



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

WOMEN & CONFLICT



AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE FOR PROGRAMMING


Key Issues

Lessons Learned

Program Options

Resources





Conflict arises due to a complex set of variables coming together and reinforcing each other at multiple levels and at critical junctures of a country or region's development. It leaves in its aftermath significant development and humanitarian challenges. USAID recognizes that conflict is an inherent and legitimate part of social and political life, and is often a precursor to positive change. Yet the consequences of conflict can also be alarmingly high. Therefore, USAID has adopted a new policy by which it will aggressively expand its development and implementation of programs mitigating the causes and consequences of conflict, instability, fragility and extremism. Since development and humanitarian assistance programs are increasingly implemented in situations of open or latent violence, USAID must explicitly incorporate sensitivity to the dynamics of conflict and instability in their design or execution.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA/CMM) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was established to provide technical leadership on conflict, instability, extremism and now terrorism and insurgency to Missions and our Washington bureaus. The vast majority of our field missions and staff are currently working in areas that are either in conflict, coming out of conflict, are at high-risk for violence and instability, or are facing growing extremist threats. A central objective of the office is to integrate or "mainstream" best practices in conflict management and mitigation into more traditional development sectors such as agriculture, economic growth, democracy, education, and health. Increasingly, DCHA/CMM is also working with missions to help them understand how to work in countries experiencing growing fragility, instability and in some cases insurgencies. Where appropriate, DCHA/CMM will be an advocate for stable change.

As Director of DCHA/CMM, I am pleased to introduce this document on women and conflict. This guide identifies the key issues and methods for understanding the common impact of conflict on women and some of the creative ways that USAID can respond to address the most vital needs of those affected by conflict.

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WOMEN AND CONFLICT: AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE TO PROGRAMMING

While conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women are particularly affected by its short- and long-term effects. Sexual assault and exploitation are frequently employed as tools of war; victimization leads to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma, and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children. As culturally-designated caregivers, women must struggle to support their families and keep their households together while the traditional bread-winners – husbands and sons – are caught up in the fighting and are unable to provide for their families. The new role as primary provider exposes many women to further abuse. Conflict shatters the comfort of predictable daily routines and expectations. Women and girls are equally affected in a fragile environment where social services they once depended on degrade or disappear. Although conflict may, in some cases, improve gender relations as a result of shifts in gender roles – some changes even improve women's rights – by and large its impact on women is devastatingly negative.

Women are rarely mere passive victims of conflict and should not be treated as such. Women can play active roles in the events that lead to fighting and instability, and even in combat itself – yet they have also served as the forerunners of peace movements that have ended conflict. However, the determined efforts of women to bring an end to fighting is usually behind the scenes.

This introductory guide describes the ways in which conflict and fragility may increase gender inequities and suggests programming approaches that address these issues while building on the strengths of women. With this guide, DCHA/CMM aims to both raise awareness among USAID Mission employees of issues surrounding women and conflict, and to assist USAID by integrating conflict and gender concerns.

The project coordinators and the authors wish to thank Judy Benjamin for her early work on this guide, which has benefited from substantial discussions with Sahana Dharmapuri of the Office of Women in Development in the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade at USAID, and Brenda Opperman, former Gender Advisor for USAID/Iraq, and from dialogues with development partners such as Inclusive Security: Women Waging Peace. This document follows their lead in shaping a guide with suggestions for USAID Mission staff.

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DEFINING WOMEN IN CONFLICT

This guide focuses on the particular roles, needs, and vulnerabilities of women in conflict settings so that the most appropriate interventions can be determined and initiated. The term “women” is purposefully used because the focus is on their role in environments of instability, fragility, and conflict, rather than on broader gender issues. “Gender” is used where appropriate to refer to social and cultural issues relating to female-male interactions and roles. By focusing on the roles and lives of women, the guide acknowledges that interventions are more effective and lasting when they integrate an understanding of women’s perspectives, while at the same time fostering awareness that crises of fragility and conflict can challenge and alter gender roles - often radically and rapidly.

Gender and development issues may overlap or be identical to those relating to women and conflict. Many of the key issues and best practices identified in these pages will in fact be the same as those that are useful in general development settings and/or in humanitarian/emergency responses. However, the focus here is on women’s roles in conflict situations, and the best practices for addressing them. Although women’s roles vary in every conflict, they generally fall into the

following categories:

- Agents of change
- Active participants (combatants)
- Supporting participants or shields (forced or voluntary camp followers, cooks, wives, slaves, etc.)
- Victims and spoils of war
- Newly responsible care providers

These roles will be addressed throughout the guide and programmatic options will be provided accordingly. New programs are not always necessary; these options may simply be incorporated into existing programs. However, this is not always the case and opportunities to address the role of women in conflict can be lost if the surrounding issues are not acknowledged and understood.

KEY ISSUES

CULTURAL CONTEXT & SENSITIVITY - STATUS & ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

While the United Nations and many in the international community recognize equal rights and status for women as a legitimate goal to pursue globally, the speed and manner in which this goal can be attained will vary according to the cultural setting. Just as each country has its own unique culture and traditions, each society views the role of women differently. This will vary by country/region and can be influenced by such factors as education, religious and cultural norms, the legal status of women, and the degree of exposure to Western ideas and culture. Program options will therefore need to be adapted to particular settings, even in emergency and humanitarian responses.

