INCLUSIVE CEASEFIRES
Women, Gender, and a Sustainable End to Violence

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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. Belligerents increasingly target civilians, and global displacement from conflict, violence, and persecution has reached the highest level ever recorded.[1] States that emerge from war also persistently relapse; in the 2000s, 90 percent of conflicts occurred in countries previously afflicted by war.[2]

To address these challenges—and in response to overwhelming evidence[3] of the association between gender equality and stability—the inclusion of women and civil society in peace processes is gaining normative traction.[4] Yet one consistent exception has emerged: ceasefires. Out of 585 peace-related agreements signed between January 1990 and May 2010, only 92 (16 percent) explicitly mention women—and ceasefire agreements represent but a fraction of that.[5]

One common explanation for this persistent exclusion is that ceasefires require technical knowledge of military forces and equipment that only armed factions are likely to possess.[6] Mediators, therefore, may not find women and

civil society to be relevant, and conclude that inclusion is more important at later stages of a peace process.[7] Traditionally, the more destructive an armed group, the more they're seen as critical to the ceasefire and the more leverage they wield in its negotiation. Not only does this provide warped incentives to armed actors; it also overwhelmingly excludes women. If arms are the primary currency for buying one's way into ceasefire processes, women—who are rarely seen in the upper echelons of armed groups[8] —will continue to go uninvited.

It is remarkable that ceasefires remain unquestionably untouched by the principle of inclusion, given the foundational role they often play in the form and function of ensuing peace negotiations and their inherent fragility. Ceasefires can heavily influence—if not determine outright—which actors will subsequently be invited to the peace table and which issues will appear on the agenda of those talks.[9] And research shows that, when women participate in peace negotiations, the resulting agreements are 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years.[10] Inclusion may also benefit the sustainability of ceasefires themselves. A growing body of evidence shows that, because of their societal roles, women bring different life experiences, priorities, and information to the table

that make for more comprehensive, sustainable peace agreements. There's little reason to believe that ceasefires are an exception. On the contrary, according to one of the most extensive studies to date on ceasefires and peace, strong ceasefires—defined as those that include detailed mechanisms like demilitarized zones and peacekeeping forces—reduce the risk of another war by more than 80 percent.[11]

Yet the growing body of research on ceasefires contains little information on if, how, and why women's and civil society's needs, perspectives, and considerations are incorporated. We analyzed two case studies, the 2014 South Sudanese Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and the 2015 Myanmar Nationwide Ceasefire agreement, along with the sparse literature on women, gender, and ceasefires, to generate the following hypotheses on the value of women's inclusion at this stage.

Benefits of Women's Inclusion in Ceasefires

1.

If women are included in pre-negotiation phases, they are more likely to be included in subsequent processes.

Those who negotiate official ceasefire arrangements typically become those who negotiate later political settlements. Take, for example, the 1999 Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement, negotiated to cease hostilities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Chapter 5 of the Annex to the agreement stipulates which parties would participate in subsequent political talks.[12] Despite a stated commitment to "all-inclusive" negotiations, women were not explicitly mentioned, and initial delegate selection procedures produced only six women delegates out of 73.[13]

This first point calls into question perhaps the most prevalent assumption about ceasefires—namely, that they are standalone stages of peace processes, wholly distinct in their dealings and of little lasting import once they've succeeded in carving out the space for political negotiations to begin. If this is false, and inclusive political negotiations improve the outcomes of negotiations, then at the very least, this warrants an evidence-based debate of the merits of inclusive ceasefires.

2.

Popular pressure can incentivize parties to negotiate a ceasefire as much as, or more than, a mutually hurting military stalemate.

