



AUGUST 2015

Gender and Peace Negotiations

Why gendering peace negotiations multiplies opportunities for reconciliation

This policy brief argues that the inclusion of women and of gender issues in peace negotiations is key to the success of any subsequent process of reconciliation, because it is likely to lead to more encompassing and inclusive peace agreements. Involving female negotiators can also possibly help to prevent a relapse into conflict, by giving a voice to players with a significant experience and expertise in peacebuilding at the local level, like some women's organisations, which are usually excluded from the political and security fields.

Recent initiatives spearheaded by the UN, like the publication in 2014 of *Guidelines for Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements*, signal an increased international interest in the issue. This policy brief explores the reasons why gender has so far been largely neglected in peace processes, and proposes strategies for increasing the gender-sensitivity of peace negotiations.

1 Introduction

Research as well as fieldwork observation have long established the multiple inter-sections between gender and conflicts. Conflict-related policies such as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, which addresses the impact of war on women, and the key role women should play in conflict management and resolution, have further signaled the importance given by the international community to gender issues in conflict settings.

With regard to peace negotiations, past research has mostly focused on how the inclusion of women in peace negotiations or mediation strategies has an impact

on the outcome of such processes, and research has shown that the presence of women in negotiation settings is likely to increase the chances of reaching an agreement (see for instance Maoz, 2009). The benefits of including gender issues in the negotiation process have, however, received considerably less attention.

This policy brief argues that the inclusion of gender issues in peace negotiations, and of women as negotiators, is key to the success of any subsequent process of reconciliation, insofar as it helps to deal more efficiently with all the consequences of conflict, beyond the political and military ones. The nature of contemporary conflicts, targeting civilian populations and especially women through

sexual violence or displacement, renders the “gendering” of peace negotiations, via the use of a gender sensitive approach and the inclusion of women as negotiators, key to the stabilisation of post-conflict societies, and to the ushering of genuine reconciliation processes. Involving female negotiators is also likely to help preventing a relapse into conflict, by giving a voice to players with a significant experience and expertise in peacebuilding at the local level, like some women’s organisations, which are usually excluded from the political and security fields.

2 Women, Gender and Peace Negotiations: A long history of exclusion

One of the most striking features of past as well as current peace negotiations is their gender unbalance, characterised by an over-representation of men, and the almost total absence, of women. For instance, no women participated in the Dayton negotiations that ended the war in Bosnia, in spite of the fact that women had paid a heavy toll during that conflict. According to UNWOMEN (2011: 3), of 31 major peace processes between 1992 and 2011 only 4 percent of signatories, 2,4 percent of chief mediators, 3,7 percent of witnesses and 9 percent of negotiators were women. What is more, very few women have so far been appointed Chief or Lead peace mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks. It is therefore not very surprising that the roles of women are often not mentioned at all in peace agreements. A study conducted by Bell and Rourke (2010: 947) showed that only 16 percent (92 out of 585) of peace agreements signed since 1990 contain references to women, but that the number of references to women has increased significantly since the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000, from 11 percent in the 1990 decade, to 27 percent in the 2000 decade.

When women are mentioned, it is most of the time to refer to gender equality, only in very general terms, and sometimes in the annexes of the agreements. Even when gender equality is mentioned, provisions

for enforcing it, like quotas or other mechanisms, are most of the time missing.

Agreements become even more elusive when it comes to address the gendered dimensions of conflict and violence. Despite the fact that, for instance, sexual violence against both women and men, has long been recognised as a major characteristic of most contemporary conflicts¹ out of 300 peace agreements for 45 conflict situations in the 1990 and 2000 decades, only 18 have addressed sexual violence – in 10 conflict situations: Aceh, Burundi, Chiapas, DRC, Guatemala, Nepal, Sudan/Darfur, Sudan/Nuba Mountains, Philippines and Uganda. Attitudes seem to be slowly changing, though. According to a UN report², of the 13 peace agreements signed in 2013, 7 (54 percent) included references to women and peace and security, compared with 3 of 10 in 2012 (30 percent).

3 Why so oblivious?

The explanations for such neglect are numerous: negotiations are often held in urgency, and therefore tend to gather the main military and political leaders, mostly males. Also, many believe that peace processes are “gender neutral”, in the sense that peace benefits all, men and women alike – overlooking the fact that just like conflict, peace is gendered³. Women themselves are sometimes depicted as their own “enemies”, as many seem to self-exclude from negotiations, believing that men are

-
- 1 This is not to say, of course, that sexual violence does not happen in peacetime as well, but that it has been shown to be used as a tactic of subjugation and ethnic cleansing by some conflict actors.
 - 2 UN Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security, 23 September 2014: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2014/693 (Accessed March 23, 2015).
 - 3 For instance, it has been shown that men and women are often involved in peace activities in different ways, and that the ways they perceive their security needs differ (see for instance Hoogensen and Rottem, 2004).

more competent and knowledgeable on security and political matters.