Understanding the culture and currently prescribed role of women in a society is absolutely necessary when working on gender-specific programs. This remains true during conflict and in its aftermath. Women's role and status in society will determine best practices and the appropriate means of intervention in order to empower – rather than endanger – women. While in some cases

women's position in society is relatively strong, in other cases religion, tradition, legal status or other issues may present substantial obstacles to program implementation.

WOMEN AS AGENTS OF CHANGE AND PEACEMAKERS

Women must be involved in conflict prevention, resolution and management efforts at all levels. When they are not active participants, the views, needs and interests of half of the population are not represented, and therefore interventions will not be as appropriate or enduring. Because the consequences of war weigh so heavily on the lives of women, they naturally show great interest in peace processes. In some cases, peace itself may come much later if women are not involved in the process. For example, the leadership and diligence of women as leaders of human rights organizations has been critical in keeping the international community aware of the continuing conflict in Chechnya and growing instability in Russia's other republics in the North Caucasus. These groups have pressed the Russian authorities to address the rampant violation of human rights across the region,

UNION OF THE COMMITTEES OF SOLDIERS' MOTHERS OF RUSSIA (USCMR)

Mothers of Russia is a human rights non-governmental organization (NGO) founded by the mothers of soldiers in 1989 to protect draftees, soldiers, and their families from human rights abuses committed by the military. The NGO handles individual complaints regarding human rights violations in the armed forces, provides human rights education to draftees and their parents, and peacefully advocates adherence to human rights in Russia.

BETTY BIGOMBE: SEEKING PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Betty Bigombe has played a pivotal role in moving forward the peace process between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. Negotiating directly with rebel and government leaders, Bigombe has worked tirelessly, mediating between the two entities, and has made a significant contribution to bringing the country closer to peace.

and the women-led Memorial, a Russian NGO, has provided the world with documented information on human rights violations from the North Caucasus and especially Chechnya. Mothers of Russia¹, another Russian NGO, has pressed for peace and an end to the fighting, and the Mothers of Beslan argued passionately for a real accounting of the causes and consequences of the tragic 2004 school hostage standoff, attempted rescue, and massacre.

Women often play decisive roles in negotiating the peace process. To do so effectively, they must be empowered politically and economically, and must be adequately represented at all levels of decision-making. Despite the difficulties conflict-affected women face, their role in peacemaking has steadily grown over the past several years. In Liberia, the Women's Peace Initiative made major strides towards a peaceful resolution of the 14-year conflict by pushing for disarmament of the fighting factions before the signing of a peace accord. In some war-torn countries - Guatemala, Burundi, Cyprus, Bosnia, and South Africa, among others - women's peace organizations and coalitions have played a crucial role in helping to bring about peace.

¹ For more information on the Mothers of Russia NGO, see www.ucsmr.ru/english/

Nevertheless, women are usually left out of formal peacemaking activities unless they exhibit remarkable determination to seat themselves at the peace table. Despite notable progress for women over the past decade, even when they manage to play a role in peace negotiations, women tend to fade into the background when it comes to rebuilding destroyed economies and reconstructing war-torn societies. Their efforts in rebuilding social networks are viewed as tangential to formal mechanisms, and women do not receive their deserved recognition. In most cases, women's efforts towards peace go unrecognized and are under-reported, as data collected on peace processes is often not disaggregated by gender.

The efforts women make are not without many obstacles and risks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo for example, the National Democratic Institute has developed a women's political party program called "Win with Women" that allows women to partake in roundtable discussions, attend campaign skills training for female candidates and conduct meetings with political party leaders. The program works to assist women to overcome the many difficulties they face when they try to join the political process due to the lack of a forum for discussion, training, or buy-in from existing

political leaders. The roundtable discussions give women a venue to discuss the difficulties they encounter and identify possible solutions, and the consultative meetings allow women to demonstrate to political leaders the importance of including women in the political process.

Because women do not have the same level of influence that men do in most societies, they are easily marginalized. Keeping the peace may be viewed as a 'male' role and women may be left out of that important area of responsibility. However, when women organize themselves for peace efforts, they can significantly impact the peace process. This has been demonstrated by the Mano River Women's Peace Network, in which women in three West African countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea) were able to successfully participate in and influence the outcome of the peace process. The Mano River model needs to be supported by international agencies, and women need support to expand their roles in reconstruction efforts.

WOMEN AS COMBATANTS AND PARTICIPANTS IN DISARMAMENT, DEMOBILIZATION, AND REINTEGRATION (DDR)

An important dimension of the relationship between women and conflict is women's involvement with combatant forces. Women are found among combatants as forced participants (often as a result of abduction), as dependent "followers" of fighters, in supporting roles assisting fighters but not carrying weapons, as "shields" for combatants, and as active combatant soldiers. Women and girls may have multiple roles among fighting forces—at times domestic servant, cook, sexual partner, porter, guard, informant, and soldier.

Women who have been associated with fighting forces need specialized assistance during the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), but they are often overlooked. This may be due in part to the fact that there are typically fewer female combatants than male, yet it is also the case that the number of women combatants or associates of combatant forces may be partially hidden because of long-standing attitudes that classify soldiers as male. Many female fighters do not present themselves at

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DDR centers because they do not believe they will be entitled to benefits. Yet the number of women who participate in fighting forces is increasing in nearly all conflicts. Women have constituted significant proportions of combatants and combat support operations in conflicts in Eritrea, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, and Rwanda.