Ripeness theory argues that certain conditions, such as parties' perception of a 'mutually hurting military stalemate,' must be present to incentivize warring parties to cooperate with mediation.[14] But this focus overlooks the role of civil society in mobilizing mass action and bringing popular pressure to bear on belligerents, thereby "ripening" conditions for mediation.[15] Take, for example, the Liberian Women in Peacebuilding Network and the Mano River Women's Peace Network. These organizations succeeded where the UN could not by bringing President Charles Taylor to the negotiating table with rebel leaders from

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Clockwise from top left: AP Photo/Aaron Favila, MONUSCO/Sylvain Liechti, Inclusive Security/Shereen Hall, AP Photo/Aaron Favila

Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia. The first agreement to come out of those talks was a preliminary ceasefire.[16]

The pressure that women and civil society apply to belligerent parties may also help propel conflicts "frozen" by ceasefires towards peace. Because they typically suffer disproportionately in modern warfare, women and civil society have perhaps the largest vested interest in ensuring that ceasefires drive momentum towards peace. Indeed, according to an in-depth study of 40 peace processes since the end of the Cold War, one of the most consistent contributions from women was their push for negotiations' commencement, resumption, or conclusion once talks had stalled.[17]

3.

If women and civil society are included, the definitions of the hostilities to be ceased will be more robust.

Mediators' preparations for ceasefire negotiations typically include the creation of a list of hostilities. Ideally, this list is compiled using available data and consultations with conflict-affected populations to more holistically reflect civilian concerns.[18]

The importance of including women and civil society in these consultations was illustrated by the Burundi talks that led to the 2000 Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, mediators consulted a forum of civil society activists (many of whom were women) to inform the cessation of hostilities. By doing so, the mediation team brought to light additional hostilities that the armed groups had left off their lists, using them to advance more comprehensive language in the agreement.[19] The final text included a ban on a

number of violent acts against civilians that, left unchecked, would have undoubtedly fueled further conflict, including "summary executions, torture, harassment, detention, and persecution of civilians on the basis of ethnic origin, religious beliefs, and political affiliations; incitement of ethnic hatred; arming of civilians; use of child soldiers; sexual violence; training of terrorists; genocide; and bombing of the civilian population."[20]

4.

If women and civil society are included, the issues on the agenda of peace talks are more likely to be comprehensive and reflective of citizens' needs.

To secure commitments to a ceasefire, mediators must provide some level of assurance that the parties' grievances will be addressed in negotiations.[21] To that end, ceasefire agreements often produce an agenda of issues for subsequent political negotiations. Limiting this agenda to the priorities of the warring parties risks marginalizing the needs and perspectives of women and civilians, essentially cutting them out of processes "that both chart a road out of conflict and put in place the political, legal, and economic structures of government…and set in place funding streams."[22]

Research shows that women raise different priorities during peace negotiations, taking talks beyond military action, power, and territory to consider social and humanitarian needs that belligerents fail to prioritize.[23] As preliminary steps towards peace negotiations, ceasefires are not designed to tackle longer-term peacebuilding issues, but such perspectives must be part of the ceasefire negotiation that determines whether they will be addressed later. Moreover, on the few occasions when women have participated in

these discussions, the resulting provisions included language more conducive to effective transition processes. Compare, for example, the language of the 2003 ceasefire between the Government of the Republic of Liberia, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia, to the language in the 2008 Agreement Permanent Ceasefire between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army/Movement. The former commits the signatories to seek a comprehensive peace agreement within 30 days on "Commencement of a DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration] programme,"[24] whereas the latter, which saw significantly higher participation by women, commits the signatories to give "highest priority" to "gender and child specific UN IDDRS [Integrated DDR] standards for encampment" in "the preparation of detailed agreements and arrangements for DDR."[25]

5.

Including gendered language in the text of ceasefire agreements will likely improve attention to gender-based violence and civilian protection in planning for mutual threat reduction, monitoring and verification mechanisms, and transitional security arrangements.

The acts included in a cessation of hostilities "will determine what will be regarded as a ceasefire violation, [and] what violations will be monitored."[26] If sexual and other forms of gender-based violence are included in that list, monitoring and verification mechanisms are more likely to include a mandate

and related standard operating procedures for reporting on their incidence. This is critical to mutual threat reduction. As the UN states, if for example, "when guns fall silent, raping...continues unchecked...ex-belligerents can claim to adhere to the formal terms of a peace accord while waging a proxy war on one another's women." Besides the

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obvious security failure this represents, "license to loot and rape at gunpoint (be it implicit or explicit) can prolong conflict, providing incentive for irregularly-paid rebels to continue or resume the fight," [27] and fueling tit-for-tat escalation of violence.

