

Does the Inclusion of Women in Peace Building Processes Make a Difference?

Written by Katherine Remenyi

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KATHERINE REMENYI, JUL 7 2016

The 15th anniversary of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 has passed in recent months, and it remains a landmark document when considering women's involvement in peace-building at every level. The resolution both recognised the unique effect that conflict can have on women and children and "reaffirm[ed] the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stress[ed] the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" (United Nations Security Council, 2000:1). Resolution 1325 was passed unanimously, after decades of feminist activism stemming primarily from those in conflict-affected countries, pushing for formal recognition of women's role in peace-building which had previously gone largely unrecognised (Moosa et al, 2013:454). Although the resolution was received with enthusiasm, its impact has fallen short from what was widely expected, and in the wake of the resolution, an increase in women's involvement in formal peace building can be seen, however not to any significant level. A quantitative review of 31 major peace processes conducted by UN Women in 2010 (quoted in Moosa et al, 2013:455) found that "women made up only 2.4 per cent of chief mediators, 3.7 per cent of witnesses, and 9 per cent of negotiators ... [and made] up just 2.5 per cent of signatories to peace agreements". Given this, it is somewhat difficult to examine the extent to which women make a difference to the processes and outcomes of formal peace-building as they have remained largely side-lined. However, women have significantly impacted peace-building processes and outcomes informally at local and grassroots level. Porter (2003:246) identifies that women are particularly active in "peace protests, inter-group dialogue, the promotion of intercultural tolerance, and the empowerment of citizens". Moosa (2013:460) further recognises the involvement of women in similar peace-building activities, noting that although "these are not always what is traditionally understood by peacebuilding, [they] are important contributions to a 'positive' peace that will meet the needs of both men and women". This essay is going to examine what is understood by peace-building and consider what is meant by peace through both the lenses of Galtung and Lederach. The inclusion of women in formal peace-building processes will be discussed, with particular attention to the case of Liberia where women fought to be heard in the formal agreements. The role of women in peace-building initiatives at local levels will also be addressed, with reference to the case of Sierra Leone where women's efforts were restricted to an informal role because of deeply rooted patriarchal traditions. The essay will consider why women are particularly prominent in local peace-building efforts, and the impact of both female and male stereotypes will also be discussed in regards to their limitations to both sexes. The case study of women in Guatemala will be examined as a point of discussion for the complexity of the issues at hand; and it will ultimately be argued that it is not as simple as including more women in peace-building to make positive difference to the processes and outcomes, but instead a gender sensitive approach should be considered.

Before it is possible to assess the impact that women have on peace-building processes it is first necessary to have an understanding of what is meant by peace-building. Cocknell (2000:16) suggests that it is "the least examined term in the peace studies lexicon", with terms such as peacemaking and peacekeeping often taking priority within the academe. Although these concepts are closely interlinked, it is important to recognise their differences. It should be noted that peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building are complex concepts which vary in practice from case to case and thus their definitions will vary considerably across academic discourse. Porter (2003:255) identifies the three terms as they are understood through a UN lens, stating that "peacemaking includes mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and negotiation to bring hostile parties to agreement", whilst peacekeeping has much more immediate

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goals of “keeping parties from fighting or harming each other, by means of multinational forces of armed soldiers and police, authorized to use weapons only in self-defence”. Lastly she identifies peace-building as formal post-conflict community reconstruction which should “address immediate security needs as well as root causes of strife”, and thus it is a term which seemingly encompasses elements of both peacemaking and peacekeeping (Porter, 2003:255). She further identifies a UN study which defines peace-building as “a means of preventing the outbreak, recurrence or continuation of armed conflict [which] therefore encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights mechanisms” (UN study, 2002 quoted in Porter, 2003:256). Lambourne (2004:3) echoes this sentiment, defining peace-building similarly and noting a focus on establishing lasting peace, which encompass goals of both negative and positive peace. It should be noted that the UN only identifies peace-building as a formal process, however this essay is going to argue that peace-building, as defined by the UN, can also be identified in informal practices, in which the inclusion of women makes a marked positive difference to the processes and outcomes.

