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Women's Participation as a Development Priority

► Turing policy into progress.

By **Jenneth Macan Markar**, Director, Women, Peace and Security Project, Global Action to Prevent War, **Kavitha Suthanthiraraj**, Research and Policy Manager, Center for Peace and Conflict Studies, and **Robert Zuber**, Director, Global Action to Prevent War

OVER THE PAST DECADE, THE critical importance of women's participation in peace processes and policies has been recognized through numerous international institutions, resolutions and state commitments, including UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (Resolution 1325 or simply 1325), adopted in October 2000.

Resolution 1325 promotes the "role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and ... their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security." It also provides a framework for women's participation in activities such as negotiating peace agreements, planning peacekeeping operations and rebuilding communities impacted by armed violence.

A limited number of states have adopted National Action Plans to implement Resolution 1325 and, in October 2010, the Security Council formally approved a set of global indicators to track implementation. But many experts on women's participation have been disappointed by state commitments to fully implement 1325. Positive state rhetoric on gender has masked many deficiencies in the application and enforcement of 1325. Few states have developed National Action Plans to implement the resolution. Efforts to motivate the Security Council to take a more active role in implementing 1325 have, until recently, been undermined by the scarcity of quality data on women's participation and a lack of clear indicators that would allow govern-



▲ Assisted by her grand-daughter, an 89-year-old woman casts her vote during February 2010 elections held in Rawalpindi, Pakistan.

ments and civil society groups to accurately track progress (or often the lack of progress) towards the full participation of women in policy and practice. So long as information on participation remains ad hoc and sporadic, there will be few satisfying responses to the questions of those unconvinced of the need to include women in decision-making.

Systemic gender-based violence and abuse against women also remain ongoing problems

with serious negative impacts on women's participation in security and development policies. These and related security issues will require attention in all forums seeking to expand women's participation in policy.

Innovative local responses

Women on the ground also face cultural barriers, traditional patriarchal structures, minimal legislative support and a lack of resources—all of which make it harder for women to share their knowledge and experience in formal policy environments. With few (if any) institutional mechanisms to address such barriers, many women's organizations are developing informal and innovative community-based responses that are transforming local attitudes and reshaping women's roles in their communities. Such perseverance leaves little doubt about the positive impact of women's participation in a wide variety of security and development-related practices and policies.

Women's groups worldwide have learned to capitalize rapidly on the window of opportunity during post-conflict transitional periods by promoting greater women's political participation. Through voter education, quota systems, constitutional revisions and leadership training, women are gaining greater access to political structures previously reserved for men. In 2010, the post-conflict nations of Rwanda (with nearly 56 percent), South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Nepal, Uganda, Burundi and Timor-Leste all ranked in the top 30 nations worldwide in terms of women's political participation, with women representing more than 30 percent of the total members of the legislatures in their countries.

In several nations, local organizations have undertaken a range of activities to monitor existing participation quotas and expand the pool of female candidates for key political positions. In Sri Lanka, the Association for War Affected Women initiated a campaign to enable and encourage women to run for political office. The organization initiated Team 1325, composed of women from each of Sri Lanka's 25 districts who train local women on human rights, public speaking, legislation and campaign strategy. The organization has already worked with over 600 women, enabling many to contest local elections and serve as role models for others. In Nepal, to counteract claims there are not enough qualified women, women's networks developed the *Who is Who of Nepali Women*, with a list of over 3,000 women qualified to participate in political and

peace processes. These networks have also been deeply involved in upholding the minimum 33 percent quota for women's participation in the legislature as well as in formulating a 1325 National Action Plan.

Local organizations also create alternative structures to spread good governance practices and help women participate in decision-making that affects the broader development of their families and communities. For instance, the Uganda Community Based Association for Child Welfare launched "Local to Local" dialogues to address the limited participation of women in local councils, create space for deliberation and develop ongoing relationships with local authorities. This work includes providing forums for unified messaging and collective action, training to improve women's capacity and confidence, and formats for regular discussions among women and local authorities.

While grassroots and national organizations are vigilantly promoting women's empowerment and participation, many of these groups are small-scale and resource-poor, requiring more systematic government and interna-

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tional support. National-level financial and technical assistance must be obtained to help formulate 1325 National Action Plans, cultivate more educational and leadership training opportunities and promote strong, sustainable networks, especially for rural women. Similar support is also needed to foster regular consultations with local women's organizations that can help ensure participation-related needs and aspirations are recognized and enhanced

through a holistic and strategic approach.

