FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC, POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY AND PEACEBUILDING

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Photo by Frank van Lierde

Post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding require innovative, diverse approaches to ensure sustainable peace and socioeconomic development. Despite frameworks like CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration, the gendered impacts of conflicts and women's roles in peace processes have long been overlooked. In response to advocacy by women's movements, the UN adopted Security Council Resolution 1325 on the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda in 2000. Yet, the vulnerabilities and significant contributions of women in these processes remain underrecognised, underscoring the need to better integrate them for effective and lasting peacebuilding efforts.

Recognising and addressing the specific challenges that women face in post-conflict environments is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic necessity for achieving long-term peace and stability. Gender-transformative policies can mitigate the socio-economic vulnerabilities of women, thereby contributing to more resilient and prosperous communities.

Additionally, the meaningful participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels provides the conditions for a transition towards more just, equitable and prosperous societies. Their involvement leads to more comprehensive and inclusive solutions that reflect the needs of entire communities, not just a select few. Incorporating gender considerations promotes the leadership of women and gender equality. It recognises that women are not just victims of conflict but also agents of change, capable of driving development and peace when given the opportunity and resources.

WIPC and Cordaid are long-term partners within the Just Future alliance and beyond. Just Future is a 5-year, 6 country programme, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Together with our national partners, we work to amplify women's voices in peacebuilding processes in conflict-affected countries. We take an inclusive, locally-led approach, informed by women's experiences and daily realities. Through our networks we collaborate on priority-setting and compiling concrete recommendations for policy-making and programming.

Just Future at the 68th CSW

JUST FUTURE

At the 68th annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), Cordaid's Just Future Alliance partner, the Women's International Peace Centre (WIPC), organised two key parallel events. The first event featured representatives from women's rights organizations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Iraq, who discussed the often-overlooked role of women in the socio-economic recovery of post-conflict societies. The second event explored the importance of a progressive taxation system in reducing poverty through a gender-transformative approach. The events offered a solid foundation to advocate for incorporating feminist approaches into peacebuilding and poverty alleviation strategies that prioritise women's needs, such as enhanced livelihoods and reparations. The testimonials from women human rights defenders from the different conflict affected settings included meaningful recommendations for governments, donors and national civil society.

Women's International Peace Centre
Amplifying Women's Voice and Power

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KEY BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

In advance of the CSW event in March 2024, a consultation with women's organisations was organised and key barriers to women's participation in the economy were identified:

Exclusion from the formal economy

Women are disproportionately represented in the informal economy and care sectors, where job security, income potential, and access to social protections are minimal. Most often, household management and care for family members is an added burden on top of informal employment, such as selling vegetables at local markets. Beyond this, women's economic success also uplifts their families post-war.

Limited access to resources

Women often lack access to essential resources such as information, funds and land. This restriction severely limits their ability to participate fully in the economy and to benefit from post-conflict recovery efforts. Lack of access can be rooted in discriminatory laws or be due to sociocultural factors (or a combination of both). For example, illiteracy due to lack of access to education, or inheritance and land tenure laws that favour men over women.

Climate change

Women and girls, especially in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by climate impacts due to structural inequalities, especially in the agricultural sector. They face greater risks to their health, safety, and livelihoods, often bearing the brunt of securing resources like food and water. This leads to a further exacerbation of inequalities (for example: increased workloads and health risks, loss of opportunities for education).

"We cannot talk about effective women's economic empowerment in the post-conflict process in DRC if women cannot participate equally and benefit from decent work and social protection; if they cannot access markets and control resources, their own time, lives, and bodies."

Claudine Tsongo
Founder and Coordinator of Dynamique des Femmes Juristes (DFJ) in the DR Congo

Moving beyond short-term benefits and achieving sustainable economic empowerment for women requires addressing issues such as illiteracy and providing women the tools for leadership. At the same time, men and entire communities must be engaged to highlight the value and importance of women's leadership. This is a hallmark of gender transformative policy, which aims not only to respond to gendered issues and work to reduce inequities but also actively tackles structural causes of inequality at a broader scale.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEMINIST APPROACHES TO POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY

Feminist approaches go beyond traditional gender equality mechanisms, striving for systematic change: the equalisation alone of the legal status of men and women fails to address gender-specific vulnerabilities and sociocultural norms. Feminist approaches lead to the following outcomes:

Economic growth

Feminist approaches aim to address structural gender inequities, which leads to a reduction in overall poverty levels. When women have equal access to resources and opportunities, they can contribute more effectively to economic growth and stability.

Equitable society and sustainable peace

Achieving gender equity results in a more inclusive and equitable society. This inclusivity fosters social cohesion and resilience, essential components for lasting peace. Societies that support women's rights and empowerment are less prone to conflict and better equipped to recover from crises.

These two benefits are intrinsically linked. As stated by Harriet Poni Dumba (Executive Director of Women Partners for Health), when women are economically empowered, chances of enduring peace are also increased, as they have negotiating power and can participate in peace- and state-building processes. Women are able not only to take part, but also lead in these processes, abandoning the limiting roles of exclusively victims or beneficiaries.

SRHR program by Cordaid: Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in the DRC.

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Economic empowerment of women is then not only beneficial in terms of socioeconomic recovery but also has long-lasting positive effects on a country's stability. In short, when women are actively included in the labour market and policymaking, and their voices and needs are being heard, gender inequities are reduced, mitigating poverty and contributing to sustainable peace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations reflect the outcomes of the discussions by various stakeholders on how to respond to the barriers mentioned above. We believe action must be undertaken in light of the locally led agenda, allowing communities to set their own priorities and determine their needs. It is essential to avoid working in silos and truly embrace the Triple Nexus framework, recognising the inextricable interlinkages of development, humanitarian and peace actors, while adopting a gender transformative approach.

