



From the ground up

Country focus: Women's roles in local peacebuilding in Liberia

Despite the increased international attention to women’s participation in peacebuilding, the achievements and challenges facing women building peace at the local level have been largely overlooked. *From the Ground Up*, a research report published by Womankind Worldwide, ActionAid and the Institute of Development Studies in 2012, addresses some of these gaps by providing qualitative evidence on the roles of women in local peacebuilding in five countries: Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone.¹

Research was conducted in each country, both through focus group sessions in conflict-affected communities, and interviews with staff of local and national civil society organisations, government representatives and community members working to support peacebuilding at the local level.

The research uncovered important commonalities across the countries, providing guidance on how women can be supported to build peace in conflict-affected communities. Certain contextual differences between the communities and countries were also identified, and much rich and insightful information was collected in each country. This paper provides a picture of women’s participation in peacebuilding in Nepal. It explores the national context,

examines gendered understandings of peace and peacebuilding, and explores the impact of women’s participation in peacebuilding. Barriers to women and women’s rights organisations building peace are identified, and recommendations to mitigate these are proposed.

Women’s rights at a glance

Following many years of conflict and civil war (1989-2003) Liberian women face a great many challenges. These include low literacy rates, high fertility rates, high levels of maternal mortality and adolescent pregnancy, forced marriage, poverty and HIV. In addition, violence against women is widespread. Ongoing school attendance rates are low for both boys and girls, despite free primary education programmes, although the rate of literacy in adolescents is higher for girls than boys.

Women, conflict and peace: general context

Liberia experienced a 14-year civil war that started in 1989 and continued in two phases until 2003. Estimates suggest that over 200,000 people were killed during the conflict and at least 1.5 million were displaced.² Unequal relationships among the various ethnic-linguistic groups, state weakness and corruption, and a series of repressive governments are factors associated with the start of the war.³

1. The full report can be found at: www.womankind.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/09/From-The-Ground-Up-FINAL.pdf (accessed 19/12/13).

2. See US State Department, www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm (accessed 19/12/13).

3. Badmus, I. A. 2009. ‘Explaining women’s roles in the West African Tragic Triplet: Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d’Ivoire in comparative perspective’. *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, 1(3), pp.808-839.

Cover photo: Women’s group taking part in a project to support reintegration and resettlement of women and girls affected by conflict in Gbarpolu County, Liberia
ActionAid

Selected Statistics on Women in Liberia

Indicator	Women	Men
Population (thousands/%)	2,110 (50%)	2,135 (50%)
Life expectancy at birth (years)	59	56
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	20.2	9.3
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	16	39
Economic activity rate (%)	58	64
Maternal mortality ratio	770 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	123.0 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	11	
UNDP 2011 Gender Inequality Index (world rank/value)	143 (0.658)	

Sources: UN Statistics Division and UNDP. Latest statistics available for each indicator.

“Women have played a prominent role in peacebuilding in Liberia at local, national and international levels”

Women have played a prominent role in peacebuilding in Liberia at local, national and international levels. While negotiating inclusion in formal processes has not always been achieved, there are many examples of women activists successfully contributing towards lasting peace at all levels. Local organisations and social forces, including women’s rights organisations and movements, have played a vital role in peacebuilding by demanding the compliance of their leaders in implementing and maintaining peace accords and in shaping post-conflict reconstruction. One reason for women’s prominence in Liberia’s history is the significant number of educated, professional women, both pre- and post-war. Liberia boasts Africa’s first democratically elected female president (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was elected in 2005) and also lays claim to the first woman president of an African national university (Dr. Mary Antoinette Brown-Sherman in 1978) and the first woman head of state (Ruth Perry was the Chair of the transitional government before the 1997 election). At the same time, female fighters participated in all factions and in the national military during the war.⁴