The distinction between negative and positive peace was first identified by Galtung in 1967, and has since become an integral concept for modern academics when discussing peace and conflict. Galtung (1967:12) summarizes the differences between the two, identifying negative peace as “the absence of organized collective violence” and positive peace as “cooperation and integration between human groups, with less emphasis on the absence of violence”. Domingo and Holmes (2013:1) suggest that within the international community it has widely been an acknowledged that peace-building efforts should strive towards more than just establishing negative peace. The authors recognise a conscious effort to further address the root causes of conflicts through “peace processes and agreements, and supporting the foundations of institutions and systems mechanisms to resolve division and conflict through peaceful means”, as methods of establishing positive peace (Domingo and Holmes, 2013:1).

Interestingly Moosa et al (2013:457) found in their research that despite geographical, cultural, and societal differences there was a marked variance in how men and women define peace. This is important to examine when considering how the inclusion of women impacts peace-building processes and outcomes, because if men and women ultimately have different definitions of peace, their methodology in pursuing peaceful goals will also be different. Moosa et al found that men prioritised negative peace, focusing on “the absence of formal conflict and insecurity at community, regional, and national levels, as well as with the stability of formal structures, such as governance institutions, the justice sector, and infrastructure” (Moosa et al, 2013:457). Contrastingly, women were more interested in peace on a local level and within the private sphere, with emphasises on family and community needs, for example “peace within the household, education for children, and the attainment of individual rights and freedoms”, thus valuing positive peace over negative peace (Moosa et al, 2013:457). This is perhaps because women have a different experience of conflict than men, particularly when their sexual integrity is undermined and “rape is used as a weapon of war” (Porter, 2003:249). Moreover not only are there cases of women’s bodies being violated during conflicts but also by formal security actors who are responsible for the protection of women post-conflict, “namely the military, civilian police and even peacekeepers, are sometimes among the perpetrators of violence against them and fail to serve as accountability institutions to which women can turn for redress and security” (Klot, 2007:1). Given this, it is not unfathomable that “women are more likely to feel an absence of peace, even when formal agreements have been reached” (Moosa et al, 2013:458). Additionally, given that women are largely absent in formal peace-building processes, their focus on positive peace issues are often not considered, and negative peace goals which are valued highly by men are more likely to be realised, again making women feel that peace has not been achieved despite formal peace agreements.

In such situations Lederach (1999:406) argues that peace agreements are unsustainable as they fail to recognise the differing needs of individuals at different levels within a society, in this case failing to recognise the needs of women, though his theory can be applied to any marginalised group within a community. He identifies this as The Interdependence Gap, which “is rooted in the lack of responsive and coordinated relationships up and down the levels of leadership in a society” (Lederach, 1999:407). Lederach suggests that to establish lasting peace in a post-conflict society there needs to be an awareness of the unique perspective each individual or group can bring to the table. Given this, it is evident that from Lederach’s perspective women have a significant impact on the outcomes of peace-building efforts, as without consideration for them, any peace established would be ultimately unsustainable as it fails to recognise the needs of every group. Although it could be argued that an appreciation of women’s

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perspectives in peace-building has been recognised in Resolution 1325, and later related resolutions, the inclusion of women in formal post-conflict peace-building has mostly been an unrecognised ideal.

