



From the ground up

Women's roles in local peacebuilding
in Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal,
Pakistan and Sierra Leone

act:onaid

IDS Institute of
Development Studies

WOMANKIND
WORLDWIDE EQUAL RESPECTED PROUD

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The views expressed in this report are the responsibility of the authors alone, as well as all errors and omissions.

Cover image: Young women at an ActionAid rally in Nepal dance to a song encouraging women to challenge gender-based violence

Brian Sokol/ActionAid

The photographs used in this report are for illustrative purposes only and do not depict any women who participated in this research, unless explicitly specified

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Acronyms

ADF	Awam Dost Foundation
AWID	The Association for Women's Rights in Development
AWRC	Afghan Women's Resource Centre
BCD	Boat for Community Development
CDC	Community Development Council
COME-SL	Community Organisation for Mobilisation and Empowerment – Sierra Leone
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
FEDO	Feminist Dalit Organisation
FGDs	Focus group discussions
GLCS	Graceland Counselling Services
LIWOMAC	Liberia Women Media Action Committee
LWI	Liberian Women's Initiative
MAM	Mahila Adhikar Manch
MARWOPNET	Mano River Union Women for Peace Network
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, Sierra Leone
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PAT	Paiman Alumni Trust
PEAD	Peace Education and Development Foundation
SEED	Society for Environmental Education Development
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
VAW	Violence against women
WAPPDCA	Women's Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and Constituent Assembly
WAVES	Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society
WHR	Women for Human Rights
ZWUC	Zwedru Women United for Change

Foreword



This important report showcases the voices and work of a large but forgotten group of women - those working locally, wherever they are, to rebuild society after war and lead their communities to peace.

From Nepal to Liberia, from Pakistan to Sierra Leone and Afghanistan, a common thread of peace pulls women together, and compels them to act at local level for a just and equal future.

The experiences of women in Nepal mirror those of our sisters across the world. Despite their contribution and rich experiences in building peace, women have been left out of peace negotiations and sidelined from decisions about the future of our country and communities. The barriers against women's participation persist - patriarchal attitudes, lack of security, lack of access to justice and support mechanisms. Continued violence against women, as well as the failure to address abuses committed during conflict, are key factors underlying a feeling of injustice and tension in local communities.

Yet, against the odds, women overcome these and bravely step out into view to demand change. In Nepal during the drafting of the National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, local women put aside their ethnic and political differences, and instead focused on the root causes of the conflict, and how they could tackle the associated grievances and discrimination. Women at local level, often previously confined to a domestic role within the home, have found strength in each other as they publicly demand justice and inclusion.

Against this backdrop I'm proud to introduce this report, and make a plea to the international community to put women at the heart of peace. Learning from and supporting the work of women's organisations, who are at the frontline of building peace at local level, is a crucial part of a future where peace can prosper, not for just half the population, but for everyone.

Bandana Rana,

Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

“Supporting the work of women's organisations... at the frontline of building peace at local level, is a crucial part of a future where peace can prosper”

Executive summary

“Peace means different things to women and men because of their unique experiences as a result of the war, and as a result of how society is structured”

“For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.”¹

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. This study 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 and examining how women, supported by women’s rights organisations, are building peace in their communities.

The research found many contextual differences between the communities and countries visited, including the degree of displacement and mobility restrictions as a result of conflict as well as differing levels of external involvement in peace processes and post-conflict recovery. However, it also uncovered important commonalities across the countries which provide clear guidance on how women’s rights and their peacebuilding efforts can be supported in conflict-affected communities.

The meaning of peace

“Peace means different things to women and men because of their unique experiences as a result of the war, and as a result of 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.”

– Estella Nelson, Founder and President of Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC)

This research found that women are more likely than men to adopt a broad definition of peace which includes the household level and focuses on the attainment of individual rights and freedoms such as education, healthcare and freedom from violence. In contrast, men have a greater tendency to associate peace with the absence of formal conflict and the stability of formal structures such as governance and infrastructure.

Barriers to women’s participation in peacebuilding

“We hear that we don’t have women who are sufficiently educated to take part in peacebuilding. Yet we see men taking part who are neither educated nor care about peace. Women don’t need to be educated to know how war affects them, and to know what they want from peace.”

– Selay Ghaffar, Director of Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan (HAWCA)

This research has revealed that women face multiple barriers as they attempt to build peace in their communities including the following:

- a) Restrictive social norms and attitudes** that reinforce traditional gender roles, making it difficult for women to participate safely and meaningfully in peacebuilding.
- b) Violence against women and girls**, fuelled by the long-term impact of conflict and militarisation, impacts on women’s freedom to participate in peacebuilding activities. Women face intimidation and threats to their safety when they try to take active roles

1. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Open Session of the UN Security Council Debate on Women, Peace and Security, New York, 24 October 2000.

“Women have many skills in conflict resolution and peacebuilding that do not necessarily require high levels of education”

in their communities. Access to justice also remains a significant challenge for survivors of violence against women and girls.

c) Poverty and economic inequality also inhibits women’s involvement in peacebuilding activities. Women report that they are unable to engage in peacebuilding activities because of the double burden of their domestic roles and income-generation activities as well as a lack of control over household income.

“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, Liberia

d) Inequality in access to education for women and resulting low levels of literacy were identified in many communities as barriers to women’s active participation in peacebuilding. However, it was also noted that women have many skills in conflict resolution and peacebuilding that do not necessarily require high levels of education.

e) Women often de-value their role as peacebuilders, and despite their achievements, women do not necessarily recognise the important role they play in building peace. They tend to focus much more on the importance of state institutions and local leaders as the key actors in peacebuilding.

f) Sustainability of support: organisations working to support women in peacebuilding activities also face barriers which impact on the sustainability of their work, including limited and short-term funding and the challenges posed by a lack of national infrastructure and lack of access to remote communities.

Women building peace

The skills of women as mediators, decision makers within the home and their experiences building trust and dialogue in their families and communities are frequently dismissed as irrelevant or are not

sufficiently valued by national governments, the international community or by women themselves. Yet this research demonstrates that at the local level, women continue to build peace within their homes and communities and to come together collectively to create change.

Many researchers have shown that peace starts with families, the way men and women relate to each other, and how children are educated.² In this study, women describe the importance of their role in building peace within their own families. Women’s role in conflict mediation, building trust and dialogue, educating children and counselling family members not to engage in violence are common themes across communities. Significantly, women’s conflict mediation in the domestic sphere is also recognised by male members of the community.

“Most of the women try to dissuade their male relatives from taking part in violent action and provocative activities. They effectively solve family disputes.”

– Male focus group, Pakistan

A key characteristic of women’s involvement in peacebuilding across the study countries is that women and girls organise themselves collectively to achieve change. Some of the most important advances in women’s rights – including for example UNSCR 1325,³ various legal reforms in all countries that expand women’s rights, and institutions such as UN Women – have been secured through the efforts of international and national women’s movements. This research has revealed that women’s peacebuilding efforts at the local level are no different.

“In a patriarchal society, it is extremely difficult for women to be heard, so it is important that women come together. Unless they act together, no one is going to hear them. They find security and strength in each others’ experiences.”

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

Across the study countries, women come together and form support networks to create spaces where they can be heard,

2. Pearce, 2006, 2007; UNESCO, 2011.

3. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), adopted in 2000, recognises the importance of women’s equal participation and full involvement in peace and security.



Above: Mothers' group meeting, Sierra Leone

Des Willie/ActionAid

“Women build peace among themselves. They mediate and solve disputes at the community level”

settle disputes, address unjust treatment, promote women's involvement in decision making, propose initiatives for community development and seek justice for female survivors of violence and sexual abuse. This collective action results not only in a greater impact in building peace in the community, but also offers a degree of protection and support for women.

“Women build peace among themselves. They mediate and solve disputes at the community level. Most men solve conflicts at the ‘chief’ level.”

– Male Interviewee, Justice and Peace Commission, Sierra Leone

While there is evidence in this research that in many study communities, women's rights have regressed in the aftermath of conflict, it also appears that the post-conflict period has given women space to organise collectively and to assert their power in decision making. This change was most noticeable in Liberia, where women describe a new standing for women in the post-conflict period. However, there was also evidence across the countries of how the transformation of gender roles during conflict as well as the post-conflict recovery

work of external organisations has led to the emergence of women leaders or a stronger women's rights movement.

The missing link – local to national

Across the study communities, participants expressed concern with the disconnect between national peace and decision-making processes and local communities. Central government and associated politicians and political parties were not viewed as contributing to local-level peace by the majority of respondents. Women frequently did not see the links between their own peacebuilding activities at the community level and national-level activities. There are clearly few spaces for the voices of those working for peace within their communities to have dialogue with decision makers at a national level and this is compounded by remote geographical locations and technology barriers.

“At the national level it's the same people all the time. We need to start at the community because we're not changing anything at the moment.”

– Women's rights activist, Afghanistan

“Participation of women in political structures can have significant positive consequences for peace and stability at a wider level”

A large number of research participants across the study communities agreed on the need for a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding with peace built from the individual, to the household, and to the community level before it can be achieved nationally. NGOs, and in particular networks, are seen as the key connector between local-level peace processes and priorities and the national level.

Supporting women peacebuilders – what works?