During the early years of the war Concerned Women of Liberia, a national women’s coalition, made direct contact with women in territories held by the warring factions, ‘often building on a history and tradition of mediation and negotiations within families, prayer bands, and using new skills gained through conflict resolution training programmes within and outside of Liberia’.⁵ The Mano River Union Women for Peace Network (MARWOPNET), a group of professional women from the three Mano River Union countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea), was instrumental in bringing the countries’ presidents back to the negotiating table in September 2001. MARWOPNET also served as a signatory to the Liberian peace accords in 2003.⁶

The Liberian Women’s Initiative (LWI) was instrumental in attempting to block UN-

sponsored peace accords, which they saw as rewarding leaders of the armed factions with positions in the transitional government without many incentives for real disarmament: their fears were confirmed with the election of Charles Taylor in 1997. The LWI was eventually able to participate in the next phase of peace talks after exerting huge pressure on the government. This allowed them to negotiate a new unit for women and children within the Ministry of Planning, and also to convince the Ministry of Education to carry out a mass literacy programme for women and girls. A member of the LWI also became Minister of Education.⁷ The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) launched a Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Campaign in 2003, focusing on the cessation of hostilities between the warring parties, and lobbied at governmental and UN level.

Liberia’s current President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has also challenged her government to increase the participation levels of women in national government and has implemented reforms in the security sector: in 2006, for example, a 20% quota for female police officers was introduced.

Unfortunately there is little documentation of women’s peacebuilding activities outside the capital city. There is some evidence of women in rural areas using positions within local institutions to rebuild and rehabilitate war-torn communities. For example, the Sande society in northwestern Liberia provides guidance for young girls who have lost their families. In the southeast of the country, women have been active in the reintegration of young male ex-combatants in their communities.⁸ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established by the government after the end of the war. However the TRC report was considered controversial by the government and though the Independent National Human Rights Commission has been formed, it was reported to be considered ineffective and non-responsive to human rights issues associated with the war and the current context.

4. Moran, M. H. 1997. ‘Warriors or soldiers? Masculinity and ritual transvestism in the Liberian civil war’. In: Lamphere et al., eds. *Situated lives: gender and culture in everyday life*. New York: Routledge, pp. 440-450.

5. African Women and Peace Support Group. 1998. *African women and peace: Liberian women’s initiatives and actions*, Unpublished proposal. p.4.

6. Moran, M. H., and Pitcher, M. A. 2004. ‘The ‘basket case’ and the ‘poster child’: explaining the end of civil conflicts in Liberia and Mozambique’. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(3), pp. 501-519.

7. Karam, A. 2000. ‘Women in the war and peace-building: the roads traversed, the challenges ahead’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 3:1, 2-25.

8. Moran and Pitcher, 2004.

“Peace to women means putting food on the table, economic empowerment, access to healthcare and education, and that we can speak up against abuse in the home”

Community profiles: Grand Gedeh County

The research was conducted in two communities located in Grand Gedeh County in the far southeast of Liberia, an area of the country that borders with Ivory Coast. Community A is made up of approximately 300 households and is located within a short car journey of the county capital. ActionAid has been working in this community both directly and through partner organisations since 2010. The community has benefited from its proximity to the county capital, and therefore from the work of national NGO actors working on peace and women’s empowerment.

Community B is made up of approximately 350 households. It is located around two hours drive away from the county capital and is positioned along the main trunk road for the county. This community experienced significant refugee movement throughout the conflict both in Liberia and Ivory Coast. As a consequence of this there is a significant UNHCR presence. Other INGOs are also present but they have not conducted any formal peacebuilding work such as capacity building, counselling or mediation training, so this community did not have experience of discussing these topics with outsiders.

Impacts of conflict at the local level

Both communities visited were severely affected by the conflict in Liberia. Most significantly, huge proportions of people migrated between different areas of Liberia and Ivory Coast throughout the conflict period. The communities have also been recently affected by the conflict in Ivory Coast, with a new influx of refugees settling in their communities.

The women in both communities spoke of losing everything they had when they were forced to repeatedly run from armed groups. They described huge personal difficulties and trauma. But they also spoke of a new standing for women in the post-war period. They were proud that they had overcome adversity, and have continued to

speak out and assert their decision-making powers where possible. The women felt that they started this change themselves, with and without the intervention of external actors, but they also felt that they needed support to further these changes, to empower themselves and their daughters for the future.

