

GENDER,

CONFLICT

AND THE

MILLENNIUM

DEVELOPMENT

GOALS

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but development without peace will not be possible either”**

Ngozi Eze, WfWI International Country Director, Nigeria.



WOMEN *for* **WOMEN**
International

GENDER, CONFLICT AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Across the world, poverty wears a woman's face. She battles daily with the greatest obstacles to her well-being and autonomy, struggling to meet her family's most basic needs against deep-rooted discrimination, exploitation and exclusion from the benefits of development. A daunting set of statistics reveals that 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in extreme poverty are women, who perform 66% of the world's work and produce half its food while earning only 10% of the world's income and owning less than 1% of its property. Sadly, in times of war a woman's burdens only get heavier, her vulnerabilities more pronounced. She remains locked in poverty, often losing the protection of home and husband, coping with fear and suffering devastating rights violations and violence, including torture, rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution and mutilation. Despite these grim realities, she brings enormous energy, leadership and resilience to protecting families and rebuilding fractured communities. Yet, her essential voice remains absent from formal peace negotiations and her needs remain on the margins of reconstruction, development and poverty reduction programmes.

Cognisant of the crippling poverty faced by women worldwide, the disproportionate effects of war on women, and the benefits of fostering gender equality, UN member states have jointly agreed to pursue policies that strive to eliminate poverty and empower women. The year 2010 marks the tenth anniversaries of two such distinct but related policy frameworks:

1. The first, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is an ambitious set of eight global targets for development and poverty reduction that 192 United Nations member states and international organisations have agreed to achieve by 2015. Recognised as the foremost global policy instrument for poverty reduction, the targets include eradicating poverty, decreasing maternal and child mortality, fighting disease, and advancing gender equality.
(See the eight Millennium Development Goals opposite)
2. The second, United Nations Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1325, outlines specific policy measures to strengthen the inclusion of women's perspectives in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building. It advocates for what have become known as the 3 Ps:
 - participation of women at all levels of decision-making;
 - protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence; and
 - prevention of violence against women through the promotion of women's rights, accountability and law enforcement.

Assessments at the ten-year mark reveal that despite some progress, the implementation of both frameworks has fallen strikingly short of expectations. While many countries are behind on their promises to meet the MDGs, particularly those goals in which gender is explicit,¹ conflict-affected countries are more likely to be lagging.²

To mark the tenth anniversaries of both the MDGs and UNSCR 1325, Women for Women International (WfWI) commissioned a small-scale research project to link the two policy agendas and to pinpoint steps that are needed to craft real change for women in conflict-affected countries based on their actual experience. The study focused on five countries at different stages of conflict and recovery - Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Sudan - and is informed by a literature review, interviews with several southern NGOs, and responses to a detailed questionnaire that was disseminated through networks working on gender, peace and security issues. The majority of informants were southern-based, but there were also responses from northern-based organisations with programmes in the south.

Findings reflect a rich seam of experience from organisations working with women towards inclusive security and development in conflict-affected countries, and contributing to the realisation of both frameworks. In addition, they outline development policies and practices that have made a difference to women's lives and the role that governments and donors can play in enabling women and men to participate equally in peace-building and development.

THE EIGHT MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

- GOAL 1** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- GOAL 2** Achieve universal primary education
- GOAL 3** Promote gender equality and empower women
- GOAL 4** Reduce child mortality
- GOAL 5** Improve maternal health
- GOAL 6** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- GOAL 7** Ensure environmental sustainability
- GOAL 8** Develop a Global Partnership for Development



Photo by Lekha Singh

¹ MDG 3 (measures gender equality through parity in education, share of wage employment and representation in parliaments) and MDG 5 (maternal mortality). The 2010 UN MDG report describes gender equality and women's empowerment as being 'at the heart of the MDGs' but says that progress has been 'sluggish.' (p4) <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/MDC%20Report%202010%20En%20r15%20-low%20res%2020100615%20-.pdf>

² The 2010 UN MDG report finds that armed conflict remains a major threat to human security and to MDG gains; the report of the UN Millennium Project, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the MDGs* states that of the 34 poor countries farthest from reaching the MDGs, 22 are in or are emerging from a conflict (p138) <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/documents/MainReportChapter12-lowres.pdf>

KEY FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY:

A Development and security agendas are not linked

"It's important to link 1325 and the MDGs, because we can't have peace without development, but development without peace will not be possible either," says Ngozi Eze, WfWI International Country Director, Nigeria. However, links between the MDGs and SCR 1325 remain largely unrealised in practice, policy and research. Monitoring efforts are separate and therefore critical connections between the lack of progress on women's security and development are missed.

