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Understanding Women Participation in Humanitarian Interventions and Peace-building: Perspective from the United States of America

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Abstract

In US, government departments and agencies are accountable for the implementation of the policies and initiatives endorsed in this Plan. Above all, this National Action Plan expresses the United States' unqualified commitment to integrating women's views and perspectives fully into our diplomatic, security, and development efforts not simply as beneficiaries, but as agents of peace, reconciliation, development, growth, and stability. In many countries, high levels of violence continue to afflict communities long after wars have officially ceased. Peace accords are too often negotiated only among the small number of armed combatants who originally fought the war groups whose experiences on the battlefield are not easily transferred to the difficult task of building peace. There are plenty of roadblocks on the way to realizing gender awareness in agencies peacetime development activities, but in emergency situations there is, in addition, a strong tendency to say: When the situation is serious you can't afford the time to stop and think about gender issues. Essays in Women and Emergencies (Oxfam Focus on Gender 4) make the case – clearly enough to convince the most skeptical and macho logistics or technical officer that such an attitude is extremely damaging. Recognition of women's needs and a gender-based analysis of an emergency situation are essential starting points if an aid intervention is to be effective in the short term and have positive impacts in long-term development. The goal of the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security remains as simple as it is profound: to empower half the world's population as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, violence, and insecurity. Achieving this goal is critical to our national and global security. There are obvious reasons why women are important to the peace building process. For example, they constitute half of every community and the difficult task of peace building must be done by men and women in partnership. Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. Women have played prominent roles in peace processes in the Horn of Africa such as in Sudan and Burundi, where they have contributed as observers. The United States faces a complex global security environment characterized by instability, conflict, and record levels of

displacement, well-armed non-state actors, and great power competition. The United States' Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) of 2019 focuses on improving the effectiveness of our foreign policy and assistance efforts across the board by proactively integrating the needs and perspectives of women, and empowering women to contribute their talents and energies to international peace, security, and prosperity.

Keywords: *Women, Participation, Peace-building, Humanitarian, Interventions, USA*

1.1 Introduction

There are plenty of roadblocks on the way to realizing gender awareness in agencies peacetime development activities, but in emergency situations there is, in addition, a strong tendency to say: When the situation is serious you can't afford the time to stop and think about gender issues. Essays in *Women and Emergencies* (Oxfam Focus on Gender 4) make the case clearly enough to convince the most skeptical and macho logistics or technical officer that such an attitude is extremely damaging. According to Ciancia (2020), recognition of women's needs and a gender-based analysis of an emergency situation are essential starting points if an aid intervention is to be effective in the short term and have positive impacts in long-term development. An intervention with the modest ambition of meeting women's welfare needs can if carried out through consultation, with women themselves identifying their needs have surprisingly far-reaching impacts (Natil, 2020). Stark, Robinson, Seff, Gillespie, Colarelli and Landis (2021) believe that where no family planning facilities are available, women may refuse to sleep with their husbands resulting in an increase in domestic violence and social tension and in the same camp, failure to provide sanitary towels was found to be a strong contributing factor to the low self-esteem that affects most women in refugee situations, undermining their ability to carry out their family social functions effectively. Another study in the same collection shows the need to provide psycho-social assistance to women victims of sexual and other violence in Burundi, not just because of the individual suffering involved, but for the communities' future (Stark et al., 2021). Because their culture prevents them from talking about their experiences, many women are repressing powerful anger and hatred against the other side. This anger is easily passed on to the next generation and is a barrier to conciliation and political discourse.

The goal of the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security remains as simple as it is profound: to empower half the world's population as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, violence, and insecurity (Basu, Kirby & Shepherd, 2020). Achieving this goal is critical to our national and global security. Deadly conflicts can be more effectively avoided, and peace can be best forged and sustained, when women become equal partners in all aspects of peace building and conflict prevention, when their lives are protected, their voices heard, and their perspectives taken into account. As directed by Executive Order 13595 in 2011 entitled Instituting a "National Action Plan on Women", Peace, and Security, this Plan describes the course the United States Government will continue to take to accelerate, institutionalize, and better coordinate our efforts to advance women's inclusion in peace negotiations, peace building activities, and conflict prevention; to protect women from gender-based violence (GBV); and to ensure equal access to relief and recovery assistance, in areas of conflict and insecurity (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021).