Understanding of peace and peacebuilding

Women in both communities conceived of peace as the freedom to live the lives they chose, to send their children to school, to move around freely without threat, to live without violence or conflict within their homes, and to be able to feed their families.

Estella Nelson, Founder and President of the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC), a media development organisation dedicated to the promotion of women’s rights in Liberia, stated:

“Peace means different things to women and men because of their unique experiences as a result of the war, and how society is structured. Peace to women means putting food on the table, economic empowerment, access to healthcare and education, and that we can speak up against abuse in the home. There is violence in the home, but too often women are silent, that is not peace.

“Both the man and the wife they are friendly, there is no confusion, the children are happy, the man is happy, the woman is happy.”

– Older women’s focus group, Community A

The men in the communities understand peace more in terms of absence of conflict and insecurity at community or regional levels, freedom of movement, and having job opportunities. Lack of money to buy food is a major factor contributing to lack of peace at home, expressed by both women and men. Almost all people interviewed (both women and men) spoke of peace in terms of togetherness, unity, and love between one another.

Women's participation in peacebuilding and its impacts

Women in both communities organised themselves collectively and formed support networks and groups at the local level. They understood that when someone has a problem, everybody has a problem. This helped them to overcome obstacles created by cultural barriers, such as patriarchal norms and values, to create spaces where they can be heard, settle disputes, address unjust treatment of children, propose initiatives for community development and seek justice for survivors of violence and sexual abuse. Importantly, this was observed both in a community with direct support from NGOs as well as in a community with no direct support, as the following example shows:

“During the war the women are most vulnerable, the women are the ones that usually suffer”

“So, after they came back [from refugee camps in Ivory Coast] they build a house: the women decided to come together and contribute. From the farm they put together yellow rice and were able to construct a house for the women to meet. During the war the women are the most vulnerable, the women are the ones that usually suffer. So they decided to construct a place for the women to meet and discuss, ‘What can we do so that we have peace? What shall we do so that war cannot come here again?’ So, they came together and decided to call their children, both boys and girls to tell them that if there is war, if there is anything that would bring destruction to this town they shouldn't partake.”

– Older women's focus group,
Community B

Men, however, usually go individually to the clan chief to solve their disputes or directly to local officials when they have the means and contacts to do so. This is probably related to the fact that males can be heard without the need to be organised or supported by other men. A male member of the Justice and Peace Commission told us that **“Women build peace among themselves. They mediate and solve disputes at the community level. Most men solve conflicts at ‘chief’ level.”**

For women to be heard by clan chiefs and local officials, it is necessary for them to gain the support of other women or to have contacts with local authority figures. Support from NGOs has created different spaces for women's involvement in peacebuilding activities. With help from ActionAid and the Justice and Peacebuilding Commission, community members in Community A received training to mediate disputes, as an alternative to the traditionally male-dominated mechanism of solving conflict through the clan chief or local officials. This training also included education around women's rights and laws aimed at protecting women from violence. The key difference between this approach and the traditional community methods of solving disputes is that the mediators are trained to tell people when they can solve their case through dialogue (small disputes) and when they need to go directly to police or courts (criminal cases, including domestic violence cases).

A mediator for women in Community A said that **“the training that I got from ActionAid made me have confidence,”** and she can now speak and participate in any activities: **“Before it was only the elderly and town chief who would decide on all the cases and on who was doing wrong and right, now it is the mediation group.”** Even though the training is open to women and men, women are usually more involved and interested in this mechanism. As one of the local training partners notes:

“Women are better. Women are perfect at mediating. If a woman would come to solve a dispute between two men, the men would listen. She would have learned the skills through the mediation training.”

– Female key informant.

All focus group respondents reported the presence of women's groups that solve disputes as a positive force that helps to maintain peace. Where an NGO was present, the group has been able to achieve further impacts through mediation training and implementation of complementary projects such as livelihoods training. Yet even where no NGO was present, or that

“Women’s participation in peacebuilding within their communities has led to direct and positive impacts for the women of those communities”

presence had been very limited, women had still found ways to come together and collectively work towards peace.