This research found that the work of local NGOs and women’s rights organisations is recognised and valued by people across communities. These organisations become the focal point of support for excluded and marginalised women, who struggle to get attention and support from formal state institutions. The study revealed a number of key approaches to empowering women as peacebuilders at the local level:

a) Long-term support and investment:

Peacebuilding requires long-term support and funding. Changing structural and cultural barriers that have existed for generations is a gradual process that takes time and persistence, yet funding for women’s participation in peacebuilding is frequently inadequate and not sufficiently long term.

b) Empowering women through access to justice:

Many of the organisations interviewed in this research recognised the importance of access to justice for women in building peace. In order to achieve this, empowering women through increased awareness of their rights and participation in justice structures is key. Access to justice also requires providing support and safety for survivors of violence against women.

“I’m proudest of solving conflict cases – particularly domestic violence cases where, as a group, we have held husbands to account and let them know they cannot get away with it. They know that we will take it further, even to court.”

– Head of Women’s Peace Council, Community C, Afghanistan

c) Creating safe spaces for women’s participation:

Organisations can help facilitate space for women to engage in peacebuilding in the local community and build on the safe spaces women already create for themselves. This requires the creation of formal peacebuilding mechanisms at the community level as well as informal safe and secure spaces for women to collectively organise for peace.

d) Changing attitudes towards peace and valuing women’s contribution:

Gender-responsive peacebuilding requires the prevention of violence against women and the recognition of women’s rights in the household and in the community. This involves awareness-raising, such as through the media, on women’s rights, the different impact of conflict on women and a broader understanding of ‘peace’ at the local level.

e) Recognising the diversity of women’s experiences:

Women in post-conflict countries are not a homogenous group. Widows, ex-combatants, survivors of sexual violence, displaced women, women living with HIV and AIDS or disabilities all face unique challenges and require different approaches to enable their participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Successful support for women’s participation in peacebuilding at the local level requires recognition of the diverse needs, priorities and experiences of women.

The vital roles that women play as peacebuilders at the local level indicate that the meaningful participation of women in political structures can have significant positive consequences for peace and stability at a wider level. Given the findings of this research that women are instrumental as peacebuilders within their families and their communities, an ideal gender-responsive approach to peacebuilding should recognise the importance of gender equality for sustainable peace, support the important roles that women undertake within their families and communities as peacebuilders and bring these skills, experiences and priorities to the regional and national levels.

Summary of recommendations

Develop and implement concrete, coherent policy commitments	<i>All national governments should develop and implement a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in consultation with women's rights organisations at local, regional and national levels, and with adequate resourcing, clear indicators and a robust monitoring and evaluation plan.</i>
Ensure women's participation in peace processes	<i>A minimum of 30% representation should be guaranteed for women and women's rights organisations in all local, national and international peace negotiation processes.</i>
Provide long term support and funding to women's peacebuilding	<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>
Tackle violence against women and girls	<i>All peacebuilding policy, funding or activity should contain a gendered risk analysis, and include targeted action and ring-fenced financing, to tackle violence against women and girls as a key barrier to peace.</i>
Build an enabling environment for women's peacebuilding	<i>All national governments should ratify without reservation and implement the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, as well as relevant regional treaties, paying particular attention to institutional reform.</i>

1. Introduction

“Without the input of women, the national agenda will not represent the people, it will be faulty”

“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, Liberia

Today there is an unprecedented global focus on women’s participation in peacebuilding. Since the Beijing Platform for Action first called attention to the link between peace and women’s participation in 1995, there has been accelerated recognition by the international community, national governments and policy-makers of the need for women’s rights to be central in peacebuilding and post-conflict processes.⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), adopted in 2000, broke new ground in recognising the importance of women’s “equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.”⁵ To reinforce these commitments and support

their implementation, the Security Council has passed a raft of related resolutions in the last decade. An increasing number of Member States have also adopted National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325 (see box below). However, disappointingly, these impressive international commitments have largely failed to translate into increased participation of women in peace processes. Women remain marginalised or overlooked as peacebuilders, both in formal peace negotiations as well as in their own communities.⁶ This has had serious implications for the inclusion of women’s rights and women’s priorities and needs, within peace processes and in post-conflict development agendas. When limited efforts have been made to increase the representation of women in international, national and regional levels of decision making in post-conflict periods, this has often been in nominal and not meaningful ways.⁷ Even when there are provisions related to women’s rights on paper, in practice there is limited implementation. Attention to the issue of women’s participation in peacebuilding has tended to concentrate on the national and international levels. As a result, the contribution of, and the challenges facing, women building peace at the local level have

The International Framework – Women, peace and security

UNSCR 1820 was adopted in 2008 as a follow up to UNSCR 1325, to create increased awareness of the issues of sexual violence as a tactic of warfare. This was followed in 2009 by UNSCR 1888 to provide a framework within which protection and prevention measures in response to sexual violence should be implemented and UNSCR 1889 calling for global indicators to strengthen and monitor the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Finally, UNSCR 1960 was adopted in 2010 calling state and non-state actors to act according to international laws, in particular those prohibiting the use of sexual violence against women and children in situations of armed conflict.

4. Caprioli 2003, 2005; Greenberg and Zuckerman 2009; Schirch and Sewak 2005.

5. S/RES/1325 (2000), p.1.

6. Anderlini 2010; Castillejo 2011; UN 2010.

7. GAPS 2011; McCarthy 2011.



Above: Women and child friendly spaces set up by ActionAid after 2010 floods in Pakistan support women to interact and learn about their rights and gender-based violence.

Umar Farooq/ActionAid

been largely ignored together with the impact of their involvement on women, their communities and on national-level peace processes. Local civil society organisations, including women's rights organisations, are frequently at the front line of supporting women's participation in peacebuilding, but their efforts are also typically overlooked.

"The first time I heard about 1325 was in early 2004. In November 2004 I wanted to organise a meeting about it, and I couldn't find anyone – not a single person, not even a UN person – to come and talk about it...1325 means nothing to many women...When we talk about the things that matter to them, then let them know their concerns and needs are backed up by international legislation, that's when it matters and makes sense to them."

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

This study addresses some of these gaps by providing qualitative evidence on the roles

of women in peacebuilding, conflict prevention and post-conflict recovery efforts at the local level and, where possible, their impact in five countries: Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone. It explores the different meanings that women give to peace as well as the obstacles women face as peacebuilders at the local level. As this study illustrates, women are working tirelessly to build peace in their communities. This study will examine the achievements of these women and the external support that is strengthening their efforts. Recognising and understanding women's involvement within informal local-level processes, as well as the barriers that curtail their full and equal participation, will allow NGOs, governments and donors to better support women's peacebuilding roles, and could ease the integration of these roles into formal processes. This should in turn increase women's influence and involvement within decision-making mechanisms, and ensure these processes deliver better outcomes for women.

2. Background to this study

2.1 Conceptual framework

Approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding often focus on state institutions and national-level actors. In reality, civil conflicts can originate from individual and household behaviour and their interaction with local surroundings, social groups and institutional norms.⁸ Therefore, peacebuilding needs to focus on all levels (national, regional and local), for peace to be sustainable. This study focuses specifically on local-level peace processes and, where possible, it establishes links between the main findings at the local level and national peacebuilding efforts.

The gender analysis in this study is based on a framework developed in on-going research programmes by the Conflict, Violence and Development Cluster at the

Institute of Development Studies,⁹ which places gender at the centre of its work on conflict and violence and is built around two tiers:

1) How processes of conflict, its causes and consequences, can be disaggregated by gender in order to recognise the different experiences and needs of both women and men; and

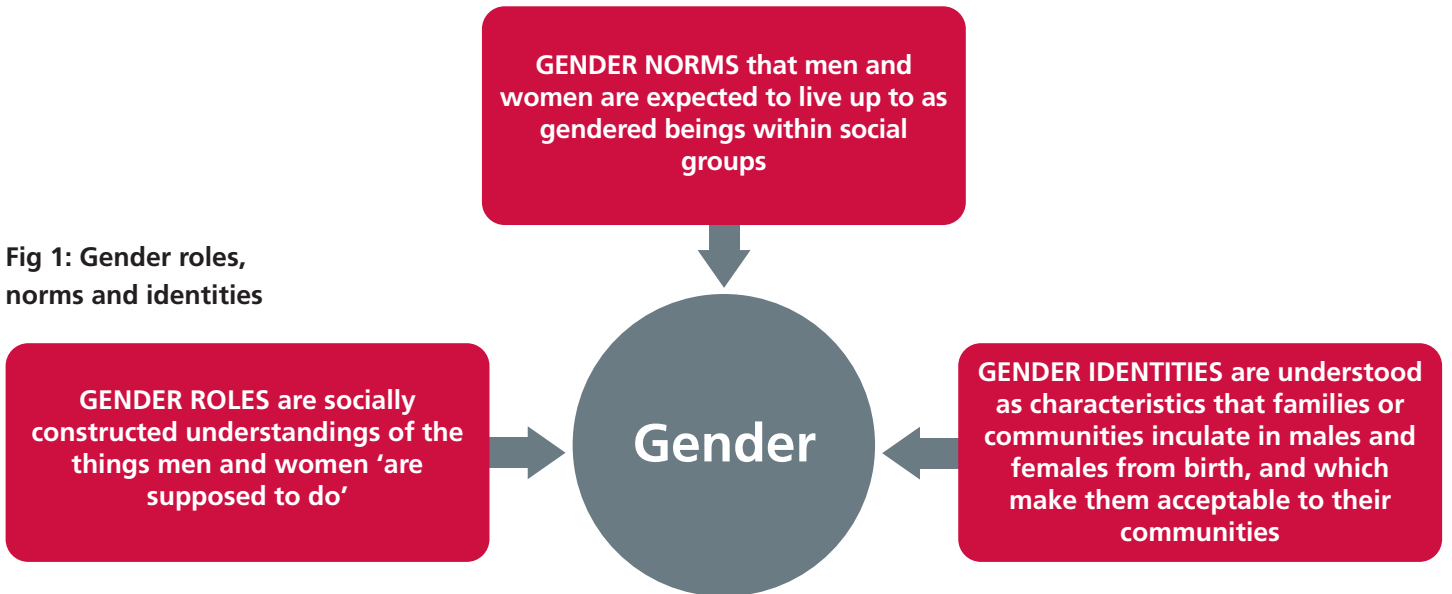
2) Moving beyond simple gender disaggregation to a broader understanding of 'gender'. This requires a more in-depth analysis of three aspects of gender (see Figure 1 opposite).¹⁶

This framework allows analysis of the role of masculinities and femininities in violent contexts, and the power structures that frame gender relations and determine access to power.