In US, government departments and agencies are accountable for the implementation of the policies and initiatives endorsed in this Plan. Above all, this National Action Plan expresses the

United States' unqualified commitment to integrating women's views and perspectives fully into our diplomatic, security, and development efforts not simply as beneficiaries, but as agents of peace, reconciliation, development, growth, and stability (de Jonge & Brown, 2020). We welcome this opportunity to work with our international partners to make the promise of this commitment real, to advance implementation of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), and to make significant progress toward the goal of sustainable peace and security for all. More than half of all peace agreements fail within five years of signature (UN, 2019). In many countries, high levels of violence continue to afflict communities long after wars have officially ceased. Peace accords are too often negotiated only among the small number of armed combatants who originally fought the war groups whose experiences on the battlefield are not easily transferred to the difficult task of building peace.

As noted in the U.S. National Security Strategy, experience shows that countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women are accorded full and equal rights and opportunity (Biden Jr, 2021). In order to bring about the peace and prosperity we seek, the United States is promoting better understanding and integration of gender issues across all our departments and agencies. The Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) continue to implement reforms initiated through the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review related to support for women and girls abroad in the realms of policy and program development and coordination, budget planning, staff capacity-building, and evaluation and learning (United Nations, 2020). The Department of State's Ambassador at-Large for Global Women's Issues and USAID's Senior Coordinator for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment ensure that the rights and concerns of women and girls remain at the core of U.S. foreign policy. The 2011 National Action Plan and corresponding USAID Implementation Plan (2012) are integral parts of the Agency's architecture for advancing gender equality and female empowerment, serving as USAID's roadmap for promoting the empowerment and protection of women and girls in crisis and conflict situations. National Action Plan implementation has been supported by USAID's adoption of a comprehensive Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy (2021) with a clear set of requirements and responsibilities for gender integration, including mandatory gender analysis for country-level strategies and project-level design, and basic gender training for all Agency staff involved with programming.

The voices and concerns of women who endured violence and supported communities during conflict, and who will carry much of the burden of healing and rebuilding communities in peacetime, are routinely absent from or overlooked at the negotiating table (McCaskill, 2021). This exclusion often carries over into related post-conflict efforts to rebuild, to strengthen peace through security sector reform, and to redress past grievances and abuses. Peace agreements that focus solely on ending the fighting fail to address the vital tasks necessary for sustaining a genuine peace, including: providing security and basic services, reintegrating combatants into society, building trust amongst opposing parties, fostering institutions that can uphold the rule of law, and promoting legitimately-elected leadership (Cohn & Duncanson, 2020). Evidence from around the world and across cultures shows that integrating women's leadership and gender considerations into peace building processes helps promote democratic governance and long-term stability. Research also shows that the quality of women's participation in these processes is critical (Farahi & Guggenheim, 2020). Women must play meaningful and active roles, including as leaders, in building and participating in the full range of decision-making institutions in their countries. These

institutions, from civil society to the judicial and security sectors, must also be responsive to and informed by women's demands.

The Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance's (DCHA) Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) supports activities in the Republic of Yemen that provide critical support to survivors of GBV and other women and girls at risk of abuse, violence, exploitation, or other forms of discrimination (Hursh, 2020). In Yemen, it is particularly difficult to provide programming for women and girls and GBV survivors. However, by implementing a unique program design, our partners can serve GBV survivors and others at risk of violence through women- and girl-focused community centers (Hursh, 2020). Women, girls, and other vulnerable populations within the community now have access to case-management services, individual psychosocial support, legal services, and referrals for specialized medical care. Life skills, women's empowerment, and livelihoods activities are also available to enhance the survivors' self-reliance and reintegration within their communities. DCHA/OFDA is strengthening coordination among organizations that provide similar services by establishing and defining standard referral pathways to improve access to assistance and support for GBV-affected women and girls and their families (Warsame, Murray, Gimma & Checchi, 2020).

Conflict and natural disasters exacerbate the vulnerability of individuals to GBV, particularly women and girls, who are also frequently excluded from life-saving care and under-represented in relief and recovery planning in their communities; it is critical to ensure that these issues are an integral part of disaster-response strategies and programming (Desai & Mandal, 2020). USAID will continue to prioritize life-saving activities to prevent and respond to GBV activities in its humanitarian-assistance programs through interventions such as psychosocial support, case-management, safety planning, women and girls' safe spaces, and health care for GBV survivors and those most at risk of GBV. USAID will also fund humanitarian-assistance activities designed to meet the needs of women and girls and to support their meaningful participation in decision-making related to relief and recovery (DCHA, 2020).

