Rethinking Gender and Peace Building for the Better World

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Abstract—*South Asia has been the place of ruthless violence for the past several decades. Worst affected in these aggressive conflict situations have been women of the subcontinent. According to estimates, more than half of the total causalities that happened in these violent conflicts were those of women. Additionally women have been sufferers of cultural and structural imbalances and violence, all through in recent times (Asia Foundation Report, 2017 and WHO, 2005). Women trying to deliver a transformative peace that questions gendered power relations while confronting the socio-cultural barriers that prevent them from participating in rebuilding conflict-affected societies to bring about just peace. In order to be sustainable, peace processes need to be more inclusive and respond to the needs and interests of typically marginalised groups. We aim to address this, by promoting a better understanding of the links between gender, violence and peace and enhancing the participation of women and others who are marginalised in peace building. Women are key in– turbulence affects them very intensely and if they are incorporated in peace processes things that affect them in particular can be tabled as well. It's time for a change; it's time to include women and innovative young voices in peace processes. We need new ideas and fresh perspectives. In recent years the role of gender in armed conflict and peace building has progressively more caught international attention. This position paper explores gender in relation to peace building and conflict prevention, and the work that we do to make peace processes more inclusive. Furthermore, there is still a limited considerate of the relations between gender, violence and peace. At Conciliation Resources we work to make peace processes more inclusive and to further understanding of gender in relation to peace building and conflict prevention. Women have always played key roles in armed conflict, be it as nurses, careers, combatants or workers. Women also contribute to peace in a multitude of ways.*

Keywords: *Peace, Violence, Women, Conflict, Gender*

Introduction

Structural and political changes are necessary not only to overcome subordination, oppression and coercive power relations but also to instigate transformations with positive development outcomes. This paper describes work underway to enrich the present tools to measure women's empowerment -- particularly the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The paper begins with a discussion of gender and power concepts, and then introduces a Women's Empowerment Matrix as a tool to help link socio-cultural, religious, political, legal, and economic spheres. It then raises some of the difficulties related to the calculation of the GDI and GEM.

In this article, three points are developed. First, some key changes in thinking on empowerment in scholarship and policy are traced. Second, fieldwork data from India, Afhganistan and Sri Lanka on women, peace and security are highlighted to indicate different ways to understand empowerment through the lens of security, transformative change and participation. Third, the central argument drawn from this data is that understandings of empowerment differ according to cultural contexts, and thus strategies to foster empowerment must be locally driven. This is not a new view. Examples are suggested of culturally different ways to evaluate empowerment that sit within holistic notions of human security and peacebuilding and wide-ranging motivations for women's participation as called for by UNSCR 1325. Before developing these three points, I make a case for why equality, rights and development are foundational to achieving the sort of empowerment the interviewees indicated is worth striving towards. A rights-based approach to development accepts that every individual has universal, inalienable rights that are accompanied by obligations to protect and respect those rights. The normative framework underlying this approach builds on broad notions of human security as the context in which empowered individuals can counter discrimination, vulnerability and inequalities

Christine Koggel, *The Ethics of Empowerment. Development*, makes an important distinction when she writes, 'I think empowerment is distinguishable from agency because it endorses a focus on individuals as relational and interdependent' (2010, 176). By this she means that it calls for attention to relations of power, institutional structures and responsiveness to others, including the responsibility to learn about gender differences. This type of empowerment gives individuals and groups a voice in challenging the debilitating

forces of dependency, coercion, manipulation and control. It reinstates the political potential of the ideal and practice of empowerment. To summarize, the argument in this article supports Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to agency as fundamental to a transformative empowerment that challenges insecurities and gendered inequalities in culturally meaningful ways.

Use of the Term 'Empowerment of Gender'

The term 'empowerment' is used indistinctly. In development policies, it often is a catchword that crops up uncritically in the service of today's one-size-fits-all development recipes, spun into a politicised form that everyone can agree with'. Traditionally, right to use to aid, education, and health care is seen as the best route to empowerment, but traditional responses frequently miss the ways in which power politics constrain access for women. Addressing gendered power relations that are legitimised by local traditions is a prerequisite to breaking down the stereotypical view that gender equals women, and women need set tools prescribed by Western development donors to achieve empowerment by rethinking gender.The place of women's empowerment within development agencies working in post-conflict settings is often influenced by a neoliberal development agenda that brings different concepts and practices of empowerment.

Take note to Women's tone of voice

We come to the root of this article. Culturally standardised notions of empowerment on rethinking gender that have manifested in the traditional and neoliberal agendas described above miss culturally relevant nuances around local understandings of the concepts and practices of empowerment of gender.