Key Terms

Conflict	<i>Conflict is understood as a complex, dynamic process with different forms, causes, dimensions and actors.¹⁰ Conflict exists in all societies at all times and is a necessary and indeed inevitable consequence of structural inequalities and exclusion. For the purposes of this study, conflict refers to violent conflict¹¹, as understood by research participants.</i>
Peace	<i>This study does not rely on existing definitions of peace, but rather investigates how peace is understood within the context of each case study community, and recognises that 'peace' is only just and sustainable when it reflects and is responsive to the needs, priorities and views of the whole community, including women.</i>
Peacebuilding	<i>The term 'peacebuilding' has been widely adopted since it was first introduced by the United Nations as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."¹² In this research, peacebuilding refers to the efforts by actors across political, economic, humanitarian, and social spheres to strengthen prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict.¹³ A gendered approach to peacebuilding recognises that addressing unequal power relations between women and men is essential to prevent and mitigate conflict.¹⁴</i>
Communities	<i>Throughout this report, communities (usually rural villages) are clusters of households where local political, social, and economic interactions take place.</i>
Violence against women	<i>"... Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."¹⁵</i>

Fig 1: Gender roles, norms and identities



“Peacebuilding needs to focus on all levels (national, regional and local), for peace to be sustainable”

The study recognises that experiences of conflict differ not only across gender, but also across age groups and socio-economic groups, and therefore attempts to include the different views of young people, adults and older people, where possible. Furthermore, this study recognises that conflict itself can bring about changes in households and communities that challenge the traditional exclusion of women from decision making at all levels (for example through migration or displacement and the increase in female-headed households). Where possible, it aims to examine how these changes have supported or challenged women’s participation in peacebuilding activities.

2.2 Methodology

This study was conducted in five countries – Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone and was carried out in two stages. Firstly, a review of existing literature on women’s roles in peacebuilding was undertaken. Following this, primary research was conducted in each country during February and March 2012.¹⁷

The research focuses on the community (the ‘local level’) to explore local peacebuilding processes, and how women individually or in organised community groups affect and sometimes drive peace. One to three case study communities were selected per country. Where possible, the research in each country was conducted in communities that had similar contexts in terms of population size, geographic location, and the impact of

the conflict. The research also tried to focus on one community that had participated in peacebuilding activities with the support of ActionAid or Womankind, and one community where no such work had taken place. With a focus on the local level, this report does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of all national level processes, or all organisations involved in peacebuilding.

Primary fieldwork was based on qualitative data collection. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with approximately 10-15 key informants per country, and via telephone before and after visiting the country (see Appendix). The informants were identified with the help of in-country partners, and included staff from local civil society organisations, government representatives and community members. Three to four focus group discussions were also conducted in each of the communities, separating community members into groups of young women (aged under 20 years), women aged 20 years and older, men and, where possible, local officials. This focus group composition was selected in order to allow for women-only discussions to create a safer space for women to share their views and minimise the influence of husbands or other community members on women’s participation.

The questions for key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were composed in collaboration with experts in participatory methods and gender and with ActionAid and Womankind staff. Interviews and FGDs were conducted using identical

8. Justino 2012.

9. Harris 2011; 2012.

10. MICROCON 2006

11. ActionAid International, 2010

12. Boutros-Ghali, B., 1992.

13. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 2002

14. Strickland R., and Duvvury N, 2004

15. United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993, Article 1.

16. Harris 2004.

17. The research team from IDS travelled to Liberia, Nepal and Sierra Leone where they carried out research in two communities per country. A representative from Womankind visited Afghanistan to carry out research on behalf of the team, and visited three communities. In-country staff from ActionAid, in collaboration with an in-country partner, carried out similar research in one community in Pakistan.

“The impacts of conflict on women are devastating”

questionnaires to allow comparison of results and identification of common trends and patterns across all research sites. The FGDs were designed to elicit opinions and offer opportunities to speak about difficult topics. Participants were well-informed about the background, objectives, and expected outputs of the research. Consent was sought from all participants to use their input in this report, and quotes from FGD participants and staff of national and local organisations are attributed only where such consent was given. All other contributions have been anonymised. The names and specific locations of the case study communities are also anonymised for security reasons.

2.3 Existing evidence – women, peace and conflict

The impacts of conflict on women are devastating, and include physical insecurity, increased vulnerability to sexual and physical abuse, increased incidence of domestic violence and economic insecurity.¹⁸ A growing body of qualitative and – to a lesser extent – quantitative research has provided evidence of the varied activities and responses of women during and after violent conflict, and their important implications for peacebuilding.¹⁹ Common roles of women in conflict include voluntary or forced supporters of combatants (as cooks, wives, mothers, messengers and farmers), voluntary or forced combatants, heads of households,²⁰ and agents that push for peace through their individual or collective actions in social and political spheres.

In their households, women are often obliged to adopt additional roles during and after conflict. One of the largest population shifts observed in conflict-affected countries is a rise in female-headed households, often headed by widows.²¹ This is related to the high incidence of injury and death among men during violent conflict, and to the fact that men form the majority of recruits in armed groups. In these circumstances, women take on economic roles that are traditionally performed by men. Increases in female labour market participation have been reported, for example, in Indonesia, Nepal, and

Colombia.²² Women also take on increased responsibilities in their communities during and after conflict, such as caring for the elderly, the ill and the injured,²³ and in churches, schools, hospitals, charities, self-help groups and local political institutions.²⁴

In this way, the social upheaval caused by conflict can open up spaces for women which can, in turn, challenge traditional gender roles and unequal gender relations. For example, women’s increased participation in labour markets in conflict and post-conflict settings has been associated with improvements in women’s social and economic status within the household and the community, but also with a greater burden of work overall, as women remain the main carers of children and other household members.²⁵ Some post-conflict settings have seen increased representation of women in national-level politics, with some post-conflict countries (Rwanda, Mozambique, Uganda, Nicaragua and Burundi for instance) among the top-ranking 50 countries globally for female representation in parliaments.²⁶

However, research also points to women’s participation in economic and political spheres often shrinking once hostilities cease. Examples in Asia, Africa and Latin America have shown that gains in women’s access to employment and income-generation are often lost after conflict due to economic restructuring, resettlement of displaced populations and demobilization and reintegration of (male) ex-combatants.²⁷ Similarly, the expansion in women’s public roles and responsibilities has in some cases declined after conflict, as evidenced by low levels of women’s representation in the first post-conflict elections in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, and Guatemala.²⁸ The effects of militarisation, increased acceptance of violence against women and the rise of fundamentalism can all contribute to the regression of women’s rights after conflict.²⁹

The existing evidence demonstrates that women are active in peacebuilding in a multitude of ways; through peace activism and advocacy, peacekeeping and relief work, mediation, counselling, policy-making,

18. Calderón et al. 2011; Couldrey and Morris 2007; Date-Bah 2003; International Alert 2010; UNTAET 2002.

19. For a review of available evidence and compiled case studies on women’s roles during and after conflict see: Bouta et al. 2005; Bruck and Vothknecht 2011; Byrne 1996; Date-Bah 2003; El-Bushra and Sahl 2005; Kumar 2001b; Meintjes et al. 2001; Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf 2002; Kumar 2001a; Sorensen 1998; Kumar 2001a; Sorensen 1998-Sirleaf 2002; Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004. For a detailed review of recent micro-level research on conflict see: Blattman and Miguel 2010, Justino 2009, 2012, Verwimp, Brück and Justino 2009.

20. Annan et al. 2009.

21. Annan et al. 2009; Bouta et al. 2005; Schindler 2010; Zuckerman and Greenberg 2004.

22. Adam 2008; Menon and Rodgers 2011; Calderón et al. 2011.

23. Baird 2010.

24. Kumar 2001a; Sorensen 1998.

25. Agustiana and Papkahan 2004; Afshar and Eade 2004.

26. Weill 2003; Bouta et al. 2005.

27. Adam 2008; Spencer 1997; de Watteville 2002; Kumar 2000; Date-Bah 2003.

28. Kumar 2000.

29. See for example, Association of Women in Development (AWID), 2009, Balchin, C., 2011. Rehn E., and Johnson Sirleaf E., 2002.



Above: Mothers' group meeting, Sierra Leone.