There are obvious reasons why women are important to the peace building process; for example, they constitute half of every community and the difficult task of peace building must be done by men and women in partnership (Wallenstein, 2021). Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. US women have played prominent roles in peace processes in the Horn of Africa such as in Sudan and Burundi, where they have contributed as observers (Tavares, 2021). However, efforts to foreground the perspectives of women in peace processes and to prevent gender-based violence have met with limited success. Women's participation in conflict resolution and peace building is limited by a number of factors, including: The prevalence of rape and sexual assault, as in Bosnia and Kashmir. This form of abuse generates fear and helps to silence campaigns for social, economic and political rights. Women are most likely to have fled conflict, and take on responsibilities such as primary carers and providers for dependents, which makes participation in peace building more difficult. Cultural pressures against women putting themselves forward that pressure women to refrain from travel, and not to engage in important public arenas. Where women do participate, they may not have the required education or training (Kamminga, Boswinkel & Göth, 2020).

The report analyses the needs of women and girls in post-conflict situations; identifies the challenges to women's participation in preventing, resolving and recovering from conflict; and

specifies national and international measures aimed at ensuring that women's priorities are addressed, their right to full participation is realized, a gender perspective is applied to peace building, and all public actions are consistent with States' international human rights obligations (Yayboke & Abdullah, 2020). Evidence indicates that women participants in peace processes are usually focused less on the spoils of the war and more on reconciliation, economic development, education and transitional justice all critical elements of a sustained peace. The inclusion of women can and must take many forms, especially in the effort to address rising global violent conflict that since the end of the Cold War has occurred within states, with armed insurgencies or civil wars tearing countries apart. The end to these conflicts cannot be forged through only a top down peace process, with only armed actors at the negotiating table (Yayboke & Abdullah, 2020). Instead, it requires a more inclusive process one that includes women playing more pivotal roles in building a peace from the bottom up as well as from the top down, engaging multiple stakeholders. Parties must come together not just in the capital city but also at the local level where communities are confronted with a host of critical issues that left unaddressed could unravel any peace deal.

2.1 Women and Humanitarian Interventions

Disasters kill more women than men, and hit women's livelihoods hardest. According to UN reports, 60 per cent of all maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings and all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls spike during disasters and conflict. Experience and research show that when women are included in humanitarian action, the entire community benefits (Mahmood, 2020). Despite this, women and girls are often excluded from decision-making processes that shape the response strategies that affect their ability and that of their community to recover from crisis. Women must be included in decision-making about the forms of assistance, means of delivery, and the provision of the protection and economic and social empowerment opportunities they need so they can be agents of change. At the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) in Istanbul from 23-24 May, UN Women is leading preparations for the High-Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls: Catalyzing Action to Achieve Gender Equality. It will be one of seven roundtables at which leaders from Member States, the UN and multilateral actors, and civil society will come together to endorse commitments to improve humanitarian action worldwide (Mahmood, 2020).

It is estimated that over 40% of the half a million humanitarian workers who provide frontline care during emergencies, wars and disasters, are women (Patel, Meagher, El Achi, Ekzayez, Sullivan & Bowsher, 2020). Women are at the forefront of improving health for conflict-affected populations through service delivery, education and capacity strengthening, advocacy and research. Women are also disproportionately affected by conflict and humanitarian emergencies. The growing evidence base demonstrating excess female morbidity and mortality reflects the necessity of evaluating the role of women in leadership driving health research, policy and programmatic interventions in conflict-related humanitarian contexts (Patel, et al., 2020). Despite global commitments to improving gender equality, the issue of women leaders in conflict and humanitarian health has been given little or no attention. The World Humanitarian Day on 19 August 2019 was dedicated to women, reflecting the growing global momentum on gender equality and equity.

Marking the tenth anniversary of the occasion, the United Nations (UN) and several leading humanitarian organizations honored the contribution of women humanitarian aid workers who provide life-saving support to millions of people caught in crises in some of the world's most

dangerous places (Nafey, 2021). It is estimated that over 40% of the half a million humanitarian workers, who provide frontline care during emergencies, wars and disasters, are women. Women are also increasingly at the forefront of improving health for conflict-affected populations through service delivery, education and capacity strengthening, advocacy, and research (Nafey, 2021). They have made important contributions to strengthening health systems, improving evidence and humanitarian interventions as well as in documenting human rights abuses, highlighting the detrimental health outcomes of marginalized groups, and bringing vital knowledge and intervention gaps to global attention.