Likewise, evidence shows an increase in the forced recruitment of children of both sexes into armed forces. Rural villages provide the main recruitment base for most insurgent armed groups, and young rural women may voluntarily join fighting groups to escape the drudgery and hopelessness they may be experiencing in their communities. In Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front made a practice of raiding villages and capturing adolescents and children and forcing them to join their rebel groups. The children were abused, raped, starved, drugged, and forced to kill. Many of those abducted remained with the rebels for several years under deprived conditions. The method of conscripting fighters by abduction and indoctrination is more common than most people realize. The same pattern has been found in Uganda, Mozambique, Liberia, and elsewhere. The deep-seated problems that result from interrupted education, lack

of medical care, harsh living conditions and psychological trauma require that those who have been conscripted into rebel forces - boys and girls alike - receive specialized attention in order to be reintegrated into civil society.

Addressing the needs of women combatants presents particular challenges. Female ex-combatants may have experienced a newfound degree of autonomy and even prestige within armed groups. Women combatants may have held the same responsibilities as male soldiers in terms of fighting, in addition to functioning as porters, cooks, cleaners, nurses, and camp "wives." However, they often face severe feelings of personal guilt and may be rejected by society, depending on the extent of their involvement and the circumstances under which they became part of the armed group.

DDR programs should be based on a clear understanding of gender roles, relations and the specific gender inequalities in a given population. When disarming involves exchanges for agriculture projects, training or equipment, it is important that decisions are based on a gendered understanding of who does what in a particular community. One way to achieve that objective is to increase the involvement of women's organizations and peace movements in disarmament discussions. It is often useful

to include female soldiers in consultative groups who plan DDR programs. The agency responsible for setting up DDR programs in a given country should ensure that program documentation and announcements include specific references to women and girl combatants, supporters, and dependents for inclusion. Women leaders are important stakeholders in ending conflict, and as such should be involved in drafting DDR plans and programs.

WOMEN'S NEEDS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Women are among the most vulnerable groups during conflict for more reasons than just violence. Large flows of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are associated with most conflicts, and providing proper protection for all is vital. Emergency measures must be taken to provide basic survival requirements – physical security, access to water, food, health care and shelter – and certain vulnerable groups require protective measures to prevent exploitation and abuse in these situations. Reports from human rights advocacy groups document many examples of the exploitation and abuse of women and children affected by conflict. Women in refugee and IDP camps face sexual exploitation and a lack of physical security. This is especially true in households without male

protectors, and women in refugee or IDP camps are often heads-of-households.

War-induced migration and mobility put unaccompanied women and children at greater risk of violence during flight. They frequently lack documentation to prove their entitlement to food, health services, and shelter, and consequently may be obligated to exchange sex for survival.² Lack of protection exposes women and girls to sexual abuse - including rape - and increases their risks of exposure to HIV/AIDS. The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have on a number of occasions urged the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) to address problems arising from the fact that female refugees and internally displaced women often do not have the right to hold their own documentation and registration papers. Despite recent sexual abuse scandals in West Africa - many incidents were reported of women exchanging sex for food they were entitled to, but unable to obtain for lack of documentation - the problem has persisted.

² "Issues of Power and Gender in Complex Emergencies" in *Emergency Relief Operations* edited by Kevin M. Cahill, M.D.; Fordham University Press, NY, 2003 [ISBN 0-8232-2240-3]

THE COST OF SURVIVAL

Lack of equal access to food in emergency situations is one of the primary reasons that war-affected women and girls adopt high risk behavior such as exchanging sex for food. In countries like Liberia, Burundi, Ivory Coast, East Timor, Congo, and Bosnia, UN Peacekeepers have been accused of exchanging sex for food with girls as young as eight. A report conducted by Save the Children in Liberia found that parents of these abused girls refused to complain because offering sex seemed to be their only option for acquiring food. (The Washington Times, "The UN Sex-for-Food Scandal")

In Northern Uganda, girl "night commuters" are known to exchange sex for money in order to pay for their school fees. (World Vision, "Pawns of Politics: Children, Conflict and Peace in Northern Uganda")

WOMEN AND CONFLICT-RELATED SOCIAL DISLOCATION

In addition to food and shelter, women affected by war also need means of generating incomes. Widows are often unable to provide for themselves and their families in traditional societies, such as in parts of Afghanistan. Due to cultural and religious restraints, lack of education or child-care responsibilities, women are not always able to obtain meaningful employment and are therefore unable to provide for their families. Given their isolation and seclusion, it is difficult for NGOs to assist them, and governments may be either unwilling or unable to provide the necessary social services. While it is vital to present economic opportunities to women, it is imperative to undertake this with sensitivity to the current social climate in order to avoid exacerbating the problem.

Legal and political processes often fail to recognize the role of women in maintaining social order during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. They also fail to adequately recognize the particular harm suffered by women. Women's lack of awareness of matters such as property and inheritance rights - also culturally determined - may lead to further disempowerment. In general, conflicts exacerbate gender disparities, both in society at large and in families.

TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Trafficking involves the abduction of women and girls (in some cases boys) for the purpose of transporting them across borders to locations where they are forced to work in brothels or as domestic or industrial "slaves." Conflict and post-conflict environments provide favorable conditions for trafficking because of the poverty that war causes. Traffickers who promise families they will look after their daughters, by providing employment as domestic workers in another country, take advantage of the destitute circumstances of war-affected households. A small sum of money may be paid to the family to make up for the loss of labor to the household (in Afghanistan, the sum was between \$50 and \$100). Once the women leave their homes, traffickers take away the women's travel documents, restrict their freedom and do not permit them to contact their families. The chaotic conditions associated with conflict also make it easier for traffickers to operate because of the confusion and lack of police enforcement.

Prevention of human trafficking is well served by the promotion of public awareness of the problem. The challenge of responding to this grave violation of human rights is compounded by its covert and underground character. Women's groups and networks are

effective channels through which to disseminate information about trafficking.

LINGERING EFFECTS

Even after hostilities cease, a variety of conflict-related health issues persist, such as post-traumatic stress, malnutrition, war-related injuries, and the scars of sexual abuse. The lack of reproductive health services in particular has harmful long-term ramifications for women and their children. Maternal and child mortality rates soar when services are absent. Women are often forced to give birth away from their traditional medical practitioners. The risk for contracting communicable diseases also rises during conflict, as heightened population mobility, increased presence of soldiers, relaxed social behavior controls, and widespread poverty are common in conflict situations, leading to high-risk behavior and increased exposure to HIV and other diseases. Another lasting consequence of conflict for women is the impact on children. In cases where rape has been a weapon, unwanted pregnancies often lead to the abandonment of the resulting children.

Despite extensive documentation on the detrimental effects of trauma on reconstruction, a very small percentage of post-conflict reconstruction funding covers programs to address mental

health. In order for reconstruction efforts to be successful, and for civil societies to become rehabilitated, implementers of health programs in post-conflict situations should include funds for mental health components. It is important to bear in mind that women are likely to have suffered psychologically in different ways than men as a result of personal loss, separation from family, rape or other physical abuse. Rape in particular affects not only the female victim, but also her family and community who are forced to witness it.

Violence against women in the context of conflict has a broader effect on the viability and sustainability of other development programs and dimensions of social welfare. The trauma, adverse health impact, and loss of educational opportunities and productivity suffered by women has an effect both through the additional burden on social institutions and the loss of the full social contribution of women, whose critical role in overall development is now axiomatic.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Given the nature of post-conflict assistance, it is easy to overlook the specific role that women may have played during the conflict or the ways in which they may have helped mitigate conflict. The general needs of the population

are overwhelming in countries emerging from conflict, and priorities for aid organizations providing emergency assistance are humanitarian in nature. As aid organizations grapple with where to even begin in such situations, the temptation to avoid gender issues is great, especially given the immediate needs of reconstruction and enabling a fledgling government. It is during this transition from emergency response to stabilization efforts that the opportunity to include women in conflict programming can be seized or lost.

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF CONFLICT ON WOMEN

While the negative consequences of conflict are widely accepted, the disturbance of established norms can also have unintended positive effects on the status and role of women in their societies, and therefore on their role in development. For example, women's social and economic responsibilities may increase when women are obliged to take over the responsibility of supporting their households. Often that requires learning new skills that enable women to perform jobs previously held by men or that prepare them for entrepreneurial income-generating activities. This can help women achieve greater financial independence and lead to long-term changes in the gendered division of labor.

As in the case of Rwanda, changes in demographics (more women may survive the conflict than men) can mean that there are more positions available for women in government and commercial posts. This allows women to advance their rights in post-conflict, newly-established governments through constitutional revisions and new policies. Programming interventions should endeavor to build on these positive aspects by supporting initiatives that take advantage of the shifts in gender power relationships, while remaining aware of potential resentment from men because of women's positive gains in status. Positive changes for women must be sustained by supportive programming that builds skills, provides education and promotes leadership so that the advancements women achieved will remain when the conflict ends.

The argument that conflict may bring net positive changes for women, however, is strongly contested by some scholars who point to the huge price women pay in pain, suffering, and loss for the newfound gains. Regardless of the debate, assistance to war-affected communities should recognize the positive and negative ways in which conflict may affect women, and programs should capitalize on positive changes by providing support where needed.

LESSONS LEARNED

SUPPORT WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Because of issues of diminished individual social status in many countries, women alone are often not empowered to effect change. Collective action by them mitigates this powerlessness to a degree. Women's networks may begin with a few women seeking solidarity by uniting; sometimes their only goal is to find better ways to survive the social upheaval of war. Yet over time they may grow to have real influence. Networks can expand outside borders and across both political and economic boundaries, and when donors support women's networks the potential to empower women expands substantially. Women leaders and entrepreneurs emerge from networks and provide role models for other women. Such institutional infrastructure also provides a basis for women's involvement in the broader socio-economic and political infrastructure of long-term sustainable development.

Women's organizations can take many forms – from local NGOs to religious groups or common purpose units, such as women farmers' unions. These groups provide assistance to women in the form of services like childcare, shelters for battered women, skills

training, literacy and education courses, and income-generating activities. Women's networks are often the most effective means of disseminating information to communities, and they are likewise the most efficient means to find out about women's interests and needs. These networks also provide donors with ready access to women who can be involved in assistance programs. Such network linkages need recognition and support; the important role they play in conflict mitigation is too often overlooked. Programming interventions by international donors and NGOs can tap into such networks to increase program effectiveness and coverage.