Des Willie/ActionAid

education and development activities. Often women create spaces and new organisations to promote the protection and fulfilment of human rights and equality, and to provide and restore community welfare, including health, education and support for refugees.³⁰ Women's rights organisations also spread political education and support women candidates which, in turn, supports the political empowerment of women, and raises awareness of gender issues. Although sub-national women's organisations have the potential to bring attention to women's rights in formal peacebuilding processes, they face significant obstacles. Challenges include a lack of sufficient and sustainable funding, limited management and lobbying capacity, increased women's work burden, and backlash, including marginalisation and harassment from local men and security forces.³¹

A number of the limited documented examples of specific local-level peacebuilding activities in the research countries include women's contribution to the process of reintegrating ex-combatants into the community in Sierra Leone³² as well

as the participation of women's groups in the promotion of truth and reconciliation, the education and care of children, the support to awareness campaigns, and ensuring access to resources.³³ In Liberia, research has demonstrated that women in rural communities have been active in self-help development initiatives, playing an important part in restoring trust amongst community members.³⁴ In Afghanistan, it has been documented that women's groups have helped to set up underground schools, health clinics and other vital services for women.³⁵ However, there has been limited research on other local- (micro-) level activities that women are involved with to promote and maintain peace. The reason for this may well be that the activities are undocumented or that the work is taken for granted. It could also be that they are not recognised by the women themselves or by others as 'peacebuilding' activities. This study aims to contribute to addressing this research gap by providing new evidence in the research countries on the roles of women in peacebuilding at the local level and identifying areas where more support is needed.

30. Falch 2010; Pankhurst 2000.

31. Agustiana and Papkahan 2004; Pankhurst 2000.

32. Mazurana and Carlson 2004, cited in Bouta et al. 2005.

33. Ogunsanya 2007; Mazurana and Carlson 2004; UN 2002; Sörensen 1998.

34. Moram and Pitcher 2004; Ramnarain and Brown 2011.

35. Hassan 2010.

Women's rights at a glance

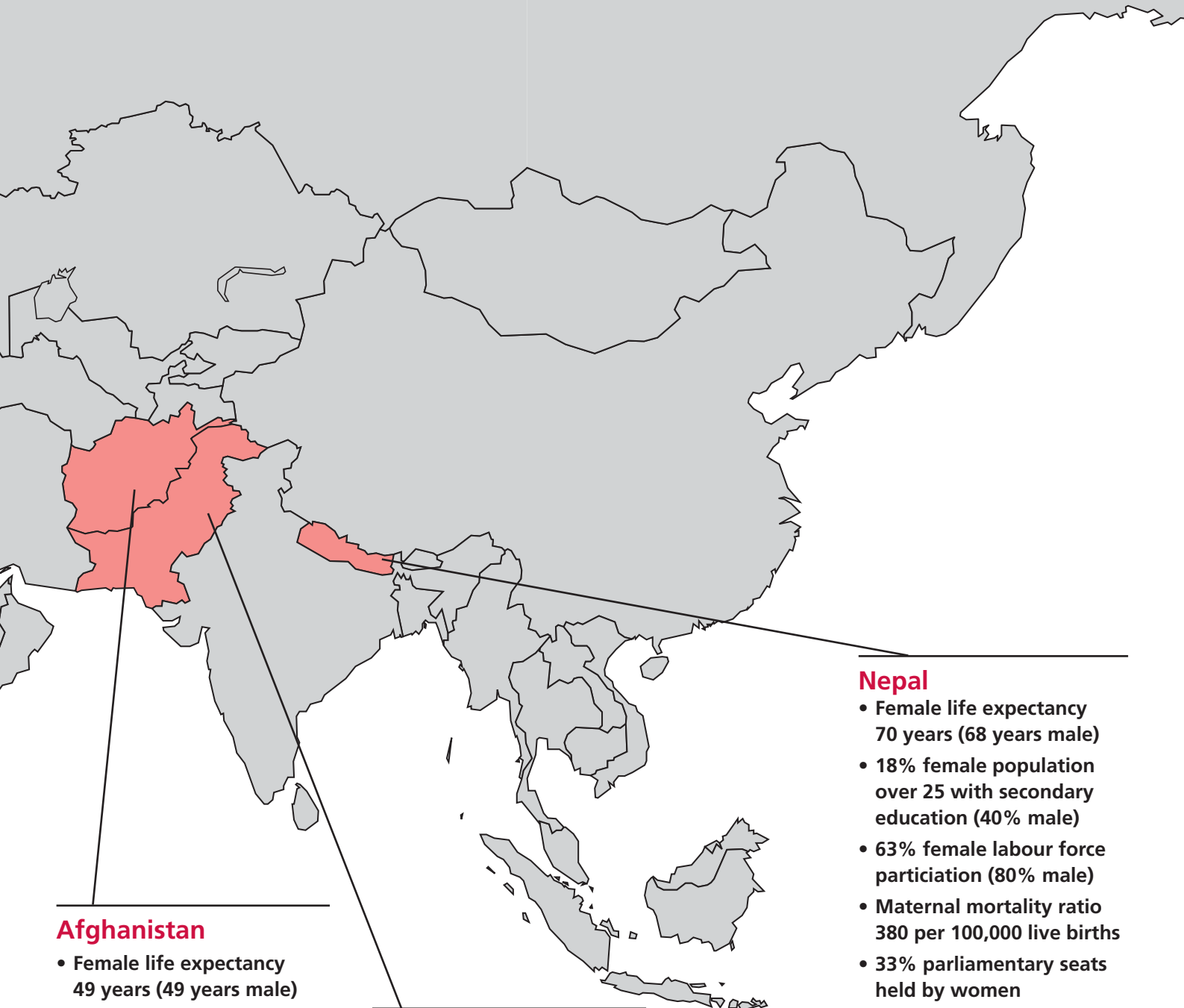


Sierra Leone

- Female life expectancy 49 years (48 years male)
- 10% female population over 25 with secondary education (20% male)
- 65% female labour force participation (68% male)
- Maternal mortality ratio 970 per 100,000 live births
- 13% parliamentary seats held by women

Liberia

- Female life expectancy 59 years (56 years male)
- 16% female population over 25 with secondary education (39% male)
- 67% female labour force participation (76% male)
- Maternal mortality ratio 990 per 100,000 live births
- 14% parliamentary seats held by women



Afghanistan

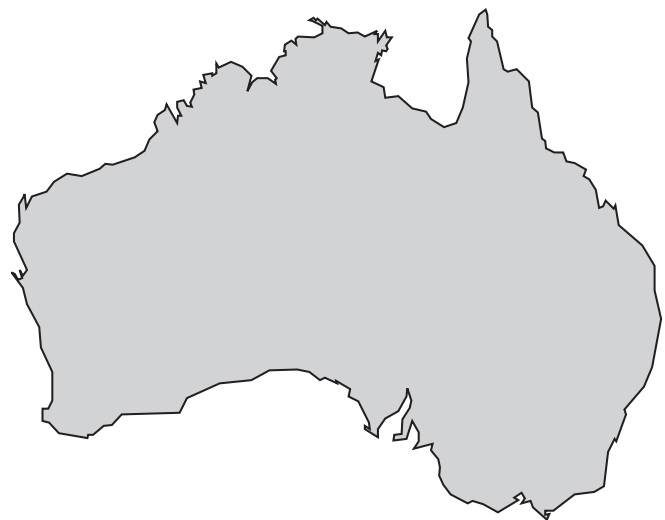
- Female life expectancy 49 years (49 years male)
 - 6% female population over 25 with secondary education (34% male)
 - 33% female labour force participation (85% male)
 - Maternal mortality ratio 1,400 per 100,000 live births
 - 28% parliamentary seats held by women
-

Pakistan

- Female Life Expectancy 67 years (65 years male)
 - 24% female population over 25 with secondary education (47% male)
 - 22% female labour force participation (85% male)
 - Maternal mortality ratio 260 per 100,000 live births
 - 21% parliamentary seats held by women
-

Nepal

- Female life expectancy 70 years (68 years male)
 - 18% female population over 25 with secondary education (40% male)
 - 63% female labour force participation (80% male)
 - Maternal mortality ratio 380 per 100,000 live births
 - 33% parliamentary seats held by women
-



3. Country contexts

“Many women still face violations of basic human rights especially in rural areas”

The five countries in which this study was conducted represent a range of contexts in terms of on-going conflict, post-conflict, reconstruction and recovery situations. This section provides a brief overview of each country with a specific focus on the women’s rights context and the study communities where this research was conducted.

3.1 Afghanistan

“... We cannot call Afghanistan a post-conflict country. There’s no stability. It means that people inside their houses are living...like they know that something will happen and they can [be forced to] leave at any time. If you are not starting to build your own house...then how can you think about the country overall..?”

– Maryam Rahmani, Country Representative, Afghan Women’s Resource Centre (AWRC)

Table 1: Women’s rights at a glance³⁶

Selected statistics related to women’s situation in Afghanistan

Indicator	Women	Men
Life expectancy at birth (years)	49	49
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	54	9
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	6	34
Labour force participation rate (%)	33	85
Maternal mortality ratio	1,400 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	118.7 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	28	

36. UN Statistics Division - Statistics and indicators on women and men (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/default.htm>, consulted in April 2012), for indicators on life expectancy and population aged 15-19 ever married; 2) UNDP - Human Development Report 2011, Table 4. Gender Inequality Index and related indicators (http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Table4.pdf, consulted in April 2012), for indicators on secondary education, labour force, maternal mortality, fertility rate and women in parliament. All statistics and indicators refer to the latest year for which sex-disaggregated data is available..