In 2000, a landmark United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC 1325) on Women, Peace and Security, demanded greater representation and participation of women at all societal levels. More recently, the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, the first Women Leaders in Global Health (WLGH) conference at Stanford University in October 2017, and follow-up conferences in November 2018 and 2019 on the same theme at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the University of Global Equity in Rwanda, addressed the significant barriers faced by women in global health, including in the conflict and humanitarian sphere. In an era of protracted conflicts, the role and contribution of women within the conflict and humanitarian health domain has become increasingly important to understand and subsequently address the divergent needs of conflict-affected populations. However, women's leadership within this domain has not attracted the same high-level attention as that of global health more broadly (Lyytikäinen & Yadav, 2021).

The Women Deliver Humanitarian Advocates Program provides direct support to women-focused civil society organizations, as women are often overlooked leaders during emergencies and in their aftermath (Tamang, 2020). We strengthen their voices through training and speaking opportunities, connecting them to the global and national conversations that affect their work and lives. Multiple protracted crises, increasing numbers of intra-state conflicts, record levels of forced displacement global economic uncertainty, rising inequality, and increasing challenges caused by climate change threaten the lives and well-being of billions around the world. Exacerbating these threats are new forms of extremism, xenophobia, intolerance, and isolationism, which themselves threaten to erode international human rights and humanitarian standards and law. These laws and standards have afforded, for 71 years, unprecedented protection of individuals, stability within and between states, and advancements in human, social and economic well-being (Kirby & Shepherd, 2021).

It is essential that humanitarian actors acknowledge women's and girls' roles as first responders and agents of change, as well as the best representatives of their needs in humanitarian crises (Manlutac, 2021). Whether women and girls have organized themselves into a women-, youth- or girl-led group, or they come forward through a community initiative, women and girls need to be consulted and their voices, specific needs and hopes need to be heard. Particular effort should be made to reach marginalized women and girls, including women with disabilities, indigenous women, elderly women, and women of diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, engaging them as active partners, and building on their needs and capacities (Manlutac, 2021). Governments, donors, UN agencies, humanitarian organizations, and national and local actors can play key roles in communicating the value of women-led partnerships and pushing for systematic and meaningful approaches for promoting women's and girls' voice and leadership in coordination and decision-making processes through all phases of every humanitarian response. Donors must also hold international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies accountable for the

quality and inclusivity of partnerships and collaboration with women's and girls' rights actors by Humanitarian Coordinators, Humanitarian Country Teams (HCTs), clusters, sector working groups, Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNO), and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRP).

Supporting a woman's right to make decisions about her own body is the focus of this legal consortium, which has had impact on local and international laws. They've had influence over reproductive health policies in Asia, Africa, and the U.S., and helped shed light on an oppressive abortion ban in El Salvador that's led to women being jailed for stillbirths (Linton, 2020). Their efforts on behalf of "Las 17," 17 Salvadoran women accused of having abortions, has seen several women released from prison; the efforts are ongoing. For too long, the needs of women have gone overlooked by the humanitarian system, and their leadership and voices have been ignored. Women leaders all over the world are taking action. The Feminist Humanitarian Network is an international network of women leaders committed to a transformed humanitarian system that promotes a feminist humanitarian agenda (Lopez, 2020).

3.1 Women and Peace-building

In 2015, U.S. Institute of Peace launched a project in Colombia to support a network of women peace builders and women-led organizations committed to nonviolence and mediation (Benitez, 2020). With members that spanned every sector of society, this network complemented the formal peace process as it got underway. Women's groups negotiated local ceasefires with armed groups and won the release of hostages. They pressured insurgents to lift roadblocks and documented human rights violations. They protested budget priorities of local governments and sought solutions to drug trafficking and other illegal activity. Some of these women were invited to the negotiating table for the Colombia peace talks in Havana. One third of the table participants were in fact women. Among other roles they were instrumental in ensuring that the concerns of the war's victims were reflected in the reconciliation and accountability mechanisms in the final agreement.

In early October of 2020, the U.S. Congress passed with bipartisan support the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, sponsored by Senator Jeanne Shaheen, that instructs the US government to develop a comprehensive strategy to increase and strengthen women's participation in all aspects of peace negotiations and conflict prevention, working with international partners (White House, 2020). The bill notes the important role that women play in sustaining peace, especially in fragile environments. Systematic and representative inclusion of women in a broad range of peace and security issues is not only important to ensuring a successful negotiation, but also for ensuring that women's interests are being addressed. Professor Valerie Hudson at Texas A&M University has used quantitative analysis to demonstrate that the security of women is integrally linked to the security of the nations in which they live. And security is linked to the ability of women to sustain peace through leadership roles and to build peace by being fully at the table. Gender equality is a stronger indicator of a state's peacefulness than other indicators, such as GDP.