ADDRESS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT

The fact that gender-based violence increases in conflict-affected communities is well established, though the specific roots of the problem remain unclear. The increased occurrence of gender-based violence may be attributed to general climates of violence in conflict environments; the lack of social order, police enforcement, and unemployment can also contribute to this problem.

THE MANO RIVER WOMEN'S PEACE NETWORK

The power of women's networks was evident in the Mano River Women's Peace Network - a formidable linkage of women in three countries with the common purpose of bringing peace to the West African region. The Mano River network grew out of the intense desires of a few strong women to put an end to the fighting and suffering caused by conflict.

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During times of conflict, rape and other forms of sexual violence are common. Sexual violence is used in war to shame and humiliate the enemy, as a reward to the conquering side, and as a means to spread terror and to weaken morale. It may also be used to undermine women's ability to sustain their communities during times of conflict. Where community support structures have been eroded by displacement, violence occurs within the community as well. Normal cultural controls over behavior tend to be weakened during times of conflict and violence becomes more prevalent. For example, women in Sierra Leone and Liberia described the situation in their countries – where rebel fighters used rape, torture, and amputations as strategic tactics – as “cultures of violence.”

The far-reaching consequences of rape linger not only with the victims, but also with their families and society long after the conflict ends. Consequently, both the rape survivor and relatives feel shamed and humiliated. During the Rwanda genocide of Hutus against Tutsis, an estimated 50% of women were raped. Babies born as a result of the rapes were unwanted reminders of a period of horror. The rapes of more than 20,000 women during conflicts in the countries of former-Yugoslavia brought rape to the fore as a war crime.

Although most international attention is focused on rape, women and young girls in conflict areas - like Darfur, in western Sudan, for example - risk daily physical attacks of all kinds when they leave refugee camps to collect essential supplies like firewood and water. Post-conflict Afghanistan and Iraq also experienced a significant increase in violence against women because of breakdowns in security. Indeed, in Afghanistan, Mullah Omar cited the lack of security for citizens – especially rape, torture, and murder of women and children – as one of the main reasons the Taliban emerged in the mid-1990s. Whenever social protection systems for communities break down, gender-based violence intensifies, leading to further deterioration of women's status. Cambodian women assert that the brutal Pol Pot regime and conflict significantly influenced men in their society, causing them to become more violent and to lose respect for women and family life.

DEVELOP CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

As discussed in the Key Issues section, having a firm cultural understanding is essential to any programmatic response to women and conflict. Programming must be sensitive to cultural practices, and both women and men must be consulted and actively engaged in planning and implementing

programs designed to assist them. International assistance agencies have not given adequate attention to the potential for “gender backlash.” In post-conflict Afghanistan, for example, some well-intentioned programs implemented by NGOs targeted women for primary assistance, such as handicraft training or poultry farming. While in many instances households benefited, some women complained that domestic violence increased in their households. This is because their husbands resented foreign NGOs ignoring the cultural practice that male honor is linked to their responsibilities to care for their families. This type of backlash is not uncommon in conflict-affected countries and illustrates the importance of understanding cultural and traditional practices. It also shows the importance of involving men in programming activities even when the target beneficiaries are women.

When social practices and culture restrict the participation of women, program implementers must make special efforts to include the women in decision-making roles. Such an approach entails more than simply adding women to the ‘mix.’ It requires an analysis of past and existing gender roles in particular settings and situations, and making special arrangements for women to contribute their feedback and opinions. A balanced gender perspective should be

incorporated into all programming from the earliest interventions.

An example of the need for a solid cultural understanding comes from the Rwandan refugee camps. Following the Rwanda genocide that began in early April 1994, when Hutu militants launched a massive campaign to eliminate Tutsis and moderate Hutus, masses of people (mostly Hutus) fled the country to Tanzania and to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to seek refuge from the newly organized Tutsi army. In the Rwandan refugee camps, food distribution agencies made serious mistakes in the beginning by giving men total control over food distribution. The male leaders compiled the lists of names of families entitled to food and other items. Corruption surfaced, leaders hoarded sacks of grain to sell in the market, and deprived women heads of households of their rations of food. Many women resorted to exchanging sex for food in order to survive; those without male family members being the most vulnerable. After a few disastrous months and several riots at the food distribution sites, agencies changed the system. They identified women leaders in the community of refugees and appointed them as food monitors, checkers, servers, and supervisors to work along side the men. This case illustrates that making an assumption about male community leaders protecting women’s

access to food can be a major miscalculation and can open the door to harmful practices against women. On the other hand, the converse can also be dangerous to women. In some areas of southern Sudan where family food rations were distributed only to women, some of the recipients were attacked and their rations stolen as soon as the women walked outside the sight of the World Food Programme food monitors.

PROMOTE COMMUNITY-BASED PARTICIPATION

Community-based participation is the key to successful program interventions, as it draws on those best informed about what is needed and what will work. It also addresses the vital issue of cultural understanding by involving both men and women from the community to explain their needs and capacities. Local men and women must be identified to participate in program design and implementation; those lacking experience in these areas can be guided through the process and taught management and monitoring techniques. Strong community participation makes the difference between success and failure.

INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Bringing women into the decision-making process can be a daunting task given cultural, political, and often practical constraints (such as lack of a pool of women with formal education). However, in countries around the world, it has been shown that when women have a voice in the decision-making process, they can often assist in mitigating conflict even before it starts. Program options in this area can be cross-cutting and easily fit into larger objectives, including targeting information campaigns on voter education for women, promoting community-based and/or grassroots organizations that include roles for women, working with state lawmakers to draft laws that guarantee women's participation in parliaments or other decision-making bodies, etc. These and other activities can be incorporated into overall programs, empowering women without diverting USAID Mission resources.

In Colombia, pressure from women's groups during the 1980s and 1990s was pivotal in pressuring the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to engage in peace talks in 1999. Even after the collapse of the peace talks in 2002, women's groups remained steadfast in their

cause to encourage a peaceful resolution to the conflict. They continue to organize peaceful demonstrations and vigils for the “disappeared” and victims of the conflict, and continue to promote awareness of the civilian costs of war. Women’s groups have also worked regionally to promote peace by engaging FARC, ELN, and paramilitary leaders in informal dialogue, acting as mediators to resolve local conflicts, and working to establish “peace zones” where community members can work and live in safety.

In Nepal, the woman’s group Shantimalika has provided an alternative voice to that of the violent demonstrators who flooded the streets of Nepal in early 2006. Shantimalika organized peaceful demonstrations that called for peace and reconciliation. Thousands of women and some men took part in these marches illustrating that violence is not needed to voice opinions and be heard. In Sri Lanka, women like Visaka Dharmadasa continue to work relentlessly on peace activities. Ms. Dharmadasa, who has worked to convey messages from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the government of Sri Lanka during peace talks when the LTTE refused to speak directly with government officials, has initiated dialogues among community leaders from different sides of the conflict. She organized a group called “Mobilizing

Mothers for Peace” that urges the government and the LTTE to stop the violence and conducts other peace-building activities.

LIVELIHOODS

When women become the primary breadwinners in their families, due to forced displacement, the death of their husbands or other reasons, they are assuming new economic and political roles. This shift in responsibilities may cause increased tension within families and communities. Attention must be paid to the challenges to livelihoods that women encounter during conflict.

These new roles also hold new opportunities. In Somalia, women who had traditionally helped support their families through the sale of agricultural products expanded their sales to include livestock and khaat while the men were away fighting in the conflict. When the men returned, the women continued to work in these new areas because many of the men were unable to work due to disabilities or the institutions that used to employ them had collapsed during the conflict.

Women’s involvement in livelihood protection means they need to be involved in recovery strategies. Assistance should help women maximize their livelihood efforts while also creating new employment opportunities for men

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to assist their households. There should be a balance between maintaining the new roles of the women and meeting the needs of the returning men.

In looking at the livelihoods component, donors should consider how traditional roles and responsibilities have shifted

during the conflict. They should also consider the ways in which women are working, both formally and informally, in different sectors. When developing a livelihoods program, it is important to consider the time and other employment constraints on the target beneficiaries.

Below: Widow's Bakery: This bakery in west Kabul employs 12 women. They earn a reliable income weighting dough and kneading, rolling and shaping it into flatbread. Providing employment opportunities for single women in post-conflict situations lowers their risk of victimization.



Photo credit: Alejandro Chicheri, World Food Program

PROGRAM OPTIONS

The level of awareness about the impact of conflict on women has steadily risen over the past decade, though much remains to be explored about the complex issues surrounding this subject. Programmatic responses aimed at improving the lives of conflict-affected women may involve overlapping and complementary approaches. The following programs are examples of innovative initiatives that have helped to mitigate the negative consequences of conflict on women. Often the impact of these programs is not easily measured. Yet many of the following have shown promise in alleviating the burden placed on women in conflict, and new tools are being developed for assessing their benefits.

In order to be effective, all development programming must incorporate an understanding of the myriad of ways that gender shapes various determinants and dimensions of conflict. Certainly, to the extent possible, development programming should have among its principal objectives the mitigation of the negative consequences of conflict. It is equally clear that women's roles in the prevention and resolution of conflict should be promoted, to improve their health and well-being and for the normative purpose of

promoting greater gender equality, and for the pragmatic benefits of enlisting the distinct knowledge, networks, and resources that women offer. Women's inclusion also increases programmatic viability through broader social buy-in.

1. PROTECTION

- In **Western Darfur**, an estimated 80% of the IDP camp residents are women and children, many of whom have been targets of gender-based violence. One activity that has proved to be successful has been the organization of joint patrols by the Sudanese police and the African Union, which accompany women outside IDP camps when they look for firewood. Alternatively, another strategy that has worked is the development of fuel-efficient stoves that reduce the amount of firewood women need to burn for household needs, decreasing the number of trips needed outside the camp.
- Implementers should design programs to include awareness-raising campaigns, both for women to be aware that help is available to them and to educate communities that gender-based violence is unacceptable and in violation of human rights. Providing Crisis Intervention Teams, as done in the **Rwanda**

refugee camps, will offer a range of services, such as legal, medical, counseling, food, and clothing, to survivors of rape and other forms of violence.