37. The agreement can be found at <http://www.afghangovernment.com/AfghanAgreementBonn.htm> (accessed 29/03/2012).

38. Abirafeh 2005.

39. Global Rights 2008.

40. Womankind 2008.

41. Abirafeh 2005; ActionAid 2011.

Right: Afghanistan

Womankind



“During the Taliban women wore burqa and women’s rights were violated by the Taliban. Women were hit a lot. Girls were not able to go to courses because if girls went out for study then they were harassed.”

– Women focus group, Community A, Afghanistan

Conflict context

Afghanistan has experienced many years of civil unrest and tribal conflict. The Soviet invasion and resulting war from 1979 to 1989 was followed by civil war from 1991 to 1994. The Taliban took power in Kandahar in 1994, in Herat in 1995, and in Kabul in 1996, ruling until ousted by the US-led campaign in 2001. The Bonn Agreement of 2001, following on from UN-hosted negotiations, was designed to rebuild the state, with a vision of “reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect for human rights.”³⁷

Community profiles

Community A	<i>This community is from an urban district of Kabul, with an ethnically mixed population of 250,000. It has high poverty levels and is badly damaged by civil war. Due to its central location, there have been a number of international and national NGO projects. Womankind supports the work of the Afghan Women’s Resource Centre in this district.</i>
Community B	<i>This community is a peri-urban community of Kabul, with a total population of 1,680, mainly Pashtun and Pashahi. Many residents are engaged in official or private jobs, so poverty is still present but less severe. During the past three years, a community development council has been established in the village and ActionAid and its partners run a governance programme.</i>
Community C	<i>This community is in the Balkh Province, in the north of Afghanistan. It is a rural community with 6,000 people, of mainly Uzbek and Turkmen origin. More than 90% are farmers, and there is a high incidence of poverty due to land shortage and drought. A project focusing on peacebuilding and conflict resolution is run by ActionAid and its partners.</i>

Women’s rights context

Background	<i>A history of conflict and authoritarian regimes, combined with restrictive social structures and norms, has led to a precarious situation for women in Afghanistan. Periods of progressive reform followed by conservative backlash have brought about a constant struggle for women’s rights.³⁸ A study found that 87% of Afghan women and girls have experienced at least one form of sexual, physical, economic or psychological abuse.³⁹ Taliban rule, between 1996 and 2001, was particularly severe and women were systematically excluded from education, healthcare, employment and faced increasing levels of violence and restrictions to their movement and choices.⁴⁰</i>
Current challenges	<i>While progress has been made since the fall of the Taliban, the impacts of the regime continue. A lack of justice prevails, particularly relating to women’s rights abuses such as violence against women and girls. Women have been involved in political processes, but often in nominal ways. Equal rights provisions contained in the approved constitution have not led to significant gains in practice. Many women still face violations of basic human rights especially in rural areas.⁴¹</i>
Progress	<i>Despite women being largely excluded from formal peace negotiations, women have organised to advocate for their inclusion in national peace processes and governance. Women’s political participation has increased and there have also been advances in education parity with over 2.5 million girls now attending school. Concrete results of women’s rights advocacy include the creation of a Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (2008), the government commitment to implement the constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and address the recommendations of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, and the enactment of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women in August 2009.</i>

3.2 Liberia

42. Gbowee 2006:5.

43. Badmus 2009.

44. See US State Department, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/6618.htm> (accessed 23/08/2012).

45. Moran 1997; Ellis 1999:143–144; Utas 2003:208.

46. African Women and Peace Support Group 1998: 4.

47. Moram and Pitcher 2004.

48. Karam 2000.

49. See International Institute for Justice and Development, <http://ijid.org/news/entry/recognizing-the-role-of-women-in-african-peace-and-security> (accessed 30/08/12).

Below: 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

“[Within the Women In Peacebuilding Network] We have a sub-group of grassroots women who are aware and are constantly reminding their community members that they are responsible for the peace they have achieved thus far.”⁴²

– Leymah Gbowee, Founder, Women Peace and Security Network Africa (WIPSEN-Africa), President, Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa and 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate

Selected statistics related to women's situation in Liberia

Indicator	Women	Men
Life expectancy at birth (years)	59	56
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	20	3
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	16	39
Labour force participation rate (%)	67	76
Maternal mortality ratio	990 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	142.6 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	14	



Conflict context

Liberia underwent a 14-year civil war that started in 1989 and continued in two phases until 2003. Factors associated with the start of the war include unequal relationships among the various ethnic-linguistic groups, state fragility and corruption and a series of repressive governments.⁴³ Estimates suggest that over 200,000 people were killed during the conflict, and at least 1.5 million were displaced.⁴⁴

Community profiles

Community A	<i>This community is located in the Grand Gedeh County in the far south-east of Liberia. This area borders with Ivory Coast. It is comprised of approximately 300 households. ActionAid and its partners have been working in this community since 2010. It has benefited from its proximity to the county capital, and therefore from the work of national NGOs working on peace and women's empowerment.</i>
Community B	<i>This community is also based in the Grand Gedeh County and is made up of approximately 350 households. This community experienced considerable refugee movement throughout the conflict both in Liberia and Ivory Coast. As a consequence, there is a significant UNHCR presence. Other INGOs are also present but they have not conducted any formal 'peacebuilding' work within the community.</i>

Women's rights context

Background	<i>Women have played a particularly prominent role in the history of Liberia. The country boasts Africa's first democratically elected female president (Ellen Johnson Sirleaf), the first woman president of an African national university (Mary Antoinette Brown Sherman), and the first African woman head of state (Ruth Perry). Female fighters participated in all factions and in the national military during the war.⁴⁵ However, following decades of conflict and civil war, many barriers to gender equality persist.</i>
Current challenges	<i>Women face multiple challenges including low literacy rates, high fertility rates, high levels of maternal mortality and high rates of adolescent pregnancy, forced marriage, poverty and HIV. Violence against women is widespread. On-going school attendance rates are low for both boys and girls.</i>
Progress	<i>While inclusion in formal processes has not always been achieved, women's rights organisations and movements (such as The Concerned Women of Liberia,⁴⁶ The Mano River Union Women for Peace Network (MARWOPNET),⁴⁷ The Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI⁴⁸ and The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) have held leaders to account in implementing and maintaining peace accords, and in shaping post-conflict reconstruction. Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has also challenged her government to act to increase the participation levels of women in national government and has implemented reforms in the security sector. For example, a 20% quota for female police officers was introduced.⁴⁹</i>

22 From the ground up

50. Shakya 2009.

51. Shakya 2009.

52. There are some exceptions. For instance, in the Sherpa communities, women often lead family businesses and are more likely than women in other communities to take an equal part in public and private decision making (Onslow 2010).

53. Shakya 2009; FWLD et al. 2011.

54. FWLD et al. 2011.

55. Geiser 2005.

56. Falch 2010.

Below: Women in Nepal take part in a rally during the 16 days of activism against gender violence.

Brian Sokol/ActionAid

3.3 Nepal

“After the peace agreement, the Constitutional Assembly was elected and the government formed since that time is still not stable. There are many things that local people expected that have not happened yet. There is no constitution...and it is impossible to maintain peace like that.”

– Male key informant, Nepal

Selected statistics related to women’s situation in Nepal

Indicator	Women	Men
Life expectancy at birth (years)	70	68
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	32	11
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	18	40
Labour force participation rate (%)	63	80
Maternal mortality ratio	380 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	103.4 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	33	



Conflict context

The decade-long civil war (1996-2006) between the government and the Maoist movement in Nepal saw 13,000 people lose their lives, and some 60,000 people displaced.⁵⁰ Caste and gender-based discrimination, as well as feudalistic suppression, lack of political representation, a weak education system, and economic inequality have been identified as root causes of the conflict.⁵¹

Community profiles

Community A *This community is located in the Dang District, in the mid-western region of Nepal in a very remote forest area with scattered villages. The area has been prone to conflict and is home to significant proportions of indigenous groups and Dalit people. The research participants were from two villages, one indigenous and one Dalit. The Society for Environmental Education Development (SEED), an ActionAid partner, has been working with this community extensively.*

Community B *This community is also located in the Dang District within an area populated by indigenous people. ActionAid partner, Boat for Community Development (BCD), has been working with this community. Both communities are extremely remote and primarily engage in agricultural activities and animal husbandry. They are characterised by an absence of men due to high levels of economic migration and were severely affected by the conflict.*

Women's rights context

Background *Nepali society is traditionally patriarchal, with women generally taking responsibility for child care and roles within the home.⁵² The years of conflict in Nepal had a severe impact on women. Women report having been harassed and raped by army personnel, and forced to give money to and cook for Maoist rebels. Women also joined the Maoist movement in significant numbers – it is reported that approximately 30 to 40% of Maoist forces were female.⁵³ Although the changes in traditional gender roles largely did not persist once the conflict had ended,⁵⁴ the voluntary involvement of women in the Maoist army gave impetus to the women's movement in Nepal.*

Current challenges *Low literacy rates for women are coupled with low rates of school enrolment for girls and a high incidence of adolescent marriage and violence against women. Progress in parliamentary representation of women has been significant, yet this is not yet reflected in local decision-making structures. Dalit and indigenous women and widows are particularly exposed to exploitation, violence and poverty due to their gender and social status. Over recent years, the number of women migrating to urban areas and other countries as domestic workers, together with trafficking in women and girls, has significantly increased.*

Progress *Women were instrumental in pushing for peace in Nepal, through organising peace rallies, acting as local intermediaries between the Maoists and the government,⁵⁵ and through involvement in the People's Movement, which initiated the peace process in 2006.⁵⁶ Women's rights organisations, networks and alliances, including the Women's Alliance for Peace, Power, Democracy and Constituent Assembly (WAPPDCA), Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM), National Alliance of Women's Human Rights Defenders (NAWHRDs) and Women for Human Rights (WHR), were involved in both securing the 33% quota for women in the national parliament as well as the development of Nepal's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. As part of the constitution-drafting process, a Women's Caucus of the Constituent Assembly was formed to ensure that women were consulted in the drafting process and that women's rights were addressed in the constitution document.*

57. <http://www.actionaid.org/pakistan/where-we-work/punjab-province> (accessed 01/09/12).

