Tim McKulka

Sudanese take part in “Citizen Hearings” in Musfa, Blue Nile State, on the border between northern and southern Sudan. The hearings were part of a 21-day process of popular consultations where residents could express whether the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) had met their expectations.

Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies:

Exploring the Evidence[1]

BY MARIE O'REILLY

Traditional approaches to ending wars—where armed groups meet behind closed doors to hammer out a truce—are falling short in the face of 21st century conflicts. The number of armed conflicts has been increasing over the past decade. In 2014, the world witnessed the highest battle-related death toll since the Cold War.[2] Belligerents increasingly target civilians, and global displacement from conflict, violence, and persecution has reached the highest level ever recorded.[3] As new forms of conflict demand innovative responses, states that have emerged from war also persistently relapse. In the 2000s, 90 percent of conflicts occurred in countries already afflicted by war; the rate of relapse has increased every decade since the 1960s.[4] Empirical analysis of eight decades of international crises shows that peacemaking efforts often succeed in the short-term only to fail in the quest for long-term peace.[5]

Partly as a means to address these challenges, calls for inclusive approaches to resolving conflict and insecurity have grown louder. In the field of international development, decades of evidence of women's positive impact on socioeconomic outcomes has changed the way governments, donors, and aid organizations do their work. The same cannot be said for the field of peace and security, where women have been thoroughly and consistently excluded. Despite a crescendo of calls for women's participation in decisionmaking surrounding peace and security over the last two decades, change has been slow to follow. For example, women made up just two percent of mediators and nine percent of negotiators in official peace talks between 1992 and 2011.[6] And just two percent of funding dedicated to peace and security goes to gender equality or women's empowerment.[7]

The full impact of women's participation on peace and security outcomes remains poorly understood.[8] But a recent increase in quantitative and qualitative research has the potential to transform the status quo. In outlining the existing data, this article shows how women's inclusion

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helps prevent conflict, create peace, and sustain security after war ends.

Women Prevent Violence and Provide Security

There is overwhelming quantitative evidence that women's empowerment and gender equality are associated with peace and stability in society. In particular, when women influence decisions about war and peace and take the lead against extremism in their communities, it is more likely crises will be resolved without recourse to violence.

Women's Participation Is a Predictor of Peace

Statistical analysis of the largest dataset on the status of women in the world today shows that where women are more empowered in multiple spheres of life, countries are less likely to go to war with their neighbors, to be in bad standing with the international community, or to be rife with crime and violence within their society. The causal direction is not yet clear, but it is evident that gender equality is a better indicator of a state's peacefulness than other factors like democracy, religion, or GDP.[10] Similarly, gender inequality has been revealed as a predictor of armed conflict in a number of empirical studies, whether measuring conflict between states or within states.[11]

Looking at the countries in conflict today, this plays out clearly. Fourteen out of the seventeen countries at the bottom of the OECD's index for gender discrimination also experienced conflict in the last two decades.[12] War-ravaged Syria, for example, has the third-most discriminatory social institutions of 108 countries surveyed—women face legal and social restrictions on their freedom of movement, only men can act as legal guardians over their children in most communities, and judges can authorize marriage for girls as young as 13 years of age.[13]

Many studies show a direct relationship between women's decisionmaking power with regard to peace and conflict, and the likelihood that war will break out. For example, a cross-national quantitative analysis found that higher levels of female participation in parliament reduce the risks of civil war.[14] Another, using data on international crises over four decades, found that as the percentage of women in parliament increases by five percent, a state is five times less likely to use violence when faced with an international crisis.[15] In terms of political violence perpetrated by the state, statistical analysis of data from most countries in the world during the period 1977–1996 showed that the higher the proportion of women in parliament, the lower the likelihood that the state carried out human rights abuses such as political imprisonments, torture, killings, and disappearances.[16]