2. INCREASE WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

- The Association of Female Lawyers of **Liberia** (AFELL) was established in 1994 as a non-profit, nongovernmental organization to advocate for the rights and promote the advancement of women and children. AFELL is a membership organization of resident and non-resident attorneys and is funded by dues and donations. The group has led successful campaigns to pass the national Inheritance Bill and to create the first Juvenile Court. AFELL has also led a sensitization and awareness campaign to strengthen the Magisterial Courts and its members have participated in reconciliation and peace-building initiatives.

- The STAR Network in the **Balkans** supports women working for democratic change and women's equitable participation in the political decision-making process. Through programs implemented in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia, Network members are trained in public policy advocacy skills and work with the media to educate the public and policy makers.

- The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children implements a **global** program to increase the participation of refugee and internally displaced women in decision-making activities. Funded by the U.S. Department of State, this program promotes women's participation by empowering women's groups to take leading roles in refugee and IDP camp management and assistance programs and addressing such issues as unequal access to food, supplies and other necessities. The focus on camp management has helped bring about major changes in how basic items and services are allocated in conflict-affected settings. The program has also addressed reproductive health, maternal/child health, income generation and skills training activities, education, and literacy programming for women.

3. WOMEN'S ROLES IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE

- In 2000, the Mano River Union Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was founded by women from Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, who recognized that there would be no peace in **Liberia** without peace in the region. MARWOPNET put forth an initiative to mediate the conflict and disagreement between Guinea and Liberia and dispatched

a delegation to appeal to the feuding heads of states in the region. MARWOPNET has issued statements urging ECOWAS and the UN to intervene in the Liberian crisis. MARWOPNET's efforts were commended by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1408 on the situation in Liberia. In 2000, women spoke out against war as the Women in Peace-building Network staged sit-ins in Monrovia, also protesting the severe economic conditions affecting the country.

- Seven Afghan women participants of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, along with other Afghan women, established the **Afghan Women's Network (AWN)** in 1996. Today there are 72 NGOs and 3,000 individuals who have membership in AWN. Members work to create an Afghan community which values, respects, and encourages the tremendous capacities of women and their contributions to Afghan culture and society through capacity building, networking and advocacy.

- In **Sierra Leone**, grassroots women's organizations organized public demonstrations and made radio broadcasts to express their desire for an end to fighting. International NGOs have supported the women's groups by providing meeting places, training, and funding.

4. JOB TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

- The USAID-funded skills training program for women in **Azerbaijan** focused on providing practical training in skills for employment, such as office procedures, clerical work, computer and secretarial skills. By increasing women's skills and allowing them better access to the job market, women heads of households are better equipped to support themselves and their families.

- In **Iraq**, USAID-funded vocational training and employment service programs seek to have 30 percent of their participants be women. This is an ambitious goal given security constraints and conservative practices among some groups. Programming approaches to address these problems have included networking with women's groups, a community outreach component, and cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education.

- In post-conflict **Mozambique**, women expressed interest in vocational training in such non-traditional skills as carpentry, masonry and metalworking - areas in which they felt they had better chances of finding employment. The international implementing NGOs trained women in building trade skills and were able to assist them in securing jobs. As this

case illustrates, it is important to learn what women want as well as to assess potential employment opportunities. Women in many cultures are willing to learn new skills, but in many instances, foreign agencies make assumptions that don't accurately represent the views of their target populations.

- The **Afghanistan** Women's Business Federation (AWBF) was created by a core group of 18 women's business associations and aims to empower Afghanistan's women to more effectively participate in its market economy by enhancing business development skills and increasing earning potential. The associations formed AWBF in order to ensure synergy among associations, as well as to serve as a capacity building network for women's organizations. Funded by USAID, this network of associations, which will eventually include national, provincial and local organizations, will provide Afghanistan's women entrepreneurs with the support they need to achieve success. AWBF focuses on technical assistance, economic development initiatives, mentorship, and membership services in order to address the changing needs of women in business.

- In **Mindanao**, women's employment is supported using renewable solar energy. USAID provides lighting for households in remote, former rebel communities in Mindanao, allowing women's

microenterprise activities in the homes (e.g. mat-weaving) and enabling children to study at night while reducing monthly lighting costs by about 70 percent.

5. STATE POLICY AND WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS

- In **Afghanistan**, USAID and the U.S. Department of State-funded initiatives provide training to women lawyers and judges to enable professional women to resume careers cut short by conflict and the Taliban regime. Courses and study tours give participants opportunities to update their professional knowledge, to observe the legal system of other countries, and to learn new skills, including the use of computers.

- In **Cambodia**, USAID and other donors have provided support to women-run local NGOs that focused on teaching women how to participate in government processes, including running for elected offices. The program also promoted the use of the media to advance women's participation in political processes. The campaign resulted in positive outcomes. After a campaign to train women to run for public office and to participate in electoral processes, the percentage of women holding elected offices increased dramatically. For the first time, Cambodian women began to have a voice in civil society.

- Following conflict, governments

need assistance in addressing gender appropriately and in instituting gender-balanced policies and laws. In **Afghanistan**, USAID funded a gender advisor to work closely with the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development to help mainstream gender in all sectors and build the capacities of the ministries. The advisor helped orient the ministries toward policy formation on issues that affect women such as legal rights, employment rights, marriage and inheritance laws, and addressing gender violence.

- USAID funded, NGO-implemented programs in **Rwanda** that have helped women sort out the legal issues surrounding access to land and property in the post-genocide society.

