

The Institute for **Inclusive Security**

**ECOSOC Special Policy Dialogue:
“The role of women in countries in special situations”
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It is an honor, a privilege, and a pleasure to be here today to speak with you about the role of women post-conflict. It is extremely heartening to see the high-level attention being focused on the need to better involve women and address their needs post-conflict. The statistics indicating how rarely women are included in decision-making around development and the seeming inability of the international community to close the gaps between the level of women’s and men’s need globally, are a call for immediate action. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that women’s marginalization in decision-making, insufficient action to meeting their needs, and faltering post conflict development correlate.

II Why Women?

There are three different lenses through which the need for greater women’s inclusion is justified:

1. Fundamental Rights and Justice

Women are the majority of the population in most post-conflict societies. They often have held communities together through generations of conflict. Frequently, they have suffered disproportionately from war or natural disaster. It is their fundamental right to have a voice in decision-making about post-conflict development. It also is just that reconstruction be used to correct for disparities in education, health care, and income that women have faced historically and as a result of conflict or natural disaster.

2. Legal Obligation

Myriad international, regional, and national resolutions, declarations, policy statements, and action plans call for women’s inclusion in decision-making and greater attention to their priorities and needs. Among them, UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, and 1889 obligate member states to attend to the needs of women, especially as victims of sexual violence, and to elevate women’s role in all stages of peace processes.

3. Evidence That Involving Women Will Improve Post-Conflict Development

A growing body of evidence confirms that marginalizing women in efforts to resolve and rebuild following conflict undermines success. Women have different experience, expertise, and perspectives that add value to deliberations, program design, and implementation. Insufficiently capitalizing on the skills and views of the majority of the population post-conflict is poor practice and bad policy.

A great deal more attention has been focused on the needs of women—as victims of conflict and as the majority of the impoverished and disadvantaged—than on the gains to our developmental mission to be accrued from women’s inclusion. I would like to shine a spotlight on the instrumentalist perspective, because I believe it is an absolutely critical frame for thinking about why women need to be brought into the post-conflict development process.

III How Women’s Inclusion Improves Post-Conflict Development

I would contend that if the global community is able to move the agenda of women’s inclusion forward, the broader developmental agenda will reap dividends. Around the world, where a critical mass of women has attained a position of authority, shifts in priorities and investments are common.

A. Women advance social objectives when governing

As women’s representation in parliaments has increased, it has often been accompanied by increased attention to family health and human welfare. In such diverse places as Costa Rica, Colombia, New Zealand, and the United States women legislators have been found generally to ascribe greater importance to issues of women’s rights and child welfare. Often, this has correlated with the introduction of related legislation.

Rwanda is an important example. The only country in the world with a majority-female parliament, the women’s legislative caucus, the Forum of Rwandan Women Parliamentarians, has dedicated itself to reviewing proposed legislation for gender bias; has strengthened the land ownership, inheritance, and citizenship rights of women and children; and has led passage of legislation to combat sexual violence. Women legislators in Afghanistan, Colombia, and Liberia have spearheaded similar legislation regarding gender-based violence.

The same has proven true at the local level. In India, for example, after a 1992 quota for women’s participation was put in place for panchayat-level governing structures, a shift in priorities was visible. Emphasis on education, healthcare and management of common property resources increased, as did entrepreneurial schemes, including the leasing of village ponds for businesses.

When encouraged and enabled to play a role in governing, women have proved instrumental in addressing many of the core challenges inhibiting improvements in the status of women and general progress with social and economic development.

B. Women help rehabilitate the image of government

Increasing the presence of women in governance can also help rebuild citizen faith in government. Women are a minority of combatants; they are less tainted by conflict during reconstruction. Similarly, because women have been marginalized in government, they are not tainted by the shortcomings of previous administrations. In such diverse places as Cambodia, India, and Rwanda, women have been found to be perceived as less corrupt and more trustworthy.

Women can help rebuild faith in government. They can help change the image and perception of public servants post-conflict.

C. Women can drive or doom economic revitalization

Women are absolutely critical to the economic well-being of developing nations. They represent over 40 percent of the global labor force, and the highest growth segment of that workforce. In Africa, women are responsible for 70 percent of the food production; half of farm labor; and 80-90 percent of food processing, storage, and transport.

It is possible to look at women as the most disadvantaged workers. They represent 60 percent of the world's working poor, some 70 percent of the poorest of the poor, and often face daunting legal, institutional, and cultural barriers to economic empowerment. Their economic struggle contributes to stagnation and inhibits development.