Within the context of post-conflict transitional justice and reparations, we call on international institutions such as the UN and the African Union to include provisions that specifically address the harms suffered by women. Justice is not possible without recognising that women experience specific vulnerabilities during times of war.

Similarly, governments and regional actors in charge during post-conflict times must enact holistic policies that not only reflect the immediate needs of women in all their diversity, but also set the stage for transformative action. Among others, action should be focussed on the following areas:

Information asymmetry and leadership

Government and civil society efforts must focus on enhancing women's access to financial independence and leadership opportunities, as well as reducing information asymmetry. A key component of integrating the WPS agenda into the Triple Nexus framework is working towards power redistribution within humanitarian, peace and development spaces in a gender-equitable way.

Investment in vocational education and adult literacy programs that are responsive to women's needs enhance their employability and economic independence. The provision of financial literacy education empowers women to make informed economic decisions, access credit, and manage resources effectively. Improving access to information, creating awareness and opening up information-sharing sessions allow women to more equitably benefit from financial sector opportunities. Digitalisation is a powerful tool in this process.

Progressive taxation

Progressive taxation generates essential revenue for rebuilding infrastructure and services, reduces economic inequality and promotes social justice. This in turn fosters citizens' trust in the state and promotes stability. We recommend the implementation of taxation policies that fund social programs supporting women's economic empowerment and participation in the formal job sector.

Informal sector

Ensure specialised support for women in the informal sector to improve working conditions, increase income, and facilitate the transition to the formal economy where possible. Targeted interventions can include access to microcredit, capacity strengthening to enhance existing skills and wider access to social security and welfare programmes.

Land rights

Ensure secure land rights for women through policies and programs that facilitate land registration. This provides legal ownership and economic security. Discriminatory land tenure and inheritance laws must be amended. Where this has already been done, there are often sociocultural obstacles to land ownership by women, which must be addressed by local authorities.

Health policy

Enhance access to maternal, reproductive, and mental health and psychosocial services. Comprehensive health services addressing women's specific needs are crucial for their well-being and participation in the economy and civic spaces.

Climate action

As mentioned above, climate change disproportionately impacts women and leads to an increase in food insecurity, natural disasters and other factors of instability. As we can only expect these consequences to rise in frequency and severity in the future, ambitious policy measures need to be taken to contrast its effects, always with a gender responsive approach in mind.

A woman refugee at a South Sudanese border camp.

"Women's involvement in post-conflict recovery issues dealing with political, economic and social reconstruction from a gender perspective should be a must, while looking beyond conventional images of women as victims of war, but as contributors to rebuilding sustainable peace."

Harriet Poni Dumba (South Sudan)
Executive Director of Women Partners for Health

CONCLUSION

WIPC, Cordaid and the national partners within the Just Future alliance will continue to advocate for gender transformative action in the post-conflict recovery and peacebuilding spaces. As highlighted in the above quote, relegating women to the role of victims does a huge disservice to their skills, abilities and untapped potential. It is essential to recognise women's needs and vulnerabilities, but beyond that it is time to harness their power and influence to create lasting, sustainable peace and thriving societies.

This policy document could not have been created without the crucial contributions of the women's rights activists who contributed their insights and experiences during the pre-consultation meetings and CSW side events.

Dynamique des Femmes Juristes

Dynamique des Femmes Juristes

Founded in 2006 by a group of young women lawyers, Dynamique des Femmes Juristes (DFJ) is a non-profit women's organisation under Congolese law, run by women lawyers, which works to promote and protect the rights of the poorest, most marginalised and most vulnerable social groups and individuals. Foremost among these are women and children.

Women Partners for Health

Women Partners for Health is a non-profit organisation that was established in 2014 and dedicated to the goal of promoting peacebuilding and the well-being of women and girls throughout South Sudan through participation, empowerment, lobby and advocacy and climate change action.

A pregnant woman from the DRC on a five-hour trek to the nearest health facility.

Women's International Peace Centre

Women's International Peace Centre
Amplifying Women's Voice and Power

Women's International Peace Centre (The Peace Centre) works with partners in conflict-affected settings and with regional institutions in Africa and Asia to ensure that women not only powerfully contribute to peace building processes and results, but also transform these spaces to be more gender inclusive and gender responsive.

Pauline Kahuubire
Strategic Partnerships and Advocacy Coordinator
pkahuubire@wipc.org

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid is a value-based international development and emergency relief organisation, based in the Netherlands with offices in 14 countries in Africa and Asia. We work in and on fragility and support communities in their efforts to improve health care, education, food security, and justice. Where disaster strikes, we offer humanitarian assistance.

Cordaid is deeply rooted in the Dutch society with more than 250.000 private donors. The Christian values of human dignity, justice, compassion and care for the planet guide us in our work. Cordaid is a founding member of Caritas, CIDSE and ACT Alliance .

CONTACT

Sabina Atzei
Senior Manager
Expertise, Innovation & Learning
sabina.atzei@cordaid.org

Jacqueline Molho
Policy Advisor
Expertise, Innovation & Learning
jacqueline.molho@cordaid.org

Cordaid
Grote Marktstraat 45,
2511 BH Den Haag
+31(0)70 31 36 300
www.cordaid.org/en

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