B Violence against women is the single greatest impediment to development and peace

Sexual and gender-based violence is exacerbated by conflict and prevents women from participating in development, denies them access to education and healthcare, and is a key risk factor for HIV and AIDS. Until women in conflict-affected settings have a basic level of security, protection of rights and access to justice, there can be no progress on gender and MDG commitments. Gross breaches of human rights, which sometimes involve security institutions that are responsible for protecting women, also undermine these commitments.

C Economic empowerment is key to women's recovery from conflict

Women's economic empowerment is an essential element for reconstruction and peacebuilding as it helps to promote social reintegration and reconciliation in conflict-affected communities.

"Income-generation schemes in post-conflict zones have given greater autonomy to women. It allows them to say no to harmful cultural practices practised against widows and to say no to husbands that beat them, because it confers a greater degree of economic independence," says Sylvia Nassiem from the Central African Republic.

The main obstacle to women's economic empowerment is the lack of security – both inside and outside the home. Other obstacles are the lack of opportunities to market goods, limited movement outside the home due to cultural attitudes and a lack of social protection when work is not possible.

D Women continue to be left out of formal peace processes

The continued marginalisation of women in formal peace processes is a huge impediment to sustainable development, democracy and lasting peace. *"Women are imprisoned by poverty, because they are not part of peace-building processes, national politics, and their voice is absent from every part of society,"* says Elysee Yohali, Women for Peace and Human Rights, DRC. Women's participation in the 16 peace processes since 2000 has been minimal, and in 5 cases – Somalia (2002), Cote D'Ivoire (2003), Nepal (2006), the Philippines (2007) and the Central African Republic (2008) – no women participated as signatories, mediators, witnesses or negotiators. In spite of their contributions to community reconciliation and peace, women are chronically under-represented in security, justice and public sectors, which all play a key role in peacebuilding.

E Work on security, conflict prevention and peacebuilding needs to be informed by local realities and women's needs

Programmes and policies that seek to bring peace and development to conflict-affected countries cannot be successful without first incorporating the specific needs of communities and women. Currently, local-level, gender-sensitive analyses are prevented by the lack of political will and resources. While women's participation alone cannot guarantee gender-sensitive approaches, their experience and expertise remain vital because of their ability to drive implementation of peace agreements and their motivation to prevent and end violent conflicts.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghan organisations report that it is vitally important to find training opportunities close to their homes for home-based workers. They say that women need to be paid while receiving training, so that they do not have to miss paid opportunities in order to improve skills. Women informal workers interviewed by Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) said that they benefited from training schemes and support that provide 'empowerment' skills, including information about legal rights and exercises to improve negotiation and organisational skills. However, HRRAC also finds that women home-based workers face insecurity, including the lack of legal and social protection, insecure employment and the lack of safe working environments, including freedom from domestic violence.

Sweeta Noori, Country Director for WfWI in Afghanistan, says that women who participate in WfWI's micro-credit schemes report feeling secure and are less likely to experience domestic violence. She shares the example of Habiba, who was widowed with four children to support. Her family tried to force her to marry her brother-in-law, but she persuaded them to decline the marriage if she could find a way to support herself. She enrolled in WfWI's training programme and received a loan to start a business. She now runs a shop in Kabul has her own house and is able to provide for herself and children. WfWI's Afghanistan programme has supported many women in this way. It has operated in the country since 2002, providing nearly \$17 million dollars in micro-credit loans to over 60,000 women. Typically, women participate in comprehensive business management training before receiving micro-credit loans.