Perhaps with the understanding that human security can mean everything and nothing, defines the concept narrowly, focusing on freedom from fear. Human security is the freedoms from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety or lives.To realize this is not easy, and the human security agenda is greatly challenged by the real politik of global relations. The task of bringing diverse states with varying powers and interests together to collectively address the vulnerability of the individual, or to hold another state accountable, must confront the centrality of the principle of sovereignty and legacies of colonialism. It is a contributing to an enabling environment for women's participation and empowerment in conflict and post-conflict environments, so they can meaningfully participate in conflict prevention, resolution, peace building, protection, relief and recovery.

The political ambitions set out by the Security Council are in stark contrast with reality. Without taking account of existing power relations, without fully including both men and women, there will be no peace. Despite the good intentions expressed, the political will shown and the progress made since the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1325 in 2000, women remain under-represented in peace processes, the security sector, the political arena and the judicial sector, hampering effective, inclusive and sustainable peacemaking. Worldwide, the situation of women in conflict and post-conflict situations has barely improved; in some areas it has even deteriorated.3 Full and meaningful participation by women in peace and security has not yet been achieved. There is still a lot of work to be done. The full realisation of the Security Council's directives on Women, Peace and Security requires greater investment by us all. This National Action Plan aims to help us reach that goal. To achieve real change, governments, civil society and knowledge institutions need to join forces. Women are key actors in exerting influence to create sustainable peace. we have to be serious about our commitment to ensuring the participation of women in peacekeeping, peace negotiations and peace building.

Key Aspects of Rethinking

The impact of violent conflict on women was first put on the international agenda in the Beijing Platform of Action in 1995. Subsequently, the global women's movement lobbied extensively for the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security. Resolution 1325 marked a turning point in history by embedding women's rights and gender equality for the first time in the international peace and security agenda. It recognises that women have vital roles to play in achieving peace and security: as peacemakers, community leaders, breadwinners and combatants. The resolution has a transformative purpose: women's participation can, and should, draw more attention to conflict prevention and encourage non-violent conflict resolution. Its adoption also demonstrated a shift from the previously dominant concept of national security towards recognition of the importance of human security. Effective peacemaking, in particular preventing conflict, peace negotiations, peace building and conflict resolution, requires that these processes are inclusive at all levels. It also requires all actors involved to adopt a gender perspective when working on matters of peace and security. The resolution recognises the significance of women and calls for a gender perspective in conflict prevention, peace negotiations, refugee camp design, peacekeeping operations, security sector reform and the reconstruction of war-torn societies.

The UN Security Council regularly addresses the issue of Women, Peace and Security. Many countries and regional organisations have adopted National Action Plans, policies and programmes and organised training courses to solidify their commitment to implementing the resolutions. There is international case law on sexual violence as a war crime that international courts and tribunals should prosecute. There is growing awareness among UN member states and international and regional organisations of the fact that women's participation increases the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of peace and security efforts. Since 2000,

we have seen a growing number of consultations in peace processes with civil society and women's groups and of related provisions in peace agreements.

The Impact of War and Armed Conflict on Gender Relations

War and armed conflicts affect men and women differently and transform gender roles in society. While often many men leave their communities for combat, women tend to become their families' breadwinners and heads of household.10 Women's participation in the labour market in times of conflict is 'commonly characterised by low-paid, low-skilled jobs, selfemployment in the informal sector or unpaid family (farm) labour'.11 When conflicts come to an end, most gender roles change (back) again, while other roles do not alter. These gender dynamics during and after conflict often entail wider societal change that puts traditions in question. This can create opportunities for change.

Another current challenge is the rise of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. Violent extremist groups deliberately target women's rights, roles and physical integrity in conflict and post-conflict societies. Their extremist ideologies, which are often religiously and politically motivated, are used to justify these actions. At the same time, women are perceived as important stakeholders and allies in preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism and terrorism.17 Women have different roles to play in private and public space. In local communities, women can contribute to the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of alternative, peaceful narratives and initiatives to counter violent extremism, by promoting inclusion, dialogue and social cohesion. Women are also important 'early warners' who can help predict escalating violence and possible terrorist attacks, due to their knowledge and access to information in communities. As activists, teachers, peacekeepers, community leaders, politicians and role models, women can enhance human security and help prevent and counter violent extremism. However, counterterrorism and activities aimed at countering violent extremism that are conducted in tandem with local women's organisations can jeopardise women's safety.18 Women are not a homogeneous group; they can themselves be 'terrorists, sympathisers, mobilisers, and perpetrators'.19 A comprehensive understanding of gender roles in violent extremism and terrorism can enhance social inclusion and the effects of alternative narratives and activities.

Conclusion

Research shows that women's perspectives and gender responsive approaches, which address the gendered vulnerabilities of both women and men and the interdependencies between them, are indispensable elements of all phases of peace negotiations and consultations. We can conclude that there are still structural barriers to the full and meaningful participation of women in all aspects of peace and security. A multifaceted approach by governmental and non-governmental actors is needed to address these structural barriers.

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