Given women’s own understanding of peace, their impacts are seen not only at individual level but also in terms of welfare for their households and their communities, as the following example shows.

A further example of women’s involvement is the decision of women to form a female unit of the community police in Community A. Community police members are usually men, which makes reporting rape and domestic violence very difficult. The women’s unit reported the following:

“Before the war, most crime was petty theft, but after they came with all kind of weapons and would take everything you had, rapes were going up, murders. It is getting better now with the help of the community police.”

– Head of a female unit of the community police, Community A

Women’s participation in peacebuilding within their communities has led to direct and positive impacts for the women of those communities. They have gained safe spaces to share their worries, help solve disputes and support each other. This has in turn, in both communities visited, impacted on the communities as a whole. All focus group respondents reported the presence of women’s groups that solve disputes as a positive force that helped to maintain peace. Where an NGO was present the group has been able to achieve further impacts through mediation training and implementation of complementary projects such as livelihoods training, but where no NGO was present, the women still achieved a peaceful impact within their community.

Support to women’s participation in peacebuilding

Education and training for livelihoods and basic education are key factors contributing to the promotion of peace and can further foster women’s empowerment, awareness and self-esteem. In Community B, where they do not have this kind of support, women speak precisely of the lack of jobs and training as their biggest obstacle to

having peace. The lack of income-generating opportunities not only for women but also for young men, particularly those who were previously soldiers, was considered to be the principle problem within the community and one of the main reasons for conflicts amongst community members. While a lack of jobs was also a huge issue for women in Community A, they felt that they had some opportunities for income generation through the training they received from NGOs.

Training and education on laws and rights that protect women is also imperative to support women in protecting themselves and their families. The women in Community A, as well as local organisations, stated that through the education and awareness-raising work of ActionAid Liberia’s Access to Justice programme women are now reporting more crimes to the police and courts with the support of local organisations, such as Zwedru Women United for Change (ZWUC) described below, and local women’s groups. Although the research team was not able to collect evidence of this from the justice system, an important proportion of women in the community reported this increase throughout interviews and focus groups. Being able to access justice and understand the law in cases of sexual abuse and violence against women and girls is crucial for women to feel safe and to have peace within their homes.

A female police officer in the Liberian Women and Children Protection Section explained:

“Before I was not exposed to women’s issues. Now my eyes are open. Today, I am not ashamed or afraid to be among men and take part in discussions. Now I am one of the police commanders for the women’s section.”

As this research has highlighted, mediation teams were also an essential component of women’s involvement in local-level peacebuilding and are often formed with the support of NGOs. Mediation teams are comprised of women and formed with the aim of helping other women (although men are also able to use their services if they wish).

Supporting women's involvement in peacebuilding in Liberia

Zwedru Women United for Change (ZWUC) was founded in 2009 by a group of local women who noted the inequalities in the living standards between women and men and wanted change, stemming from the belief that women take greater risks as peacebuilders at all levels. They have received funding and support from ActionAid, UNHCR, and USAID to work towards peace, through counselling for women with mental health problems and HIV and AIDS, livelihood training, soap-making and tailoring, and delivering access to justice training. The women who run the group are from the local community and tend not to have had a formal education. They have built up the confidence to run the group through support from each other and NGOs. Despite their success in a number of areas, they are still confronted by obstacles such as the lack of long-term financial support, logistical difficulties such as transportation, childcare and lack of support from men within the community.

Liberian Women's Media Action Network (LIWOMAC)

LIWOMAC, a partner of Womankind, is a media development organisation dedicated to the promotion of women's rights and development in Liberia. LIWOMAC's central philosophy is that respect for and protection of women's rights are critical to peace and development. They train grassroots women in rights awareness, work to make the media a more gender-sensitive platform for promoting peace, and train journalists in women's rights to increase coverage and ensure accurate reporting of issues important to women. LIWOMAC is training 200 women and men as 'Community Peace Actors' to help drive a peaceful election process. In 2010, LIWOMAC led the hosting of the First National Conference on Advancing Women in the Media.