Despite this, there have been a limited number of formal peace-building cases where women have been successfully utilized and included in the process to contribute towards lasting peace. For example, during and after the civil war in Liberia (1989-2003) women played a significant role in peacebuilding at all levels of society, having successfully fought to have their voices heard in formal agreements. During the conflict women were active in establishing relationships with women in territories occupied by warring factions, building on mutual history and traditions. Importantly, Womenkind (2014a:5) notes that this activity was happening across Liberia both with the support of NGOs and without them. This would work towards closing the aforementioned Interdependence Gap on a horizontal level (Lederach, 1999:407), creating a platform from which sustainable peace could then be established. Furthermore, The Mano River Union Women for Peace Network played a vital role in formal negotiations, bringing the negotiating presidents back to the table in September 2001 following disputes, and also serving as an official signatory to the 2003 Liberian peace accords (Womenkind, 2014a:3). After the 14-year civil war, when the peace accords had been signed, Liberian women were left with broken communities, which suffered from “low literacy rates, high fertility rates, high levels of maternal mortality and adolescent pregnancy, forced marriage, poverty and HIV” (Womenkind, 2014a:2). Liberian women continued to mobilise through women’s rights organisations and movements to demand that their leaders implement and maintain the peace accords. Womenkind (2014a:5) suggest that it is essential for women to mobilize in groups as their voices would not be heard as individuals, the way it might be if they were men. Groups like the Liberian Women’s Institute lobbied to be included in the post-conflict peace talks, thus allowing them to establish “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 [Liberian Women’s Institute] also became Minister of Education” (Womenkind, 2014a:3). By making headway into formal peace-building processes and the political sphere, Liberian women were also tackling the restricting norms of the established male dominated institutes, creating new spaces and opportunities for Liberian women’s issues to be addressed. It is evident that women played a noteworthy role in the Liberian peace-building process, and that their efforts focused on building relationships and creating structures that could both establish and maintain peaceful communities, thus supporting the theory that women prioritise positive peace goals.

In the case of Liberia, the peace-building process enabled women to weaken restricting patriarchal traditions and establish themselves as legitimate actors within the formal peace-building process. Furthermore, it created a space in which women could remain involved and represented in the political sphere, post-conflict. Francis (2013) suggests that the inclusion of women at these higher levels can promote lasting peace, and help establish greater gender equality within a community. Klot (2007:2) supports this notion, arguing that “peacebuilding may well offer the single greatest opportunity to redress gender inequities and injustices of the past while setting new precedents for the future” if the international community succeeds in effectively including women in the process. Both authors are adamant that the inclusion of women in peacebuilding will have significant and lasting effects on the outcomes of peace processes. Francis notes however, that men are “afraid that women’s role in peacebuilding lay the foundations for the empowerment [of women]” (Francis, 2013). Through a realist lens this is a matter of power politics, in which men are hesitant to relinquish their established authoritative position. This is arguably evident within UN headquarters, as in 2012 after Resolution 1325 had long been established; women made up 48% of staff however the majority failed to make it to senior decision making levels (UN Peacekeeping, 2015). Perhaps this is an example of how women are involved in peace-building as the ‘token woman’, however are not given any decision making abilities to make a significant difference to the process. Given this it is unsurprising that in many other cases women are restricted from being included in formal peace-building processes and are limited to partaking in informal grassroots peace-building efforts. When considering the conflict in Sierra Leone, it can be seen that the patriarchal traditions did not waver; But, women were able to contribute to the peace-building process on an informal level.

Sierra Leone faced a lengthy and bloody civil war (1991-2002), in which there was tens of thousands of deaths and over two million civilians displaced. The conflict had a disproportionately negative effect on women in the country, with reports that 94% of women had been victims of sexual violence (Womankind, 2014b:3). During the conflict however, women from varying social and economic backgrounds banded together to challenge the military junta, once again closing The Interdependence Gap horizontally across society (Lederach, 1999:407). Although

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historically, Sierra Leone has been shaped by deeply rooted patriarchal traditions which curtail women's freedoms, the women of Sierra Leone used informal peace-building methods to challenge this, creating women's civil society groups that fostered peace. For example, they organised "mothers' clubs that work with teachers to promote school attendance of children, and are also involved in the cleaning and sanitation of the town; 'mothers' globes' that produce and sell palm oil; 'STAR circles' that promote farming in swamps or wetlands; and 'Saturday Clubs' which provide adult literacy classes" (Womenkind, 2014b:5). The formation of these groups created spaces where women could discuss issues surrounding the conflict and advocate for peace, while also working to promote education and women's independence. Once more it is significant that women were prioritising goals which would establish positive peace in their efforts.