Without explicit mandates in ceasefire texts and scenario-based pre-deployment trainings for addressing gender-based violence, monitoring and verification teams, peacekeeping missions, and other transitional security personnel will be ill-equipped to protect civilians from this weapon of war. As peacekeepers repeatedly stated in UN interviews, "the military cannot operate in an environment of ambiguity."[28]

6.

Women's and civil society's inclusion in monitoring and verification teams will likely enhance ceasefire violation reporting and accountability.

Ceasefire agreements often include provisions for monitoring and verification teams, their selection processes, and their levels of community consultation. Enshrining hybrid missions of military and local civil society in these provisions can be a force multiplier. This is particularly true in cases where culpable governments obstruct the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces,[29] when delays in the rapid mobilization of international monitoring missions threaten post-agreement security vacuums,[30] or when operating in conservative cultures that prohibit women from speaking with men to whom they are not related.

The inclusion of woman and civil society is also likely to improve relations between local populations and multinational missions, encouraging citizens to report early-warning indicators of resumed hostilities and improving monitors' situational awareness.[31] Consider the case of Bantay Ceasefire, an independent organization founded to monitor the 2002 ceasefire in Mindanao, Philippines. Entirely civilian, it investigates violations by all sides and includes all-women groups, the establishment of which led to a significant increase in grassroots reporting of ceasefire violations, IDP (internally displaced people) needs, and protection of civilians.[32] Widely acclaimed for its effectiveness and impartiality, Bantay Ceasefire was invited in 2009 to join the ceasefire's International Monitoring Team.[33]

AP Photo/Obed Zilwa

7.

If women and civil society are included, the public is more likely to be educated about ceasefire processes, increasing popular ownership and enabling local populations to hold signatories accountable for implementation.

According to the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, a significant part of a mediator's job is working "with the parties to decrease the use of hostile propaganda and inform broader constituencies about the spirit and letter of the ceasefire agreement."[34] The more awareness citizens have about the components of an agreement, the more likely they are to hold belligerents accountable.

However, this analysis misses the role that civil society plays as a critical information vector, connecting the national with the local. Women and civil society leaders have long assumed responsibility for translating the content of agreements into relatable language for the public, particularly in rights education and awareness raising.[35]

Consider the role of women in equipping the Liberian public to serve as a "watchdog" of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. When WIPNET noticed the absence of a clear timeline for CPA implementation, they convened to identify benchmarks that they could communicate to the public.[36] Bantay Ceasefire in Mindanao also assumed responsibility for public education, organizing community-based trainings on the provisions of the agreement as part of a "deliberate attempt to connect the horizontal peace process (happening at the grassroots level among civilians in the three communities) with the vertical process occurring at the highest levels of leadership."[37] In doing so, it provided citizens with an opportunity to influence the conflict without joining the armed groups.[38]

Conclusion

If there is one conclusion we can draw with certainty, it is that more research is needed to better understand how women and attention to gender impact the sustainability of ceasefire agreements. Anecdotal evidence and intellectual analysis suggest tangible benefits, but we are often left trying to prove the counterfactual: were the ceasefire negotiations less successful because women were not included? That piece we will never know.

Regardless, we have an obligation to challenge assumptions about why inclusion need not apply to negotiating ceasefires. Perhaps instead of investigating if the inclusion of women and civil society matters, we should be questioning our current normative approach, which seems to have failed on so many accounts. If women were to be included in pre-negotiations phases such as ceasefires, would the outcome ultimately be stronger? We suggest, yes.

For additional information on women, gender, and ceasefires, see www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/inclusive-ceasefires-women-gender-and-a-sustainable-end-to-violence/.

ENDNOTES

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2   World Bank, *World Development Report 2011* (Washington, DC: 2011), 2-3.

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4   Sections of the preceding two paragraphs were reprinted with permission from another Inclusive Security publication, entitled "Why Women? Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies," by Marie O'Reilly, Inclusive Security, 2015.

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