Women Moderate Extremism

Although more difficult to document, similar patterns arise when women are involved in prevention efforts beyond official decisionmaking roles. When it comes to preventing violent extremism, for example, there are countless cases of women in civil society adopting effective nonviolent approaches rooted in cooperation, trust, and their access to communities. In Pakistan, activist Mossarat Qadeem has a decade of experience deradicalizing extremists by working with legislators, religious leaders, and schools to talk young men out of committing suicide attacks.[17] Her organization, PAIMAN Alumni Trust, has trained more than 655 mothers to deradicalize 1,024 young men and boys, rehabilitating them and reintegrating them into society.[18] In Libya, Alaa Murabit and her colleagues at The Voice of Libyan Women "walk into extremists' homes, schools and workplaces."[19] They create a dialogue with those who feel they have no alternative, drawing on religious discourse and Libyan culture as entry points, while using education and media campaigns to change attitudes.[20] These are just two examples among many more.

Like men, women play a variety of roles when conflict threatens. A small minority of women join and support terrorist organizations for a variety of reasons, often when they perceive no other options to address their grievances.[21] But interviews with 286 people in 30 countries across the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia suggest that women are often the first to stand up against terrorism, since they are among the first targets of fundamentalism, which restricts their rights and frequently leads to increases in domestic violence before it translates into open armed conflict.[22] For the same reason, women are well placed to detect early warning signals of oncoming violence or radicalization that men may miss. When women serve in police forces—which research shows are more effective at combating terrorism than militaries—this can be a particularly valuable skill, as they bring a complementary understanding of the threat environment in the communities they serve.[23] Women in police forces can access the female half of the population that may be closed off to men in conservative cultures, and women are more likely to report gender-based violence to female officers.[24] In addition, policewomen are more likely than their male colleagues to

The Bangui National Forum took place in the capital of the Central African Republic in May, 2015, and concluded with the adoption of the Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation, and Reconstruction.

de-escalate tensions and less likely to use excessive force.[25]

Women Strengthen Peacemaking

When conflict does break out and social norms are upturned, peace and transition processes represent opportunities to both transform the underlying causes of violence and address its effects. Mediation is a more effective means of ensuring that conflict will not recur when compared to military victories.[26] However, it still has a mixed record of success: empirical analysis of eight decades of international crises shows that while mediation often results in short-term cessations of hostilities, this frequently comes at the expense of long-term peace.[27]

New qualitative and quantitative research shows that women can change this picture. A study of 40 peace processes in 35 countries over the last three decades showed that when women's groups were able to effectively influence a peace process, an agreement was almost always reached—only one case presented an exception. When women did not participate, the rate of reaching an agreement was much lower. Once an agreement was reached, the influence of women's groups was also associated with much higher rates of implementation.[28] Statistical analysis of a larger dataset also shows that when women participate in peace processes, peace is more likely to endure. Measuring the presence of women as negotiators, mediators, witnesses, and signatories to 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011, this analysis shows that women's participation has its greatest impact in the long term: an agreement is 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in its creation.[29]

Women Promote Dialogue and Build Trust

Women are often perceived by belligerents as honest brokers in peace processes, and they act accordingly. Conflict parties may see women as less threatening because they are typically acting outside of formal power structures and are not commonly assumed to be mobilizing fighting forces. This grants women access to conflict parties often denied to male leaders.

In Sri Lanka, for example, when talks were foundering and leaders of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam refused to speak with members of the Sri Lankan government and Norwegian negotiators, they asked Visaka Dharmadasa, founder of Parents of Servicemen Missing in Action and the Association of War-Affected Women, to carry messages to the government.[30] Negotiators involved in peace processes in Northern Ireland, South Africa, and Somalia report that, even when female participants initially met with hostility from their male counterparts, they ultimately developed a reputation for building trust, engaging all sides, and fostering dialogue in otherwise acrimonious settings.[31]

Women's roles as mediators are also reflected in community-level dispute resolution. For example, in Somalia women are known to serve as first-line diplomats, carrying messages between clans to settle disputes, since they have greater freedom of movement between the groups, partly due to intermarriage.[32] Women in the Philippines' southern region of Mindanao report a long tradition of leading community-level dispute resolution, which ranges from mediating between conflicting clans to negotiating with the national army.[33]

Of course, not every woman who participates in peacemaking will promote dialogue.