- In **Afghanistan**, an NGO organized gender-sensitizing training for Ministry of Refugees' employees. These government workers came into daily contact with women and girls who were returning to Afghanistan. Male employees had not previously been included in any gender-related training, and the training proved extremely useful in assisting female refugees and returnees. Through this training, employees began to understand the additional difficulties faced by females in Afghanistan and were therefore better able to treat them with appropriate levels of assistance.

6. ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING CONSIDERATIONS

- Programming to benefit and involve women in reconstruction might span many sectors, including rebuilding damaged infrastructure, revamping water and sanitation systems, telecommunications, and power grids. Women want opportunities to work in non-traditional as well as traditional sectors. Gender balance should be the objective for interventions. Donors can play pivotal roles by employing gender analysis, through coordination and collaboration on gender issues, and by exerting appropriate pressure on peacetime governments to adopt gender equity in all sectors.
- Human rights training, legal literacy, gender-based violence awareness, and trauma response programming are extremely important elements - all of which provide solid building blocks for establishing more peaceful societies.
- Programming to assist women in conflict situations should not be undertaken in isolation from men. Their consultation and inputs are needed. Engaging men in pre-program planning greatly enhances the chances of full community participation and acceptance of program activities. Both women and men from the affected community should be

PROGRAM OPTIONS



Above: Afghan woman in burqa with her child waiting outside a clinic. USAID is funding programs that educate women about vaccinations to combat the high rate of child mortality in Afghanistan.

involved in the implementation, monitoring, and analysis of program interventions wherever possible.

- Comprehensive situational analyses help identify the most important gender issues in conflict-affected communities, and therefore the most appropriate programmatic approaches. One method for situational analysis, which has been used by UNHCR and was developed by Mary Anderson, is called People Oriented Planning (POP). POP uses simple matrixes to diagram the evolution of gender roles in a community as a result of conflict or displacement. Using such analytical techniques to understand the gender dynamics in a particular population helps programmers to plan appropriate interventions compatible with cultural norms.

RESOURCES

WOMEN'S COMMISSION FOR REFUGEE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children is the only advocacy organization with the mandate to support refugee and IDP women and children. It advocates for the inclusion of refugee and IDP women, children and adolescents in humanitarian assistance and protection programs, and tries to ensure that their voices are heard at every level of government.

www.womenscommission.org

INCLUSIVE SECURITY: WOMEN WAGING PEACE

Women Waging Peace connects women addressing conflict around the world in the belief that they have a role to play "in preventing violent conflict, stopping war, reconstructing ravaged societies, and sustaining peace in fragile areas around the world." Women Waging Peace advocates for the full participation of women in formal and informal peace processes. The initiative is run by the Women and Public Policy Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and Hunt Alternatives.

www.womenwagingpeace.net

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND ARMED CONFLICT: UNITED NATIONS RESPONSE

This issue of Women2000 provides extensive information on sexual violence and armed conflict. It addresses the history of sexual violence during conflict and discusses the international community's response to sexual violence. It was published by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women in April 1998.

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2apr98.htm>

GUIDELINES FOR GENDER ANALYSIS AND ASSESSMENT

An inter-agency workshop on "Integration of Gender in Needs Assessment and Planning of Humanitarian Assistance" resulted in summary guidelines and a checklist for integrating gender analysis and assessment

www.reliefweb.int/library/GHARkit/files/workshoponintegrationofgenderintoneeds.pdf

WOMEN AND WAR

In a 2000 article, Charlotte Lindsey of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) discusses the varying ways women experience armed conflict. This article addresses the different roles women play during conflict, including combatant, victim of sexual violence, and IDP. It also provides an overview of the ICRC's work to assist and protect women.

www.icrc.ch/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList179/5BD0956E8C9593CFC1256B66005EFEE9

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

Extensive information on women's human rights developments around the world is provided on Human Rights Watch's web site. The Women's Rights section offers several reports about violence against women.

www.hrw.org

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS

A section of the International Committee of the Red Cross' web site is dedicated to the issues women face during wartime. The site includes useful reports and statements on the issue. Information is also available about women and international humanitarian law.

www.icrc.org/eng/women

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Refworld database includes refugee country of origin and legal information. It contains many publications on women and conflict.

www.unhcr.org/rsd.html

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR WOMEN

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) provides financial and technical assistance to programs that support women's empowerment and gender equity. UNIFEM focuses on ending violence against women, reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS among women and girls, achieving gender equality in democratic governance, and reducing feminized poverty.

www.unifem.org

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT'S OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S ISSUES

The U.S. State Department's Office of International Women's Issues provides information and fact sheets on women's situation in several countries on its web site. The office is responsible for coordinating the integration of women's issues into the broader U.S. strategic, economic and diplomatic goals.

www.state.gov/g/wi

UNITED NATIONS' DIVISION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

Through its web site, the U.N.'s Division for the Advancement of Women provides analyses of women's rights issues in a global context, promoting awareness of such issues and advocating for gender equality. Also addressed are everyday issues faced by women who are living in conflict situations. The site promotes women's contribution to fostering a culture of peace.

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/index.html

THE 1995 BEIJING CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

This United Nations web site offers information on the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in September 1995. It covers the many issues faced by women who are living in conflict situations.

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/index.html