58. Many girls in the affected areas have had to abandon regular education in schools, although a large number of the girls in the focus group discussions are completing their education via distance learning.

59. ADB 2000:xi.

60. Mezzera and Aftab 2009.

61. Giné and Mansuri 2011.

62. See Inter-parliamentary Union, www.ipu.org (30/08/2012).

63. HRCP 2010.

64. Abbas and Jasam 2009.

Below: Women farmers in Pakistan take part in a rally to share their experiences.

ActionAid

3.4 Pakistan

“Women fall prey to stringent restrictions on freedom of movement. Women become totally homebound.”

– Women focus group, Pakistan

Selected statistics related to women’s situation in Pakistan

Indicator	Women	Men
Life expectancy at birth (years)	67	65
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	16	n.a.
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	24	47
Labour force participation rate (%)	22	85
Maternal mortality ratio	260 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	31.6 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	21	



Conflict context

Since establishing itself as an independent state in 1947, Pakistan has undergone cycles of ethnic, religious, political and social conflict. The country has also been affected by conflict with neighbouring states and changing political leadership styles, from military dictatorship to faltering democracy.

Community profiles

Community A *The community is located in Bhakkar District in Punjab Province⁵⁷ located in Northwest Pakistan near the tribal areas on the border with Afghanistan. Intra-religious conflict between Shias and Wahabi Sunnis is present in most of the district and there are fluctuations between comparative calm and sporadic targeted killings that result in open hostilities and violent demonstrations. Calls for strikes, aerial firing and blockades of roads cause intermittent disruption to normal life, such as the closing of bazaars and schools as well as the suspension of public transport services.⁵⁸*

Women's rights context

Background *Gender relations in Pakistan are highly inequitable, and women are systematically disadvantaged and subordinated by patriarchal traditions, with significant differences between women and men in terms of literacy, economic activity, and enrolment in primary education. The vast majority of economically active women are engaged in agriculture or as domestic helpers in private households. Women are denied ownership and control of resources especially land, and there are very high levels of violence against women, including forced marriage and so-called honour killings.*

Current challenges *The status of women is one of systematic subordination and familial 'honour' is closely linked to women's sexuality and behaviour, placing heavy restrictions on women's mobility and decision-making power. Violence against women is widespread across all socio-economic classes, with some reports suggesting it occurs in up to 80% of households in the country.⁵⁹ Although there are legal quotas, women are systematically excluded from political decision making.⁶⁰ In rural Pakistan, in particular, women still face significant barriers to political participation.⁶¹ The religious radicalisation of society means that as men and women become more conservative, gender discrimination grows across all socio-economic strata, restricting women's freedom of movement as well as their influence in decision making.*

Progress *Women currently hold 21% of seats in the National Assembly, and 16.3% of seats in the Senate are filled by women, placing Pakistan within the top third in world rankings of women's political participation.⁶² By 2009, more than 80% of private bills were being put forward by women.⁶³ However, female parliamentarians feel their voices and issues do not receive adequate attention. A number of organisations have been formed to raise awareness of women's peacebuilding efforts, advocate for women's integration and leadership in policy discourses and processes, and work against discrimination and exclusion of women.⁶⁴*

65. See <http://www.actionaid.org/sierra-leone/where-we-work/bo> (15/03/2012).

66. Richards et al. 2004; Mazurana and Carlson 2004.

67. See: Al, 2011; Castillejo 2009a; Holland and Saidu 2012; and Richards et al. 2004, among others.

68. Badmus 2009; Jusu-Sheriff 2000; Mazurana and Carlson 2004; Duramy 2009.

69. Castillejo 2009.

70. Including Women Solidarity Support Group (WSSG), Women's Forum, Grassroots Empowerment for Self Reliance (GEMS), Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), 50/50, Search for Common Ground, and National Organisation of Women – See Abdullah 2010.

Below: Members of a Women's Forum set up as part of ActionAid's Access to Justice for Women Project, Sierra Leone

ActionAid

3.5 Sierra Leone

“... After the war the instability and lack of safety has minimised a bit – but things have not returned to how they were before.”

– Women focus group, Community A, Sierra Leone

Selected statistics related to women's situation in Sierra Leone

Indicator	Women	Men
Life expectancy at birth (years)	49	48
Population aged 15-19 ever married (%)	34	5
Population (+25yrs) with at least secondary education (%)	10	20
Labour force participation rate (%)	65	68
Maternal mortality ratio	970 per 100,000 live births	
Adolescent (15-19yrs) fertility rate	143.7 per year per 1,000	
Women in national parliament (%)	13	

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



Conflict context

The decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) involved brutal violence against civilians, with tens of thousands of deaths and 2 million people displaced.

Community profiles

Community A *This community is a small rural village in Bo District, in the southern region of Sierra Leone. It has a population of 2,700, with a higher proportion of women than men. The area is characterised by high levels of poverty, inadequate sanitation facilities, limited employment opportunities, poor road conditions, a lack of schools and low attendance by girls. Agriculture is the most important economic activity, alongside forestry, small-scale businesses, fishing and mining.⁶⁵ In recent years, ActionAid and its partners have been working with the community on issues including women's rights and peacebuilding.*

Community B *This community is also a small village in Bo District. It has similar characteristics and faces similar problems to Community A, but the presence of NGOs has not been as prominent. Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES) have just begun to implement an access to justice programme for rural women, supported by Womankind Worldwide.*

Women's rights context

Background *The war had specific and disproportionate impacts on women, as targets of sexual violence, torture and insecurity. Restrictions on women's mobility due to their caring responsibilities made them particularly vulnerable to harassment, abduction and physical violence, including sexual abuse as well as food shortages. Displacement to large cities or the bush was a common survival strategy. Women were largely excluded from disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation programmes.⁶⁶*

Current challenges *Traditions, customs and religious beliefs based on strong patriarchal norms regulate the behaviour of both men and women in rural communities in Sierra Leone.⁶⁷ This curtails women's access to leadership positions, property and justice, and is directly associated with the high incidence of violence against women. Access to productive resources is unequal, whilst teenage pregnancy, early marriage, poverty and illiteracy levels are very high. The incidence of female-headed households as a result of the conflict has also increased. In addition, widespread destruction of infrastructure and homes has exacerbated poverty, depleted livelihood opportunities, and increased food insecurity.*

Progress *Although women in Sierra Leone were not formally integrated into official peacebuilding processes, they mobilised through the formation of women's civil society groups.⁶⁸ Important policy changes in the post-conflict period include the Nation Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 developed in 2010, and the '3 Gender Laws': the Devolution of Estate Act, the Domestic Violence Act, and the Registration of Customary Marriage Act.⁶⁹ However, these have at times created local tensions with existing informal or customary institutions recognised in the constitution. Today, 13.5% of seats in parliament are filled by women, and women's groups⁷⁰ are still working to increase women's representation in decision making.*

4. What is peace?

“A society is peaceful which is free from economic exploitation, social and religious discrimination”

“[Peace is] a feeling, a perception, that differs from level to level and context to context, and person to person.”

– Women Focus group participant, Nepal

The meaning individuals and communities ascribe to ‘peace’ will affect peacebuilding approaches and priorities. Across the communities, there were a wide variety of meanings attributed to peace. For example, in Afghanistan, both women and men talk about peace meaning togetherness, calmness, peace of mind, love between each other and unity. Physical security and feeling safe is also central to their concepts of peace. Almost all people interviewed in Liberia spoke of peace in terms of togetherness, unity, and love between each other. In Nepal, the vast majority of research participants, both women and men, understand peace to be the absence of violence and conflict in the community and country, the absence of fear and freedom of movement. Some participants also mention the importance of women’s rights, of reducing domestic violence and other types of violence against women, and the importance of social and financial security.

“A society is peaceful which is free from economic exploitation, social and religious discrimination and which practises freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of movement, gender equity and justice.”

– Male key informant, Pakistan

However, there are also interesting similarities across countries and communities as to how men and women define peace differently. As Estella Nelson, Founder and President of the Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) stated:

“Peace means different things to women and men because of their unique experiences as a result of the war, and as a result of 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.”