In Community B, where the women's group was formed without the support of external actors, they also acted as mediators for small community disputes. They stated that they would like to receive support and education from NGOs in order to make their voices heard.

Media is also used by organisations as an important tool to educate local communities about women's rights and the important role women can play in peacebuilding.

As Estella Nelson, Founder and President of LIWOMAC, explains:

"We use radio to educate, sensitise and raise awareness amongst women of their rights. We have clubs at local level who listen to the radio programmes and use them as a platform for discussion and promoting women's rights. We encourage women to think about how they themselves can work together for peace. We get to a stage where we say, you understand the issue, and now you need to speak up about them."

Barriers to women and women's rights organisations building peace

The research found that there are many barriers to women's involvement in building peace. These include a lack of economic opportunity, the dominant role of men within society, a lack of access to justice, hostility from other community members and a severe lack of national infrastructure.

Women in both communities in Liberia stated that a lack of economic opportunity remains a significant challenge for their involvement in local-level activities. In addition to this, women report that as a result of low levels of education, lack of finance, lack of employment experience, and a cultural tradition that previously marginalised women economically, they have low self esteem and lack the confidence to engage in income generation or to speak up in public.

“Men continue to dominate women, through domestic violence and sexual abuse”

“Women need economic empowerment, they need to be independent. If they have to work on the farm or other activities to feed their children they don’t have time to be active. You cannot be part of training or activities if you don’t have food to leave for the children. You need a livelihood, a better income.”

– Female key informant, Community A

Though some progress has been made, the dominant role of men as decision makers within the households is still a significant barrier for women’s involvement in groups or training. This is evidenced in the perception of women’s roles by men (for example, cooking, taking care of children) discussed in the male focus groups in both communities and also by the recurrent practices of domestic violence, discussed by women in the focus groups in both communities.

The justice system is still dominated by men: there are no women jurors within the courts accessible to the communities visited, there are very few female lawyers, and few female police officers (although this is starting to change). Women reported that they were unable to engage in peacebuilding or development activities due to a lack of time because of their domestic roles, as well as a lack of confidence, and some women reported that they were forbidden from participation by men. Women also highlighted domestic violence as a recurring practice.

“After the conflict, men and women are doing things equally. Women are trying to get to the same level as men, both economically and politically. However, men continue to dominate women, through domestic violence and sexual abuse.”

– Male key informant

Women’s involvement in collective activities is often received with hostility by men and other members of the community, particularly male leaders. However, there have been examples where the impact of women’s involvement in collective activities in terms of community welfare has made men realise the positive role women can

play. All of the NGOs and CSOs approached during the research discussed the importance of including men and male leaders in all programmes of work relating to women’s empowerment.

The severe lack of national infrastructure and wide geographical spread of communities are the biggest barriers for local organisations in reaching women in remote communities. Overcoming this requires higher levels of funding for transport and logistics. All of the local NGOs and CSOs met were entirely dependent on external funding. The funding they received tended to be short-term and restricted to specific project areas, such as livelihood training or counselling. The local organisations struggled to set their own agendas, instead often being influenced by the funding preferences of donors. For example, several of the local organisations that participated in the research expressed a desire to engage in income-generating activities, including skills training and education, but had been unable to secure funding for this.

Local to national links

All of the people interviewed noted the importance of linking local peacebuilding efforts to the wider political processes taking place at the national level. However, the representatives of the different communities highlighted how difficult it has been to accomplish this. In particular, changing structural and cultural barriers that have existed for generations at local level is a gradual process that takes time and persistence. Within the communities visited, people were very concerned with the lack of action in remote rural areas. They stated that there were large groups of people completely left out of all development and decision-making processes as a result of their geographic locations.

“In villages there is no help, no access to resources and nowhere to go or migrate. And no communication, no access to information.”