They then set up their own businesses, such as animal husbandry, bicycle and vehicle repair and running small local hotels and restaurants. Almost all of their businesses take them out of the home, suggesting that they are more likely to feel secure and free from the uncertainty of conflict, particularly family conflict and violence, than the home-based workers interviewed by HRRAC.

WfWI also provides the men in communities with training, but this alone, according to Noori, is not enough. By involving men in the businesses, they find that the respect for women increases because men see the women's skills are equal to theirs, helping to overcome traditional values towards women's roles and value in communities. Crucially, women retain control of the finances of their projects and, as a result, WfWI has started to see the family income shared more equitably in households.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Strengthen links between development and security

At the national level, gender analysis and consultation with local and women's organisations are needed when national development (MDGs) plans are drawn up. It requires the design and execution of complementary development (MDGs) and security (SCR 1325) plans that address challenges that cripple both agendas, including violence against women, women's exclusion from decision-making and their lack of access to resources. At the international level, governments need to ensure that MDG reviews address the gendered impact of conflict on the goals and develop common indicators to link progress on both MDGs and SCR 1325. As donors, they will need to increase direct funding to women's organisations, particularly those working at community level and ensure that women are fully-involved in developing, implementing and monitoring both development and peacebuilding strategies.

2 Protect women and girls from violence

Better protection of women requires peacekeepers, police and other representatives of the security sector to receive gender training so that they can develop a deeper understanding of the gender dynamics of conflict and the unique threats faced by women and children. An adequate response also needs to be cognisant that some perpetrators are in positions of power – in the government, security sector or community – and include strategies to bring them to justice. In addition, investment is needed in organisations that are at the frontlines, caring for survivors of violence. National authorities need to ally with NGOs to develop a nuanced and realistic response to sexual and gender-based violence and provide survivors with better health and psychosocial services as well as facilitate their access to justice.

3 Invest in women's economic empowerment

Governments and organisations must prioritise and fund programmes and projects that foster women's economic

empowerment. These include initiatives that equip women with the skills and resources to run businesses and be employed, enable women to own land and access credit, and facilitate saving. Interventions must also challenge conservative, patriarchal attitudes that prevent women from owning land on an equal basis with men or from working outside the home by educating traditional, religious and community leaders.

4 Make space for women at the peace table

Governments and NGOs must recognise women's contributions to peace and their potential to support stability and rebuild communities by ensuring their increased and meaningful participation in conflict prevention, resolution and formal peace processes. Creating an enabling environment for women to participate in peacebuilding processes also encourages their participation in political processes that emerge as conflict-affected countries stabilise. Community initiatives that surface women's hidden voices and experience in formal processes must also be encouraged and supported.

5 Support security and development approaches that are defined by women themselves in their own cultural context

Women will define what makes them secure differently depending on their cultural contexts. Governments and international agencies must consult with communities and women before rebuilding infrastructure or providing services in conflict-affected communities to better understand gender and power relations, reflect community priorities and adequately address the specific needs of women and men. This local-level approach recognises that minority or marginalised groups of women (widows, for example) play an important role in peacebuilding and development. It incorporates advocacy with traditional, religious and community leaders who have a vital role in easing women's participation in peacebuilding, income generation, and community decision-making.

WHAT WE DO

Women for Women International (WfWI) is dedicated to providing women survivors of war with tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty to stability and self-sufficiency, thereby promoting stable societies. We believe that stronger women build stronger nations, and with access to information and resources, socially-

excluded women survivors of war can lead change towards peaceful and stable societies. We provide women with direct aid to cover immediate needs such as food, clothing and medication, coupled with a year-long training programme that equips them with knowledge about their rights, confidence to act as advocates, and

vocational skills by which to sustain an income. In this way, we also meet women's need for independence and economic self-sufficiency. Over the last 16 years, we have served 275,000 socially-excluded women in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda and Sudan.

For a full copy of the report 'Gender, Conflict and the MDGs' by Ceri Hayes for Women for Women International please visit www.womenforwomen.org.uk.



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