Across the country case studies, men tended to associate peace with the absence of conflict and insecurity at community, regional and national levels as well as with the stability of formal structures such as governance, infrastructure and economic opportunities. For example, in Sierra Leone, while making some mention of unity and collaboration, men related peace largely to stable political conditions, absence of conflict and insecurity at the district or national level, rule of law, accountability and transparency in governance, and support from the government or NGOs to build schools, water wells, and sanitation facilities. Men in Afghanistan also associated peace with the absence of armed conflict and insecurity at community, regional or national levels. They talked about peace meaning absence of corruption and good governance, better infrastructure and access to resources, and having job opportunities. In Liberia, the men in the communities also understand peace in terms of an absence of conflict and insecurity at community or regional levels, freedom of movement, and having job opportunities. In Pakistan, the majority of boys and men saw peace in terms of relations with their neighbours and at community, village and district levels.

“Peace for women means shelter, food and education for children. Above all, women need security in the home, they need to sleep well in their beds, knowing they are safe from violence. Violence can come from husbands, from neighbours, or from family members, domestic violence is a particular problem.”

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

In contrast, women tended to define peace more broadly to include the household level as well as the attainment of individual rights and freedoms. For example, women in Pakistan identified peace as relating to the overall conditions in their homes, the behaviour of their male relatives, and the attainment of their rights. As a young female focus participant described, “Living together in peace not only with the neighbours but also with your family, relatives is peace. End of domestic violence and forced marriages can make peace possible. Male domination has destroyed peace at the household level.”

“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.”

– Women focus group, Liberia

Peace was closely associated with individual freedoms by women across the study

communities. A women focus group participant in Nepal explained, “Peace is to be able to move around freely and live free from fear.”

In Sierra Leone, among the factors that build peace, women see an understanding and enjoyment of their rights as critical, as this ensures they have access to land and property, promotes positive relations with husbands, and protects girls from forced marriage. This view was also reflected by women in Afghanistan who prioritised rights to education, health care, work, food, and the right to live free from violence in their responses. As a women’s rights activist in Kabul told the researchers for this study:

“Peace for me is if I can come out of the house not accompanied by anyone. If people do not care what I’m wearing, what I look like. If I can visit a village where I am working and feel safe. If my mother doesn’t call me four times a day when I am out for a meeting to check to see if I have returned to the office safely.”

Women in both communities in Liberia also viewed peace as the freedom to live the lives they choose, 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. In Sierra Leone, women in each community overwhelmingly associated

“Women tended to define peace more broadly to include the household level as well as the attainment of individual rights and freedoms”



Right: Estella Nelson, Founder and President of Liberia Women Media Action Committee.
Anastasia Taylor Lind/ActionAid

“For Dalit women to have meaningful peace, they need to live in freedom from discrimination, intimidation and violence”

peace with economic stability in the household (being able to provide food and schooling for their children) and positive family relations. As one female respondent stated, “If you have a livelihood you can come together in unity... With more poverty there is more conflict and splits in the community.” Several women in Sierra Leone also mentioned the importance of having a space for women to discuss their issues and a town chief that speaks in their interest as mechanisms for building peace.

Across all countries, women’s broader understanding of peace is significant as it means women are more likely to see themselves as living without peace in their communities, despite the absence of national-level conflict. For example, although Sierra Leone is classified as post-conflict, women did not consider themselves to be living ‘in peace’. This is attributed by respondents to the high rates of poverty and violence against women, including domestic violence, mental abuse and abandonment. Across the countries, girls and women see domestic violence and other forms of violence against women as ‘conflict’ in their community. As one Afghanistan women focus group participant described, “We’re not talking about a big war, but peace also means no

domestic violence.” Similarly in Nepal, although many research participants report experiencing increased security, they also stress that whilst political parties argue over the finalisation of the constitution, there is no ‘proper peace’. Ultimately, many believe that politicians are responsible for whether peace is achieved in the country. As one respondent explained, “To maintain peace nationwide, all political party leaders should agree. Local people want peace, they (the politicians) are steering.”

“For Dalit women to have meaningful peace, they need to live in freedom from discrimination, intimidation and violence. Without the involvement of marginalized and excluded women in peace processes, there will not be sustainable peace in society.”

– Durga Sob, President, Feminist Dalit Organisation, (FEDO)

Women are therefore more likely to adopt a broad definition where peace “includes not only the absence of war, violence and hostilities...but also the enjoyment of economic and social justice, equality and the entire range of human rights and fundamental freedoms within society.”⁷¹ In contrast, men have a greater tendency to associate peace with the absence of formal conflict.

71. United Nations, 1993

Below: Sierra Leone
Womankind



5. Barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding

“Restrictive social norms and attitudes that reinforce traditional gender roles make it difficult for women to participate”

This research has revealed that women face multiple barriers as they attempt to build peace in their communities (see Figure 2 below). Violence against women, a failure to value women as peacebuilders, inequalities in education, caring responsibilities and economic stability, a lack of support and funding for women's organisations as well as societal attitudes and norms which limit women's participation in public life all affect whether women can participate safely and actively in peacebuilding in their communities.

5.1 Patriarchal norms and attitudes

“Women's role has been confined to their households while men's scope of influence expands from community to district level. Women's problem is the customary restrictions they have been made subject to. Conversely men are not hindered by social and customary restrictions to organise themselves for taking collective action.”

– Women focus group participant, Pakistan

Restrictive social norms and attitudes that reinforce traditional gender roles make it difficult for women to participate safely in a meaningful way in peacebuilding. In Nepal many of the women participants who were active in peacebuilding activities described how they were questioned by their husbands and other household members about their whereabouts and the use of money for travel and activities when attempting to engage in peacebuilding initiatives. As a Nepali female key informant explained, “If they are married it is the husbands that stop them, and later it is the society.” In Pakistan, the research revealed that while women's efforts at reconciliation within households are accepted by local norms and culture, their activism outside the family is often prevented by the family itself and religious leaders who do not approve of women's participation in social programmes. This disapproval affects the organisational capacity of women.

In Afghanistan, women and girls across all three communities explicitly recognise the

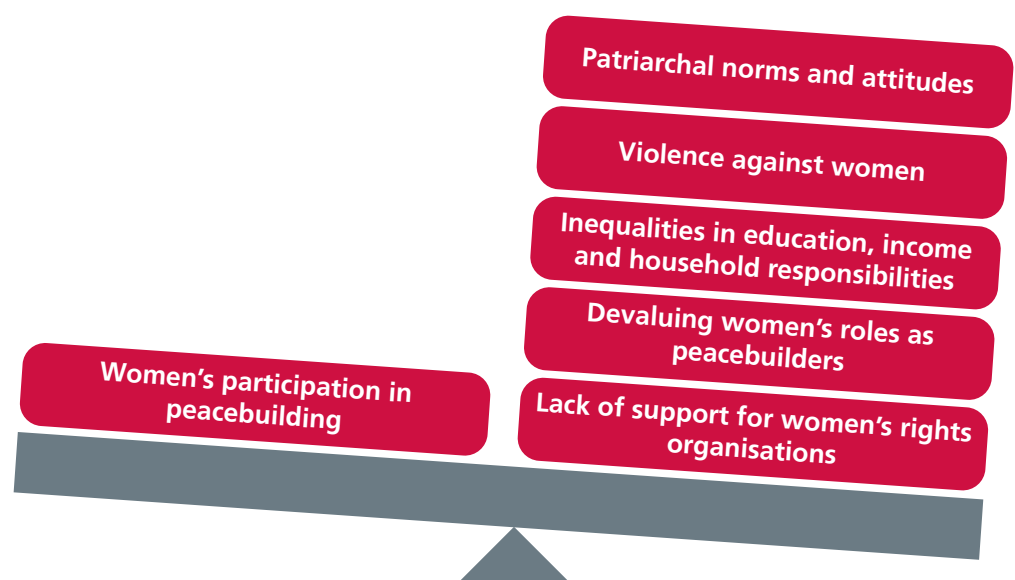


Fig 2: Barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding

“The long-term impact of conflict and militarisation creates a culture of violence that makes women especially vulnerable to post-war violence”

barriers imposed by male family members on their active participation in peacebuilding. As one female participant explained, “I have graduated from school but my brother won’t allow me to go to university. I’m allowed to go to the centre because my brother knows...[the head of the centre] and knows she is a good woman and he knows that all of people there are women so he allows this. This is very common.”

It was also apparent in Liberia that the dominant role of men as decision makers in the household is still a significant barrier to women’s involvement in groups or training. Men in both communities perceive women’s roles to be mainly cooking, household tasks and taking care of children, and some women report that they are forbidden by their male partners or family members from taking part in local peacebuilding activities. It was noted that women’s involvement in collective activities is often received with hostility by the wider community, and particularly male leaders.

Training in the communities has led to a greater recognition among men of gender equality issues. However, this does not necessarily translate into changes in attitudes and practices. In Afghanistan, a male leader in one of the communities spoke extensively about gender equality and the importance of women’s education and leadership. Despite this, neither of his young daughters are attending school. In Sierra Leone, men spoke about the importance of women’s rights, yet when male participants were asked about groups or institutions that contribute to peace they rarely mentioned women or women’s groups. Younger men however did give more importance to women’s involvement, as they themselves describe experiencing problems with traditional figures of authority.

“With regard to perceptions of women who participate in peacebuilding activities, it is very different from one context to another. There will be different reactions 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

Patriarchal norms often mean that women are not used to discussing issues in public. Local organisations in Nepal aiming to support women explained how they have to earn women’s trust in order to ‘break’ the silence:

“It is very difficult because women are first of all not very open in this society, they do not speak about what is happening with them, and so a lot of women even come to a situation where they commit suicide rather than talk about their problems with others.”