Finally, in addressing information and participation gaps, it is critical that local programs are formulated with effective and reliable monitoring mechanisms. These mechanisms must tie into broader indicators at the international level and ensure that information exchanges persist from policy formation through implementation. Information that leads to humane, empowered and concrete policies for women, their families and communities remains a core priority, enabling more women, as Jasmin Galace of the Philippines would put it, "not only to oppose and expose, but also to propose."

Women's participation and development

Women have long fought for an equal voice in the home, at work and in government. Moreover, most development-related officials, whether from religious organizations, civil society, international NGOs or governments have long recognized the positive benefits of having more women involved in forming

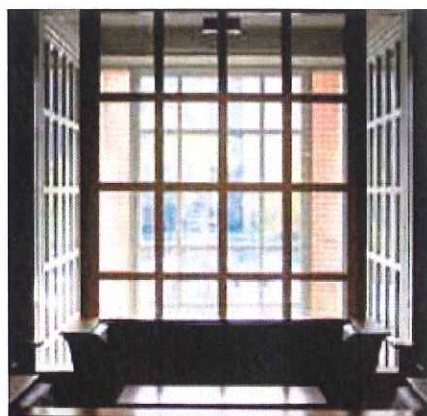
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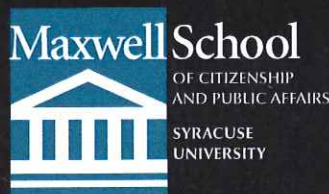
Preparing to make a leadership leap?

Potential leaders focused on obtaining top transnational NGO leadership positions and executives building a succession plan for their organization carefully consider what is necessary to make a successful leadership "leap." The Transnational NGO Leadership Institute welcomes global NGO professionals to upstate New York, USA, for a five-day, intensive and interdisciplinary leadership program.

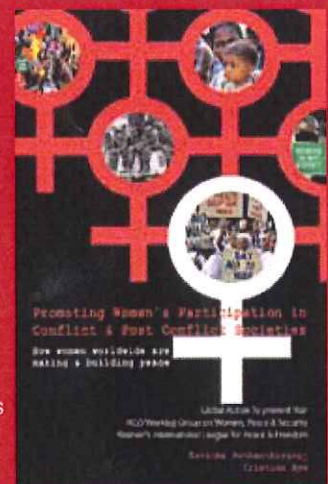


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Promoting Women's Participation in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies (free download at www.globalactionpw.org) by Global Action to Prevent War, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, and Peace Women reflects the policy and practical challenges to participation that women face in dozens of countries, the barriers they have overcome and the consequences of women's exclusion from diverse security processes. The book chronicles the impacts of women's exclusion and marginalization in critical areas of peace-making, political participation and the justice and security sectors, as well as post-conflict peace-building and reconstruction. This exclusion not only leaves women's needs unmet; it also vastly reduces the chances of successful and sustainable post-conflict development.



and implementing security and development policy, helping to address daunting obstacles to full participation caused by major disruptions in the security sector.

The mass organized rapes by rebels in the Democratic Republic of the Congo late last year are perhaps the most egregious recent example of security collapse, one for which the government seems to have neither the resources nor the inclination to conduct prosecutions. These and other collapses greatly inhibit both development options and the will of women to participate in political processes, post-conflict reconstruction and other key sectors.

But even in dire circumstances, there are strategic opportunities for development and faith-based groups to help overcome participation barriers. Resolution 1325 can both guide and inspire these organizations as they work to promote full participation of women in political, development and peace processes. Given the view that the responsibilities to the Millennium Development Goals and implementation of 1325 go hand in hand, development organizations should work more closely with UN agencies, rights-based groups and local/regional women to guarantee participation. Development organizations and their benefactors often have established relationships with governments and can thus exert influence on their policies and programs to empower women and open space for them to participate in decision making at all levels.

There is, of course, a need to be strategic about the steps development professionals take in this regard. Development and faith-based organizations generally have broader

access to resources and communities than rights-based groups, which is appropriate given the massive social dislocations and chronic human needs for which these orga-

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nizations seek to provide relief. The access they need to provide these required services cannot be jeopardized. Thus development practitioners and women's rights advocates must find a balance; women's participation is essential to both development and security, but must be promoted in a manner that preserves access and does not impede the flow of aid and assistance.

For development groups, faith-based organizations and others, promoting women's participation has clear non-partisan benefits: skills, capacities and relationships needed to address complex humanitarian emergencies and rebuild societies torn apart by armed violence, natural disaster or other tragedy. Now is the time to strategically pool knowledge and access to find ways to more effectively, sustainably and collaboratively enhance the conditions for women's participation in peace and development processes. ^{MD}