The noticeable difference in how men and women perceive peace may go some way into explaining why women are particularly effective in informal peace-building, as it takes place at a local level, and thus addresses issues that women tend to prioritise. Moosa et al (2013:459) recognise the work women can do in peacebuilding processes at this level in their efforts "mediating local disputes, creating safe spaces for women survivors of violence, [and] re-establishing schools for their children". However they postulate that the outcome of their involvement in informal peace-building processes are often over looked, not only by authorities and international actors, but also by women themselves; when asked who contributed to peace in their communities, women would identify government authorities and religious leaders, despite having made considerable contributions to the process themselves (Moosa et al, 2013, 459). Moosa et al (2013:459) suggest that this is in part due to perpetuating gender stereotypes which relegate women to the 'private sphere' where it is "natural" for women to have limited influence, particularly in regard to children, yet their efforts are not considered "threatening" to men within the community. Although there is scope for the significant impact from women in the private sphere in influencing social norms in wider society, clearly there are gender norms and long-established structural inequalities which are limiting women's involvement, particularly if they are unable to recognise their own efforts as peace-builders and understand their own potential to shape the outcomes.

Despite this aforementioned limitation of gender stereotypes which can limit women's inclusion in peace-building at grassroots levels, research has suggested that the women in formal peace negotiations, although few in number, can utilize these stereotypes to be more effective peace-builders. Maoz (2009:521) investigated this phenomena and found that women are widely perceived as "as less assertive, tough and competitive in negotiations and as more cooperative and conciliatory than men", and thus an out-group in a conflict would be more likely to support female proposed peace agreements. Maoz tested this theory, whereby both female and male Palestinian negotiators were rated by Jewish-Israeli respondents, and found that "female opponent negotiators offering the compromise proposal were rated as higher in warmth and trustworthiness and as lower in assertiveness than male opponent negotiators offering the same proposal" (Maoz, 2009:531). Furthermore research by Paffenholz (2015:2), which compared in-depth, 40 peace negotiations and assessed the role of all the actors involved, supports Maoz's study. Paffenholz found that the inclusion of women in peacebuilding has a positive impact on negotiation outcomes, identifying that "of all cases examined, there was only one case where an agreement was not reached in which women exercised strong influence" (2015:2).

Although the role of gender stereotypes is interesting to discuss when considering how the inclusion of women in peace-building affects the processes and outcomes, it is important to remember that these stereotypes are not universally applicable. Firstly it can not be assumed that all women are naturally peaceful nor that they are inherently victims when it comes to conflict, as at times they can play active roles in instigating and perpetuating violence. Strickland and Duvvury (2003:1) recognise this, identifying women as "often powerful agents", whether that is in actively promoting peace-building or promoting violence. Porter (2003:261) argues that women are often particularly involved in promoting conflicts concerned with "national, ethnic, religious, or racial identity". In such cases women may take sides and foster attitudes of hatred and bitterness within the private sphere, often passing these angers on to their children, and in doing so having a direct negative effect on peace-building efforts. Furthermore, to solely regard women as peaceful and nurturing is to perpetuate the gender stereotypes which, as previously discussed, can often keep women from participating in formal peace-building processes. To have a truly gendered perspective of women in peace-building, it is necessary to recognise the diversity of roles women can play across communities. Meintjes, Pillay and Turshen (2001:5) summarise this notion, stating "no woman lives in the single dimension of her

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sex”, and thus we cannot assume sweeping statements about all women.

In a similar vein it is also crucial not to stereotype men as naturally aggressive, authoritarian and violent, but recognise the diverse roles they can play across societies as well. Pankhurst (2000:14) postulates that “social norms about masculinity strongly influence the prevalence of, and tendency towards, the violent expression of conflict in many places”. Thus we should consider that stereotypes are limiting the way men can act both during conflict and in post-conflict peace-building efforts in similar ways that they are restricting women, as these stereotypes are shaping the way we expect individuals to behave. Pankhurst (2000:11) argues that these masculine stereotypes are deeply imbedded in societies across the globe, with “state bureaucracies and security services, and international bodies, all tend[ing] to be structured and function according to norms of masculinity, rather than having a gender neutral culture of their own”. Consequently it is neither surprising that women struggle to be accepted within these institutions, nor that men within them focus on stereotypically masculine goals, such as an overwhelming emphasis on negative peace in peace-building efforts. Therefore, one way to include women in the peace-building processes would be by taking steps to establish a gender neutral culture, which would help remove stereotypes that can be limiting to both men and women.