But if women are often not invited to participate in peace negotiations, and if gender-related issues are ignored, it is also because conflicts are still understood as politico-military events, and are addressed in a very top-down manner: those who are seen as legitimate participants in peace negotiations belong mostly to the military and political spheres. Such a conception ignores the fact that conflicts impact in multiple ways on the rest of the society too. Although there is a wide consensus on the fact that contemporary conflicts cannot be solved via official channels only, the old “interstate” tools somehow still frame our views of how negotiations should be held.

Other factors, pertaining to the organisation and functioning of women’s groups, explain why their voices are often muted. There are sometimes tensions within or between women’s organisations, between those whose first and main aim is to promote gender equality, and those who think that this objective can wait until peace is won. Of course there is in principle no contradiction between these two objectives, but in the sensitive context of peace negotiations, the way objectives are framed, and priorities set, can rapidly become very contentious.

Another challenge facing women’s organisations is that of representativeness. In a conflict context, very few groups have the opportunity to build a broad-based support, beside the legitimacy acquired via their involvement in grassroots activities. Which sections of the population can they then claim to legitimately represent? The participation of women in peace negotiations – when in some traditional societies they are not even allowed to speak in public – is sometimes so at odds with local cultural realities that it can generate strong opposition from the most traditional sections of the population, including women. Sometimes, hate campaigns are staged and spearheaded by other women, who see the participation of women in peace negotiations as a violation of customs and traditions.

4 How Women Contribute to Peace Negotiations

There is a wealth of stereotypes or assumptions regarding the supposedly more “peaceful nature” of women, or the fact that women would be more compromising and less supportive of violence and war than men. For instance, many argue that women have a more relational view of others, or that they are more likely to use dialogue to solve problems. Women are said to have specific assets in peace negotiations, which favour a better negotiating atmosphere, such as a tendency to define themselves through their relations, which they seek to maintain and protect during negotiations. It has also been argued that contrary to men, women do not focus on end gains, but rather on processes, and thus favour exchanges conducive to a friendly negotiation setting. Some other authors support the “women and peace hypothesis”, namely the fact that “the very stereotype portraying women as more peace oriented than men – regardless of its validity – may grant women with an increased capability of waging or promoting peace, through their higher ability to elicit support for peace proposals” (Maoz: 520).

Beyond all these essentialist arguments, which may not be valid across different cultures, including women in peace negotiations is first and foremost a question of fairness and of representativeness of post-conflict populations. In post-conflict Burundi, Rwanda, or in Eastern DRC, for instance, because so many men have been killed or displaced, in some rural areas women make up almost two thirds of the population. These women not only have specific needs that have to be taken care of, but they also play a key role in the stabilisation and reconstruction of post-conflict societies. Thanks to the thousands of local organisations and initiatives in which they are active, women living in conflict and post-conflict countries have often accumulated an expertise in dealing with key post-conflict issues, for instance the fight against HIV, the reintegration of returnees or of former combatants, or the setting up of micro-credit schemes for reconstruction

purposes. Harnessing and building on this expertise seems to be a matter of good sense if one intends to heal the scars left by years and sometimes decades of conflict. Involving women's organisations in peace negotiations is thus a way to strengthen the post-conflict capacities to deal with most consequences of violence, and not simply the security-related or political ones.

To this date however, it remains difficult for women participating in peace negotiations to have a real impact on the agenda, to bring up other issues, and to provide alternative perspectives on traditional items. Because they still lack credibility on most security-related issues, women are mostly listened to on "feminine" issues, like gender-based violence, HIV, orphans, widows or other family matters. However they sometimes manage to have a real impact on the negotiations agenda, as was shown during the negotiations held in Arusha over the Burundian conflict, during which the CAFOB, a group of women's associations, successfully lobbied for the mainstreaming of gender issues in various sections of the agreement, like the ones related to the post-transition constitution or to the resettlement of refugees.

5 Unfolding Alternative Narratives of Conflicts

One of the most striking features of peace negotiations is that conflicts are almost always seen and told from the perspective of (male) combatants, in terms of numbers of casualties, of territories gained or lost, of "securitised" or lost positions, and so on. Against this backdrop, women's experience of conflict, like that of most civilians, centres around displacement, random killings and/or systematic ethnic cleansing, gender based violence, epidemics, kidnapping, forced enrolment, extreme difficulties in finding food and shelter, and so on. Encouraging the participation of women favours the inclusion of issues that otherwise might be left aside, especially gender-related ones (UNWOMEN: 4), and thus increase the inclusive, encompassing and sustainable nature of peace agreements.

The international community has recently started to put in place procedures designed to help mediators and negotiators to address the gendered dimensions of conflicts, like sexual violence. Guidelines for addressing sexual violence in peace agreements and ceasefires were for instance published in 2012 and in 2014 by the UN Department of Political Affairs⁴, and distributed to all UN mediators and mission chiefs. However, the international community is also very much aware of the fact that such steps will prove insufficient unless advisers on gender issues are part of the negotiating and mediating teams, and unless women are invited, by international agencies themselves or by national policy makers, to take key mediating or negotiating positions.