In particular, women representing the conflict parties in a peace process may prioritize toeing the party line.[34] Nonetheless, research across cultures demonstrates that, on average, women are less likely than men to be discriminated against by virtue of their race, religion, or ethnicity, making them well positioned to move between such groups during conflict.[35] Empirical studies show that both men and women are less fearful of women from a different social group than men from a different social group, so conflict parties may be more likely to trust women as intermediaries.[36] The fact that men are more likely to act as competitors and aggressors in interpersonal and intergroup relations compared to women—whether measured by laboratory studies, homicide rates, or all-out war—may also help to explain why women tend to be perceived and to act as peacemakers rather than as adversaries or competitors for power.[37]

Women Bridge Divides and Mobilize Coalitions

Beyond their roles as intermediaries, women are adept at building coalitions in their push for peace. They frequently mobilize diverse groups in society, working across ethnic, religious, political, and cultural divides cracked open by conflict. In addition to this horizontal bridge-building, women also bridge the vertical divide between elites and the grassroots, which may in turn increase the chances that peace will last by promoting buy-in and generating legitimacy.

In the Philippines, for example, women in the high-level peace talks that produced the 2014 peace agreement between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front continually pushed for a broader base of support for the peace process across Filipino society. To facilitate understanding of the process and feed public opinion back to the peace table, they consistently consulted with civil society organizations and led extensive national consultations across 13 regions, ensuring that participants represented a cross-section of religious, indigenous, youth, and other groups. Female negotiators from opposing sides united in their efforts to persuade the public of the value of negotiation over conflict.[38] Women in civil society, many of whom had decades of experience in peacebuilding, worked in unison with the female officials and constantly pushed the elites to continue their pursuit of peace.[39] When the conflict parties threatened to derail the talks with violence in 2012, women led a peaceful protest, pressuring the spoilers to return to the table.[40]

In Liberia, Leymah Gbowee and others organized Christian and Muslim women who, together, pressured warring parties into the 2002 negotiations that ultimately ended years of horrific war. Recognizing that achievement, the Nobel Committee awarded Ms. Gbowee the 2011 Peace Prize for her "nonviolent struggle for… women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."[41] Indeed, these kinds of cross-sectoral alliances frequently devise creative approaches to breaking impasses during a stalled peace process, from nonviolent sit-ins to unorthodox tactics like blocking doors or even withholding sex from husbands. Liberia is one well-known case among many in this regard.

Although women have built such coalitions for peace in myriad ways in differing contexts, similar patterns of women uniting across divides and reconciling disparate groups have been documented in Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Kenya, Northern Ireland, Somalia, South Africa, and beyond.[42] In fact, in-depth studies of 40 peace processes show that no women's groups tried to derail a peace process.[43] This is not true of other societal groups—in Sri Lanka, for example, Buddhist monks and civil society organizations mobilized to protest against the negotiations.[44]

Women's coalition-building across divides may be explained by the fact that women are much more likely than men to reject hierarchies based on group belonging. Analyzing studies with more than 50,000 respondents across 22 countries on five continents, social psychologists found that this was true across cultures, without exception.[45] This gender dynamic is particularly significant for peace-seeking initiatives, since so many wars are started by oppressed groups against dominant groups and vice versa.

Women Raise Issues That are Vital for Peace

Like men, women play a variety of roles during conflict, from peacemakers and political advocates to victims and perpetrators. Nonetheless, on average, women experience conflict differently from men. Men form the majority of combatants and are more likely to be killed in combat. Women are less likely to take up arms, but die in higher numbers from war's indirect effects—the breakdown in social order, human rights abuses, the spread of infectious diseases, and economic devastation.[46]

Perhaps because of these unique experiences during war, women raise different priorities during peace negotiations. They frequently expand the issues under consideration—taking talks beyond military action, power, and territory to consider social and humanitarian needs that belligerents fail to prioritize. In fact, when women are included, they frequently advocate for other excluded groups and address development and human rights issues related to the underlying causes of the conflict.[47] Both of these approaches help societies to reconcile and ultimately build a more robust peace.