A society cannot be considered peaceful when certain groups within it experience targeted and ongoing forms of violence and discrimination. Despite this recognized importance of inclusivity, gender and sexual minorities (GSM) remain largely invisible in peace building. Even in the international Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which has become a significant entry point for addressing gender dynamics in peace building, GSM rights, protection and participation are also inadequately addressed (Cárdenas & Olivius, 2021). The absence of established norms for and approaches to GSM inclusion means that it is incumbent on peace builders to think more

intentionally about why and how GSM can be included. Every day, women around the world are leading movements to create enduring, peaceful societies. It's time to recognize the invaluable but often overlooked role that women play in ending and preventing conflict. USIP's Women Building Peace Award honors the inspiring work of women peace builders whose courage, leadership, and commitment to peace stand out as beacons of strength and hope (Cárdenas & Olivius, 2021).

USIP's Women Building Peace Award represents the Institute's commitment to highlighting the vital role of individual women who are working every day in the pursuit of peace in fragile or conflict-affected countries or regions. The award honors a woman peace builder whose substantial and practical contribution to peace is an inspiration and guiding light for future women peace builders. The award recipient received \$10,000 to be used at the recipient's discretion. She was recognized at a ceremony organized by USIP in Washington, D.C. Women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution can improve outcomes before, during, and after conflict. But women are often excluded from formal peace processes. Between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average, 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in major peace processes around the world (United Nations, 2020). While there has been some progress in women's participation, about seven out of every ten peace processes still did not include women mediators or women signatories the latter indicating that few women participated in leadership roles as negotiators, guarantors, or witnesses.

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendation

Recognition of women's needs and a gender-based analysis of an emergency situation are essential starting points if an aid intervention is to be effective in the short term and have positive impacts in long-term development. The goal of the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security remains as simple as it is profound: to empower half the world's population as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace in countries threatened and affected by war, violence, and insecurity. Achieving this goal is critical to our national and global security. There are obvious reasons why women are important to the peace building process. For example, they constitute half of every community and the difficult task of peace building must be done by men and women in partnership. Women are also the central caretakers of families and everyone is affected when they are excluded from peace building. Women are also advocates for peace, as peacekeepers, relief workers and mediators. Women have played prominent roles in peace processes in the Horn of Africa such as in Sudan and Burundi, where they have contributed as observers. Transitional justice mechanisms are increasingly responding to war crimes against women with specific arrangements to protect women witnesses. Post-conflict needs assessments, post-conflict planning processes and financing frameworks have in some cases acknowledged the need to put women's participation and concerns at the center of recovery. While these changes have been critical, much more remains to be done.

In collaboration with partners, UN Women is currently supporting implementation of women, peace and security commitments in at least 37 countries. This includes support for strengthening women's peace coalitions and to help prepare them for engagement in peace processes; work with peacekeepers to help detect and prevent conflict-related sexual violence; support to build justice and security institutions that protect women and girls from violence and discrimination; and initiatives to promote public services that respond to women's needs, ensure women's access to economic opportunities, and build women's engagement in public decision-making at national and local levels. Although the inclusion of women in peace building processes has gained momentum

in policy discussions over the last 15 years, the number of women in decision-making positions remains relatively small. Peace building is the foundation for creating sustainable human security and equitable development in countries emerging from conflict. UNSC resolution 1325 recognizes that women are disproportionately affected by conflict, and to address this, women should play a key role in achieving lasting peace after conflict. A major challenge is that women are often not perceived to have the skills, knowledge or social status needed to bring about change in post-conflict environments. Changing this requires a mind-shift by negotiators and mediators on how they view the role of women. The integration of women in key post-conflict processes can take various forms.

By being included in prevention and response strategies, women can play an active role towards sustainable peace. A start would be to engage with women at the very beginning of peace processes. Studies have shown that gender mainstreaming can only be effective when accompanied by strong empowerment structures – where women have greater voices in the public sphere, and resources are allocated to human development priorities. But, allocations to peace building projects with the objective of addressing women’s specific needs and advancing gender equality or empowering women remain below the 15% target of UN-managed funds as envisioned by the Secretary-General. In Asia, resolution 1325 implementation strategies should be geared towards the development of national action plans that include more women in peace processes

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