At the same time, it is equally possible to view women as the greatest under-tapped resource for economic growth and revitalization. Notwithstanding the very real challenges they face, women are the largest growing economic force globally; their earning power is expected to reach \$18 trillion by 2014 according to World Bank estimates. The potential returns on investment in women's economic well-being could be extraordinary. Some examples:

- In India, women's employment has been equated directly with the highest rates of growth and poverty reduction.
- In Tanzania, it is predicted that reducing the time constraints faced by female coffee and banana grower by 10 percent could increase labor productivity by 15 percent and capital productivity by 44 percent.
- In Kenya, it is estimated that providing equal training and inputs to male and female farms could increase yields by 20 percent.

Additionally, the increase in women's economic well-being could have a commensurate impact on social investment. It has been found that women invest a higher percentage of personal income in family nutrition, education, and healthcare than men.

Harnessing the economic potential of women could be a potent means for achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals while providing a basis for potent economic stimulus in some of the poorest countries around the world.

D. Women connect back to communities

Critical to the post-conflict development process is community rebuilding and reconciliation. Communities must feel a “peace dividend.” They also must feel that transitional governments and international aid agencies are vested in local priorities and in re-weaving the fabric of societies torn by violence. Women can be critical partners in every stage of the community reconciliation and rebuilding process.

Women are essential in helping former combatants and victims of conflict successfully return to peaceful society. Women have often maintained communities during conflict and frequently can draw on their authority as mothers in helping reintegrate members of fighting forces. In El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Liberia the important contributions of women to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration have been documented.

Connecting nascent peace processes and post-war governments with local community stakeholders has also proved a priority for women. In Kosovo, the female transitional government minister for democratization, good governance, and media, Vjosa Dobruna, used local consultations with civil society to ground her recommendations for reconstruction in local priorities. In Rwanda, the women’s parliamentary caucus developed its law combating sexual violence using an extensive nationwide consultative process. In South Africa, women shaped a security sector reform effort that sought to re-vision the role of the military and police using extensive local dialogue.

Women have also proven critical partners in transitional justice efforts. Often they are critical interlocutors to local communities. Frequently, they are the only stakeholders able to structure processes that can solicit testimony about sexual violence during conflict. In South Africa and within the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, women helped structure processes that created safe space for particularly sensitive testimony. In Liberia, women in civil society complemented formal transitional justice efforts with outreach to local women across the country through women-only dialogues. The dialogues accomplished three goals: they built public support for and credibility to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission; they fed recommendations from the grassroots into the TRC deliberations; and they fostered community reconciliation and psycho-social healing.

The international community can capitalize on women’s skill, authority, and propensity to build bridges within societies. We must better leverage their influence and potential impact.

III What is Being Done?

A great deal of rhetorical progress has been made in the decade since Resolution 1325 was first passed by the Security Council. More attention is focused on the need to better address the needs of women and to elevate their status in the post-conflict period. A series of reports by the Secretary General to the Security Council and to the Economic and Social Council, as well as internal analyses completed by a range of entities within the UN system document important

gaps, outline critical strategies for bridging those gaps, and provide important recommendation for action. If implemented, they would result in significant progress for the world's women and for the post-conflict development process.

IV What is Needed?

Unfortunately, rhetorical progress has not been matched by implementation and progress on-the-ground. Women are still vastly under-represented in all decision-making fora. They are fewer than five percent of the signatories to peace accords; a vast minority of those consulted in post-conflict needs assessments; a small share of the participants in post-conflict donor conferences; and an insufficient share of the beneficiaries of most assistance programs, particularly those aimed at advancing political and economic opportunity and influence. This is a loss, not just for women, but for all those dedicated to ensuring peaceful and prosperous societies post-conflict.

At the same time, this conversation comes at a critical moment. This year will mark 10 years since the passage of UNSC Resolution 1325. Commendably, the Secretary General has convened an internal UN Steering Committee composed of the heads of UN agencies to ensure attention and action related to implementing the resolution. He also has called for a Civil Society Advisory Group, under the chair of former Irish President Mary Robinson and Femmes Africa Solidarite director Bineta Diop, to advise the steering committee. The advisory group is calling for a ministerial commitments conference in Fall 2010, in addition to other Security Council events around the anniversary of the resolution. The group also is developing a specific list of recommended actions to advance 1325; that list would include potential new, additive results-based, time bound, and measurable actions to which the UN, member states, and non-governmental organizations might commit and announce at ministerial sessions.

