurrent conflicts had included women in the peace process; women represented fewer than 3 per cent of signatories to peace agreements; and of 11 peace negotiations, women's participation averaged less than 8 per cent (Norville 2011).

Some scholars have argued that the changing roles of women during conflict situations offer potential opportunities for transformation: greater responsibilities assumed during wartime will provide women with greater levels of confidence, which can potentially transform social relations and patterns as well as increase women's political participation, leading in turn to greater gender equality and sustained peace (UNIFEM 2006; Mzvondiwa 2007).

In contrast, other scholars have argued that the reality is that in many instances where women have played instrumental roles in bringing an end to conflict, such activism has failed to yield positive results in the post-conflict period (Nzomo 2000; El-Bushra 2003).

UNSCR 1325: In support of women in peace-building processes

UNSCR 1325 was passed unanimously on 31 October 2000. It was the first resolution ever passed by the Security Council to specifically address the impact of war on women and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

The purpose of the resolution was to call attention to the various ways in which women are affected by conflict so that governments could adopt a gender perspective in post-conflict reconstruction. Also emphasised in the resolution is the need for governments to support women's participation at all stages of peace negotiation – from conflict prevention and management to conflict resolution – and ensure they are represented in key decision-making positions for peace negotiations. Consequently, among its components the resolution calls for the recognition of the diverse ways in

which conflict affects women so that interventions can better address their needs. This includes gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations and taking steps to ensure that women are full participants in peace processes, with the belief that such involvement could potentially enhance international peace and security. The resolution's four pillars are prevention, protection, participation and relief and recovery.

In addition to 1325, the UNSC has passed resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 and 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010), all geared to addressing women in conflict. They identify sexual violence as a security issue warranting the intervention of the Security Council and introduce measures aimed at addressing the issue, including the creation of the Office of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict. A plan to monitor countries' progress in implementing 1325 was adopted by the UN in October 2010.

The development and implementation of national action plans (NAPs) is one of the key ways through which governments take concrete steps to implement 1325 in their respective countries. The plans spell out the actual activities that governments will undertake to translate 1325 into policies and objectives at the domestic level. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, very few countries in the Commonwealth have implemented NAPs; of the five that have done so, only three are countries that can be classified as post-conflict.