When discussing these stereotypes, the case study of Guatemala can be considered, as it shows the complexity of the situation. Firstly, it is an example that illustrates that simply including women in peace-building process and directly acknowledging their specific needs, does not automatically lead to sustainable peace. Secondly, it recognises how masculine traditions can be so deeply rooted in a countries culture that despite conscious efforts to overcome them, it is often difficult. Guatemala had been consumed by a protracted conflict spanning 36 years when peace accords, which attempted to implement a gender sensitive approach, were signed in 1996. Women were greatly affected during the conflict in Guatemala, and according to the United Nations Historical Clarification Commission “approximately 50,000 women “disappeared” or [were] extrajudicially executed”, many after being raped and tortured (Beltran and Freeman, 2007:6). Jackson (2007:8) attributes this to deeply-rooted traditions of machismo in Guatemala, where the violent crimes committed against women were used as a form of intimidation to instil fear and control them. The peace accords established in 1996 were ambitious and “contain[ed] more provisions for women’s rights during post-conflict reconstruction” and “goals for greater gender equity” (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003:21). Formal peace-building discussions and agreements had included “high-ranking female URNG officials who galvanized broad-based support from women’s rights groups and were key to getting women’s rights incorporated into Guatemala’s peace accords” (Strickland and Duvvury, 2003:21). However, in the wake of the peace accords, women remained victims of wide-spread sexual violence, which is often attributed to the “state’s failure to bring to justice those responsible for the atrocities perpetrated during the war or to fully implement the commitments regarding women’s rights contained in the Peace Accords” (Beltran and Freeman, 2007:7). Furthermore, a failure to address the root cause of these issues, which had been identified as the culture of machismo within Guatemala, perpetuated a “legacy that continues to foster much of the discrimination and violence that threaten the lives of Guatemalan women today” (Beltran and Freeman, 2007:7). As such the Guatemalan peace accords have been criticised as being “more of an intellectual product than a political compromise” (Luis Pasara, former UN mission advisor, quoted in Strickland and Duvvury, 2003:21), as they were praised for their gendered approach but in practice ultimately failed to address the root causes of the conflict and thus were unsuccessful. Their efforts can be criticised as somewhat superficial, and it would be only with long-term political commitment to the goals identified in the peace accords that seriously addressed structural gender inequalities, that tangible improvements in women’s lives would have been seen. Similar criticisms can be made of Resolution 1325.

Given the case of Guatemala, and the previous examples of Liberia and Sierra Leone, it is evident that the impact that women have on peace-building processes and outcomes is a complex issue. In the case of Liberia women effectively took part in peace-building efforts at both a formal and informal level and successfully established a presence within the political sphere to voice their issues and evoke change. In Sierra Leone, although women were restricted by patriarchal norms they were able to somewhat bypass these and aid in rebuilding their communities through informal grassroots activities, creating their own groups in order to voice concerns and address their needs. In both these cases women focused on positive peace goals, which would lead to community rebuilding in a way that recognized the needs of women and children. The women in Guatemala however were unable to implement methods to tackle the routinized machoism, leaving women as victims of widespread sexual violence both during and after the

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conflict, despite formal efforts which both included women in the process and directly considered women's needs. Therefore, we can conclude that it is not women, per se, who make important differences to peace-building processes and outcome, but instead it is when a gender sensitive perspective, which challenges structural gender inequality is effectively considered. Although the two notions are closely linked, it is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive. Women can not be simply added to the proceedings to meet quotas for the increased inclusion of women, but should instead be effectively utilized. Furthermore, in many cases it may be that including more women in the process will have a positive effect, however to draw such a definitive conclusion would be conforming to the aforementioned male stereotypes of men as aggressive, authoritarian and violent; and will thus, be unable to address peace-building through a gender sensitive lens. We must, instead, transcend established stereotypes of both men and women, and develop within a realm where both sexes are no longer restricted by societal norms and all individuals can offer unique perspectives, which will in turn support and promote the establishment of sustainable peace.

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