On a concrete level, there are any number of specific actions ECOSOC can take that will elevate the status of women and attention to their needs in post-conflict development. Within the April 2010 Report of the Secretary General to ECOSOC (E/2010/49), I particularly believe the recommendations regarding the need to address legal impediments to women's land ownership, employment, inheritance, and banking are critical, as is the need to better gear agricultural extension services to women, and routinely and systematically collect sex disaggregated data to track, monitor and evaluate programs. In addition to those, I would emphasize the need to:

1. **Include in the mandates for all peacekeeping missions as well as all mediators, Special Representatives of the Secretary General, and Resident Coordinators the obligation to consult regularly with women and involve them in all planning and program design.**
2. **Couple efforts to revise legislation with vast public outreach to inform people of their rights.** Laws are a critical first step; they are necessary to enshrine rights for the disadvantaged but they are not sufficient to ensure change in practice. They will not guarantee women protections under the laws. There are many places around the world where beautiful legal frameworks mean little on the ground.
3. **Work with women leaders to shape programs and to overcome legal and cultural constraints.** Women are critical partners for progress. Consult them when planning any

programs and operations; they can help strategize how to approach and overcome political and cultural barriers to advancing an agenda.

4. **Recognize and address particular challenges women face.** Post-conflict, women often particularly risk displacement from the labor market by returning male former combatants. (Fourteen thousand (14,000) women lost jobs in Nicaragua, for example.) Childcare can be a prerequisite for women's involvement in formal labor markets, peace talks, formal government structures, and international conferences. (Liberian women hosting women-only dialogues as part of the transitional justice process arranged babysitting during their consultations.) Strategize the specific challenges men and women will face, and seek to eliminate the barriers to participation.

V What is Needed to Achieve Transformational Change?

More fundamentally, however, broader transformational change will require important, bold attitudinal and operational shifts.

1. Assert Political Will

The Institute for Inclusive Security, which I direct, has been active around the world developing and implementing strategies for ensuring women a voice in peace processes. I am extraordinarily proud of the successes we have achieved in partnership with exceptional women leaders in places like Afghanistan, Colombia, Iraq, Liberia, and Sudan. At the same time, I am continually struck by the fact that each accomplishment is opportunistic rather than systematic. Each time, a push is required to give women a voice, notwithstanding the fact that these women leaders have important messages to deliver and that their presence in decision making fora consistently alters the discourse.

To make systemic progress, broad political will to drive forward change is needed. This is evident from my experience; it is also evident from our research. Where women have been brought into decision-making effectively, it has always involved an assertion of political will by the international and national leaders helping steer the process in combination with a home-grown push by women leaders themselves. Of particular importance are male allies willing to push this agenda because they believe in its importance. To transform the international approach to post-conflict development, broad, consistent, global political will is required.

2. Recognize that Elevating Women is Strategic

Too often addressing the needs of women is viewed as a duty to help the needy rather than an opportunity to better undertake development. Women are critical allies who can help ensure stability and prosperity. Enhancing their political and economic influence is a means for achieving our most essential development objectives.

3. Develop Locally-Appropriate Solutions and Encourage Their Implementation

Any effort to address the needs of women must be done in a manner appropriate to the local context. At the same time, there is no country in the world where there is not scope to advance

the status of women. Women in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Colombia, Guatemala, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Rwanda, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Uganda all see myriad culturally-appropriate ways to elevate their status and address their needs. The best way to ensure that programs are locally-appropriate is to design them in partnership with local women and men.

4. Bridge the Gap Between Policies and Guidelines and Implementation

Action is critical to progress. Whether commitments to act relate to fulfilling Security Council resolutions or to applying and enforcing local laws, implementation is critical. Too often, well-meaning legal declarations do not translate into concrete change. Implementation must be driven by specific programs and initiatives; broad outreach and public education; commitments of financial and human resources; and enforcement through court systems and the security sector. Without a comprehensive push, true transformation cannot and will not occur.

VI Conclusion

The Secretary General's report wisely notes that the post-conflict period offers a critical window of opportunity to pursue change. That is absolutely true. There are myriad examples of where space for women's political and economic participation has been created in rebuilding war torn societies. Quotas for women's election have been put in place. Laws guaranteeing women's rights have been passed. Simultaneously, increased flows of assistance have been used to try to address some of the specific needs of women. We must seize the post-conflict window of opportunity to address problems that undermine the health of recovering societies.

The discussion of women's role in post-conflict development is not fundamentally about women. Rather, it is about how to create a framework for development and post-conflict reconstruction that fully draws on all of the resources within a society. If we do that, the likelihood of success increases dramatically.

I hope we can all reach the conclusion that overcoming the challenges to women's full participation in the post-conflict reconstruction process is one key to successful development and conflict resolution. I look forward to a spirited conversation.

Thank you.