In Northern Ireland, for example, the cross-sectarian Women's Coalition secured language in the April 1998 Good Friday Agreement on victims' rights, as well as provisions for reintegration of political prisoners, integrated education, and mixed housing—items that were not brought to the table by the main parties to the conflict.[48] In the negotiations leading to the May 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement in Sudan, women delegates pushed for previously neglected provisions addressing safety for internally displaced persons and refugees, food security, and gender-based violence.[49] In the political transition in Afghanistan, women in the constitutional assembly that convened in 2003 and 2004 advocated for the rights of the disabled and supported the Uzbek minority's efforts to gain official recognition for their language.[50]

Indeed, when women are excluded from peace and transition processes, significant grievances and sources of instability are often overlooked. Former U.S. Ambassador to Angola Donald Steinberg suggests that women's absence from the 1994 peace negotiations in Lusaka between the Angolan government and rebel forces offers a cautionary tale in this regard. He later wrote:

> *The exclusion of women and gender considerations from the peace process proved to be a key factor in our inability to implement the Lusaka Protocol and in Angola's return to conflict in late 1998…Not only did this silence women's voices on the hard issues of war and peace, but it also meant*

> *that issues [such] as internal displacement, sexual violence, abuses by government and rebel security forces, and the rebuilding of social services … were given short shrift—or no shrift at all.*[51]

Women Prioritize Gender Equality

When women participate in peace processes they frequently raise issues of gender equality and women's rights, which closely correlate with peace. This contributes to strengthening the representativeness and legitimacy of the new political order that follows. Women's significant participation in the transition in South Africa led to the enshrinement of gender equality in the country's new constitution. The constitution provided for a new Commission on Gender Equality and included a requirement that women comprise 30 percent of all new civil servants.[52] Women's contributions to the peace talks in Guatemala led to the creation of the National Women's Forum and the Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women, as well as legislation against sexual harassment and efforts to make access to land and credit more equal.[53]

Even when women's concerns are not ultimately included in peace agreements or new constitutions, women's mobilization in contexts where gender roles and political power are in flux appears to have produced positive outcomes for the political institutions that follow.[54] Studies show that across Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, there have been dramatic increases in the number of women in parliaments in post-conflict countries compared to those without conflict. In Africa,

UNAMID/Albert Gonzalez Farran

Community policing volunteers bridge divides in Darfur. In the Zam Zam camp for Internally Displaced People in North Darfur, UNAMID police officer Grace Ngassa, from Tanzania (left), and Community Policing Volunteer Jazira Ahmad Mohammad (center) interact with a woman and her child (right).

women in post-conflict countries have almost doubled their rates of legislative representation compared to countries not in conflict—reaching 27 percent of members of parliament in post-conflict settings, compared to 13 percent in settings without conflict, according to a 2012 study.[55]

Women Rebuild More Peaceful Societies

When war is officially ended, women's political and social participation can contribute to a more robust peace for everyone by reducing the likelihood of relapse into conflict and taking a more inclusive approach to post-conflict reconstruction.

Women Break the Conflict Trap

The effect of women's participation is particularly evident when it comes to breaking the "conflict trap." Once war has broken out, the risk that this society will experience further violent conflict greatly increases.[56] But just as women's empowerment is associated with reduced likelihood that conflict will break out in the first place, statistical analysis also shows that strengthening women's political and social participation diminishes the chances of conflict relapse after war has ended. In particular, increases in parliamentary representation and in female literacy reduce the risk that a country will experience civil war again. A study of 58 conflict-affected states between 1980 and 2003 found that when no women are represented in the legislature, the risk of relapse increases over time, but "when 35 percent of the legislature is female, this relationship virtually disappears, and the risk of relapse is near zero."[57]

Inclusive Security

The late Aloisea Inyumba, then gender minister in Rwanda, stands in a Rwandan village. She placed 500,000 orphans with families after the genocide, ignoring Hutu and Tutsi distinctions.