6 Challenging Warmongers

"Gendering peace processes" by inviting more women to participate in peace negotiations, and by putting gender related issues on the agenda, also helps to open up the range of participants in the negotiations, and to question the leadership position of those who have conducted the war. During the above mentioned negotiations that led to the Arusha Peace Agreements in 2000 for instance, the Burundian women's organisations which had been granted the status of observers carefully chose their delegates so that they would include not just politically active women, but also representatives of civil society organisations, of the rural areas of the country, and of the Burundian diaspora. They also organised regular information sessions in all Burundian provinces, to keep the population, especially in the rural areas, updated about the negotiation process, but also to gather suggestions and proposals to be included in the peace agreements.

Granting access to negotiations to women, but also to various civil society actors representing deprived sections of the population, or to people who have

4 http://www.un.org/wcm/content/site/undpa/main/issues/sexual_violence (Accessed 23 March 2015)

been targeted by specific forms of violence, makes sure that responsibility for the post conflict period is not put only within the hands of those, political as well as military leaders, who were responsible for its eruption in the first place. It also means changing the meaning of negotiation itself, and acknowledging that when peace negotiations take place, they determine not just who will gain or lose what, but also the kind of society that will emerge in the post conflict period.

7 Strategies for Gendering Peace Negotiations

Because it enhances the comprehensiveness of peace agreements, because it brings in new participants, thus increasing a sense of ownership, and because it strives for a more equal society, the strategy of “gendering peace processes” has the potential to strengthen the opportunities for post-conflict stabilisation and reconciliation. Considering the features of contemporary conflicts, which entail highly gendered patterns, the question should not be: why should peace negotiations be gender-sensitive, but rather, why are we not pushing more in that direction?

Many obstacles and challenges stand in the way of such a “gendering” of peace processes, though. Women, when denied the right to participate in, or even just to listen to the negotiations that were going on, have thus learned to rely on, and to develop, creative tactics. First and foremost, they have often used the support and legitimacy increasingly granted by the international community and sometimes also by international teams of negotiators.

Women have lobbied in corridors, on tarmacs, they have passed on their proposals through door slits, and so on. They have also implemented a common front strategy in order to participate in negotiations, like for instance the “sixth clan” in Somalia, created in 2000 and including women from each of the five

male-dominated traditional Somalian clans. Other deployed strategies include the organisation of parallel negotiation processes or conferences, like in 2000 in Aceh where women organised the first All Acehnese Women’s Congress. Women’s movements have also used the legitimacy that they have acquired at the grassroots or in the streets for staging demonstrations and events advocating for the discussion of some specific issues.

In order to help overcome the numerous obstacles still standing in the way of a gendering of peace negotiations, a few policy recommendations can be listed:

- Systematically push for the inclusion of advisers on gender issues in negotiating and mediating teams, and of women at key mediating or negotiating positions;
- Compile per-country lists of organisations focusing on conflict-related gender issues, which could then be invited at peace talks;
- Rather than trying to follow a strict criterion of representativeness, ensure that women involved enhance the representation, participation and inclusion of all sections of the population; in particular, systematically invite representatives of women’s civil society organisations to participate in peace talks;
- Enhance the diffusion of the various UN policies in that field, like the DPA Guidelines for addressing sexual violence in peace agreements and ceasefire, and build advocacy strategies on the 3rd Millennium Development Goal (“Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women”);
- Develop women’s negotiating and mediation skills by offering a training to women’s organisations tailored to the specificities of each local context;
- Mainstream in post conflict programming the expertise accumulated by women’s organisations during the conflict, for instance with regards to the fight against HIV, the reintegration of returnees or of former combatants, or the setting up of micro-credit schemes for reconstruction purposes.

References

- BELL Christine, O'ROURKE Catherine, "Peace Agreements or Piece of Paper? The Impact of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and their Agreements", *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 2010, 59(4): 941-980.
- HOOGENSEN Gunhild, ROTTEM Svein Vigeland, "Gender Identity and the Subject of Security", *Security Dialogue*, 2004, 35: 155-171.
- MAOZ Ifat, "The Women and Peace Hypothesis? The Effect of Opponent Negotiators' Gender on the Evaluation of the Compromise Solutions in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", *International Negotiation*, 14, 2009: 519-536.
- UNWOMEN, *Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence*, Second Edition, October 2012.

About PIN

The Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' is a think tank and diplomatic academy on international affairs. The Processes of International Negotiation (PIN) Program is a Clingendael project. The PIN Program is a non-profit group of scholars and practitioners that encourages and organises research on a broad spectrum of topics related to international negotiation seen as a process. Its objectives include the dissemination of new knowledge about negotiation as widely as possible, and developing networks of scholars and practitioners interested in the subject, for the purpose of improving analysis and practice of negotiation worldwide.

<http://www.pin-negotiation.org/>

About the author

Élise Féron is a university researcher at the Tampere Peace Research Institute and is Member of the PIN Network.