– Retha Kar, National Rural Women of Liberia, Grand Gedeh branch

“Research participants noted that politicians only visited them during election times, made empty promises and then left, never to return and never fulfilling their promises”

Nonetheless, some examples evidenced the potential contribution of women’s involvement at the local level for national peacebuilding processes. For instance, the National Rural Women of Liberia is a key link between local and national processes. It is an umbrella organisation that links with thousands of rural women and is responsible for providing annual reports of the work of rural women to the Ministry of Gender in Monrovia. In addition, women mentioned that they have increased their involvement in politics both as voters and as candidates, and that this occurred during the post-conflict period following increases in knowledge, awareness and self-confidence that women are gaining through NGO work, as well as through supporting each other.

The study revealed that in communities where there has been longer-term support, there have been opportunities to build on women’s roles as mediators in the community to enable broader participation in public and political life. This bottom-up approach builds women’s capacity to participate in local governance, which can then lead to their participation at regional and national levels.

National and regional organisations in Liberia discussed the difficulties of connecting their work between the local and national processes. The issues facing areas far from the capital are very different from those seen in Monrovia. Research participants noted that politicians only visited them during election times, made empty promises and then left, never to return and never fulfilling their promises. During a discussion in Monrovia with representatives from INGOs, NGOs and the Liberian Government, the attendees agreed on several things: i) women’s roles are crucial in peacebuilding and in governing the country; ii) the link between grassroots work and national-level work is vital for achieving sustainable peace; and iii) at this point in time, the link is not functioning as it should or could.

“With regard to perceptions of women who participate in peacebuilding activities, it is very different from one context to another. There will be different reaction in urban areas and rural areas. In one rural area, it was believed that a woman who had been on the radio was a prostitute.”

– Estella Nelson, Founder and President, LIWOMAC

“Women make up more than 50% of the population, so without the input of women, the national agenda will not represent the people, it will be faulty, you’ve got to deal with the women factor. Women’s roles changed during the conflict, even though the conflict affected them negatively and that role change led to conflict within homes. Whether women were literate or illiterate, what they did to achieve peace in this country is written in history.”

– Caroline Brown, Medica Mondiale

Finally, it became clear that women’s involvement in formal politics both at local and national levels remains extremely limited and difficult:

“Whether they were candidates or whether they were voters we have not, as a body of women managed to generalise the support of women across the country so that we can be one block. There are lots of reasons why we have not managed to do that. I am hoping that between now and 2014 and 2017, we can amend some of the wrongs and see how we can have one loud voice. Because I think it’s only when we can become one concerted voice that some of the things we hope to see as women will be done. If you realised, we lost votes. There were women candidates in the race and almost all of them lost their seats.”

– Female Interviewee, interview conducted by LIWOMAC following the recent elections in Liberia.

Conclusion

“Women can make important contributions to national peacebuilding processes while working at the local level”

This research has demonstrated that women faced huge personal difficulties and trauma during the conflict in Liberia, but have frequently organised themselves collectively and formed support networks and groups at the local level. As a result, women have overcome obstacles created by cultural barriers, such as patriarchal norms and values, to create new spaces where they can be heard, act as mediators to settle disputes, address unjust treatment of children, propose initiatives for community development and seek justice for survivors of violence and sexual abuse.

These spaces, often but not always supported by local or national NGOs, provide women with an alternative to the traditionally male-dominated mechanism of solving conflict through the clan chief or local officials – a route generally not open to women. Women’s participation in local peacebuilding has led to tangible positive impacts, with research respondents identifying women’s groups that solve disputes as a positive force that helped to maintain peace at both the household and community levels. Furthermore, women’s active involvement in peacebuilding not only improves conflict resolution, but it also empowers women to take part in decision-

making and builds their confidence to take up positions of leadership.

However, despite these successes, significant challenges still remain. The importance of linking local peacebuilding efforts to the wider political processes taking place at the national level was identified, but this has proved difficult to accomplish. In addition, the lack of action in rural areas is concerning, as many of those living in remote geographic locations continue to be excluded from development and decision-making processes. Nonetheless, it has been shown that women can make important contributions to national peacebuilding processes while working at the local level, and that national women’s rights organisations are a key link between local and national processes.