Rwanda's experience across three civil wars brings these statistics to life. While two spells of peace in the 1980s and 1990s both ended in conflict, women held 13 percent of parliamentary seats and the female-to-male literacy rate was 0.58, on average.[58] In contrast, women held an average 21 percent of parliamentary seats in the decade following the 1994 genocide and the literacy ratio jumped to 0.85. As of 2015, women's representation has increased to 64 percent—the world's highest percentage of women in parliament—and peace, though not perfect, has held for 20 years.[59]

Women Broaden Societal Participation

The relationship between women's participation and peace duration may be partly explained by women's inclusive approach to governance in post-conflict environments and the perception of trust associated with them. Research demonstrates that gender quotas in post-conflict contexts make it more likely that other disadvantaged groups will gain access to parliament, depending on the prevailing electoral system, which in turn correlates with conflict prevention indicators.[60] Other studies show that women in politics are perceived as more trustworthy and less corrupt—a perception that is vital for maintaining the public's confidence in its new political institutions in the fragile post-conflict setting.[61]

Women who led the way in rebuilding their society in Rwanda also reflected this approach. Aloisea Inyumba, the country's first Minister of Family, Gender, and Social Affairs, directed the burial of 800,000 dead after the genocide, the resettlement of refugees, and a national adoption campaign that reduced the number of genocide orphans in Rwanda from 500,000 to 4,000. She led Rwanda's Unity and Reconciliation Commission, where she used national public dialogues to promote reconciliation between Hutus and Tutsis. She was also responsible for the implementation of the Gacaca court system, a trailblazing participatory justice mechanism to address war crimes. Inyumba served as senator until 2011 and played a significant role in strengthening women's voices in local government throughout Rwanda.[62]

Even in post-conflict settings where women are widely excluded from politics, or where the formal institutions of the state have been destroyed, women's empowerment still influences the success of peacebuilding outcomes. A cross-national analysis of postwar contexts since 1945 with a high risk of backsliding into conflict found that where women enjoy a relatively higher social status, the prospects for successful peacebuilding are greater, because the local population's participation in peacebuilding policies and activities increases.[63] In other words, women have a direct positive impact on post-conflict reconstruction because they have a voice themselves and they elicit broader societal participation. Indeed, analysis of levels of conflict and cooperation during UN peacebuilding missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone showed that in districts where women had higher status, UN peace operations have been significantly more effective.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence is overwhelming: where women's inclusion is prioritized, peace is more likely—particularly when women are in a position to influence decisionmaking.

There are several reasons why this is so. Women promote dialogue and build trust. They consistently bridge divides and build coalitions for peace. They bring different perspectives to bear on what peace and security mean and how they can be realized, contributing to a more holistic understanding of peace that addresses long-term needs as well as short-term security. Whether preventing conflict, contributing to peace processes, or rebuilding their societies after war, women take an inclusive approach. Exclusion of identity-based groups—whether religious, ethnic, or cultural—is a significant contributor to war, poverty, and state failure.[65] With their collaborative responses to preventing conflict, making peace, and rebuilding societies, women consistently address this cause of conflict and instability, helping to ensure that peace will last.

The threat and onset of war can be used to reinforce and exacerbate women's marginalization, or it can be used as an opportunity to empower women and increase the chances of a peaceful outcome for everyone. Because when women are included, it benefits entire communities, not just women. **PRISM**

Notes

[1] A version of this article was first published in October 2015 by The Institute for Inclusive Security with the title "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies," available at <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/why-women-inclusive-security-and-peaceful-societies/>.

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[5] Kyle Beardsley, "Agreement without Peace? International Mediation and Time Inconsistency Problems," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 4 (October 2008): 723–740; Kyle Beardsley, *The Mediation Dilemma* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

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[28] Research from the Broadening Participation Project led by Thania Paffenholz. See O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking."

[29] Statistical analysis by Laurel Stone, as featured in O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabháin, and Paffenholz, "Reimagining Peacemaking," 12-13.

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