Given these findings, a gender-responsive approach to peacebuilding in Liberia should recognise the importance of gender equality for sustainable peace, support the important roles that women undertake within their household and communities as peacebuilders, and should create an enabling environment in which women are supported to bring these skills, experiences and priorities to the regional, national and international levels.

Recommendations

Develop and implement concrete, coherent policy commitments	<p>Just and sustainable peace, which includes meaningful participation of women and inclusion of women's rights, begins with coherent policy. All development, defence and diplomatic policy should have clear, strategic commitment to women's rights and gender equality including measures to promote women's participation. Policy should also be fully aligned with Liberia's National Gender Policy and National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Women's rights and gender equality should be recognised in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures, and local and national policy should incorporate views and lessons from women building peace at the local level.</p> <p><i>To achieve this Liberia must strengthen mechanisms to ensure that women's peacebuilding priorities and experiences are incorporated into wider efforts to implement UNSCR 1325 and consolidate peace in the country.</i></p>
Ensure women's participation in peace processes	<p>To ensure a durable and just peace, national and international peace processes must include women as decision-makers, and reflect the priorities and views of women building peace at local levels including the views of women from ethnic minority groups, widows, ex-combatants, survivors of sexual violence, displaced women, women with HIV/AIDS and disabled women. Further, all communiqués, declarations and agreements resulting from national or international peace processes should have dedicated commitments to women's rights and gender equality.</p> <p><i>As a starting point to achieve this, a minimum of 30% representation should be guaranteed for women and women's rights organisations in all local, national and international peace and reconstruction processes. In particular, the Government of Liberia must enact the draft Gender Equity Bill, which stipulates that no political party list of elected officers and candidates for public office shall contain less than 30% and no more than 70% of a single gender.</i></p>
Provide long term support and funding to women's peacebuilding	<p>Women's rights organisations are at the forefront of innovative peacebuilding work at a local level. For them to reach their potential, this work needs to be adequately and sustainably funded. Furthermore, all funding to peacebuilding initiatives should demand demonstrable women's rights outcomes, including support for women's economic empowerment which enables their participation in peacebuilding processes.</p> <p><i>In line with the United Nations target, a minimum of 15% of all funds in support of peacebuilding should be dedicated to activities whose principal objective is to address women's specific needs, advance gender equality or empower women.</i></p>
Tackle violence against women and girls	<p>Violence against women and girls is a pervasive element of conflict, and continues long after the laying down of arms. It is both a gross violation of women's human rights, a key barrier to their participation in peacebuilding and public life, and to building sustainable peace. Women need law enforcement and formal judicial mechanisms to be accessible and fair. In addition, no peace process, whether at the national or the community level, should result in impunity for serious violations of human rights such as violence against women.</p> <p><i>All peacebuilding policy, funding or activity should contain a gendered risk analysis, and include targeted action and ring-fenced finance, to tackle violence against women and girls as a key barrier to peace.</i></p>
Build an enabling environment for women's peacebuilding	<p>In order for women's efforts in local peacebuilding to be effective, national policies and infrastructure must ensure women's rights and participation. Gender discrimination must be eliminated and women's rights promoted and protected in all public infrastructure and institutions including those in the legal and justice, healthcare, transport and education systems.</p> <p>Collaboration between women's rights organisations and women in political parties, parliament and government should be promoted. Gender discrimination must be addressed at each stage of the political process including in citizenship, electoral registration and election processes. Targeted voter registration drives and political education campaigns should be targeted at women, particularly those in remote communities.</p> <p><i>In order to achieve this, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) must be fully ratified. In addition, the Optional Protocol to CEDAW must be ratified and implemented, and significant gaps in legislation contributing to the full realisation of women's rights should be addressed, for example by adopting and implementing a stronger domestic violence law.</i></p>



Above: Women's group taking part in a project to support reintegration and resettlement of women and girls affected by conflict in Gbarpolu County, Liberia

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