– Female key informant, Community A, Nepal

However, as discussed later in this report, this varies from context to context, and the new roles which women often take on in their communities during periods of conflict can lead to increased confidence. This research found this to be the case particularly in Liberia.

5.2 Violence against women

“Before the war most crime was petty thieves, but after they came with all kind of weapons and would take everything you have, 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, Liberia

Along with the increased violence women experience during war, the long-term impact of conflict and militarisation creates a culture of violence that makes women especially vulnerable to post-war violence.

“Women in war zones throughout the world talked to us about the weapons flowing into their communities. They told us how militarisation affected their sons, their husbands, their brothers – that it turned them into different people. They complained that their men were cold, cut off and then explosive and often violent...”⁷²

In Sierra Leone, even though participants recognise that sexual assaults and rapes

have decreased since the end of the conflict, domestic violence is still commonplace according to women interviewed in both communities, and this perpetuates men's control over women. Women in Liberia also highlighted domestic violence as a recurring practice. As a male key informant commented: "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."

Violence against women also impacts on women's freedom to participate in peacebuilding activities. Women who work on women's rights or peacebuilding face intimidation, threats to their safety or experience violence because of their active role in the community. In the Afghan study communities, there are clear concerns about insecurity and intimidation, particularly for those working in women's rights organisations. These women gave numerous examples of threats they and their families have received because of their work. The Afghan Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) reported a decrease in women attending some activities because of perceived security threats to women. After each security threat, even if it doesn't affect the projects directly, AWRC staff have to convince women and girls to continue to participate.

In Nepal, women activists also reported harassment and slander due to their public role. Kamala Darji, a Peace Ambassador for FEDO explained how "[u]nfortunately there are still people in my village who have negative views about what I am doing, so I keep working to convince them that I am doing the right thing."⁷³ There have also

been incidents of women's rights activists being killed.⁷⁴ Pabitra Bishwokarma, the FEDO President for Makhanpur District describes the challenges she faces particularly when working on domestic violence: "...I have been threatened. In a recent case, we helped a woman leave her abusive husband and he threatened to kill me. My family worry for my safety. But I am available 24 hours a day and the police also call on me for help with cases of gender-based violence so I know I am doing useful work."

Access to justice remains a significant challenge for survivors of VAW. In Sierra Leone, even though domestic violence cases can be taken to the formal justice system, there is often community and financial pressure for women to mediate cases in the community. Women face discrimination and financial demands when they go to police and local courts. This has been recognised by local organisations such as the Community Organisation for Mobilisation and Empowerment – Sierra Leone (COME-SL) and Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES), who conduct training and workshops with traditional leaders as well as support and monitor cases brought to the police and courts. In Liberia, participants recognised that the justice system is still dominated by men, there are no women jurors within the courts accessible to either community, and very few female lawyers or female police officers. In Afghanistan a lack of proper vetting of the Afghan local police and other security forces leads to former and current warlords with previous records of human rights violations (including women's rights violations) being given formal power.⁷⁵ Religious fundamentalisms also impact on women's participation in peacebuilding and the violence or fear of violence they face in

"Access to justice remains a significant challenge for survivors of VAW"

73. Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2010

74. For example see: http://www.isiswomen.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1068:murder-of-ms-laxmi-bohara-member-of-national-alliance-of-women-human-rights-defenders&catid=22:movements-within&Itemid=229 and http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=18151 (accessed 25/08/2012).

75. Afghan Women's Network, 2012

76. Participant in the ActionAid Access to Justice for Women Project cited in GAPS, 2011.

Increasing women in justice institutions

ActionAid and its partners have been working in Liberia and Sierra Leone to increase women's access to justice. This has included improving the representation of women in justice institutions and the gender responsiveness of law enforcement bodies such as the police. 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..."⁷⁶

Pakistan: Peacebuilding in a context of rising extremism

In Pakistan, PEAD⁷⁷ started its work in 2002 in response to the effects of 9/11, working to contribute to peacebuilding in the face of rising extremism and radicalisation across all political and socio-economic strata. They work with the government on educational sector reforms and engage with youth, conducting training in conflict resolution, capacity building, mediation, interpersonal, communication and negotiation skills, and women's empowerment. PEAD is working in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which is an area where women face high levels of violence including the assassination of female teachers and the destruction of schools because of female attendance. PEAD's intervention with the education department has had a direct impact on safety for women in these communities.

“Women need economic empowerment, they need to be independent”

their lives. Research by AWID has found that women's rights activists in every region are facing fundamentalist tendencies within the world's major and minor religions.⁷⁸

Women's rights activists describe religious fundamentalist campaigns to control women's bodies and autonomy, and to prescribe strictly defined gender roles. In Pakistan, the religious radicalisation of society means that as men and women become more conservative, gender discrimination grows across all socio-economic strata, restricting women's freedom of movement as well as their influence in decision making. As a key informant described, “People's focus has changed from cultural activities and intellectual indulgences to the emotionally charged religious congregations, rallies – jaloos. Even the poems recited at Mushaayra – otherwise a secular event – are charged with extremist religious sentiment.”

In Afghanistan, while progress has been made since the fall of the Taliban, the impacts of the fundamentalist regime continue and are felt particularly by women. As Maryam Rahmani, Country Representative of Afghan Women's Resource Centre (AWRC), explains, “People don't know what is happening so they prepare themselves for the worst. What's the impact? The first impact is on women. Let's not send our daughters to school – bring them back home. Maybe the Taliban will come and people will just tell them that this family is sending their daughters to school. Let's not send our women to work so that we aren't targeted if times turn bad.”

Religious fundamentalisms frequently become internalised as part of people's

identity and in this way it restricts the space for dissent much more than other patriarchal systems. For example, in this study women in Pakistan often did not demonstrate awareness of the effects of conflict or violence in their own lives. As Sameena Imtiaz, Founder and Executive Director of Peace Education and Development Foundation (PEAD) explained, “Women don't have awareness of being conflict victims that they have suffered the most, even if they are displaced, raped, rights taken away – they don't realise, they take it as part of their fate.”

5.3 Economic instability and caring responsibilities

“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, Liberia

Women in both communities in Liberia stated that lack of income is a significant barrier to taking part in peacebuilding activities. Women reported that they are unable to engage in peacebuilding or development activities due to a lack of time because of their domestic roles. In addition, as a result of low levels of education, lack of finance, lack of experience in employment, and a cultural tradition that previously marginalised women economically, women stated that they lack the confidence to engage in income generation or to speak up

77. For more information, see www.pead.org.pk

78. Association of Women in Development (AWID), 2009. See also Balchin, C., 2011

Right: Women from Dim Dim [meaning “togetherness”] women’s group in Sierra Leone, work on a community garden project which provides them with skills and a reliable income.

Aubrey Wade/ActionAid



“The multiple burden of caring for children and households, as well as contributing to income generation, leaves limited time for engagement”

in public. In Nepal, it was also recognised that the economic situation of households can hold back women’s participation in peacebuilding. The multiple burden of caring for children and households, as well as contributing to income generation, leaves limited time for engagement. Women are not able to take time away from income-generating activities and therefore cannot join initiatives that do not immediately and directly benefit their families.

“In many community programmes women cannot participate, for example in training because they have to work; if an organisation gives the opportunity they are happy, but trainings such as awareness raising are not worth the time because they have to work to feed their families and there’s no return on these trainings.”

– Officials’ Focus Group, Community B, Nepal

Significantly, whilst men in the Sierra Leone communities tended to recognise the importance of women’s economic contribution, this does not signal a shift in roles and responsibilities, as women are expected to combine duties in the home with income generation. The research highlighted numerous cases of husbands in Sierra Leone leaving their wives and neglecting children, and the precarious situation of widows. Women emphasised that they need to know that they can be

involved in leadership and simultaneously that their families will be secure and provided for.

“If [women] have means to make money, they can use the profits to solve problems in their community. For example, if a sister [meaning one of the women] gets sick, they can take her to the hospital.”

– Women Focus Group, Community A, Sierra Leone

Poverty was viewed as not only inhibiting involvement in peacebuilding activities but also the achievement of peace in families and communities. For example, community members in Sierra Leone see the availability of food as a condition of peace within households. Women in Liberia also recognised a lack of income as a barrier to peace itself. Both study communities identified a lack of jobs, training and income generation as a barrier to achieving peace. This was particularly pronounced in Community B, where a lack of income-generating opportunities not only for women but also for young men, particularly those who have been soldiers, is considered to be one of the main reasons for conflict amongst community members. While a lack of jobs is also an issue for women in Community A, they feel that they have some opportunities for income generation through the training they receive from NGOs.



Above: Afghanistan
Sandra Calligaro/Womankind

“We hear that we don’t have women who are sufficiently educated to take part in peacebuilding. Yet we see men taking part who are neither educated nor care about peace”

5.4 Inequality in education

“We hear that we don’t have women who are sufficiently educated to take part in peacebuilding. Yet we see men taking part who are neither educated nor care about peace. Women don’t need to be educated to know how war affects them, and to know what they want from peace.”

– Selay Ghaffar, Director, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan

Women’s lack of access to education and low levels of literacy were identified in many communities as barriers to women’s active participation in peacebuilding. In Nepal, both women and men in communities A and B asserted the belief that women are not knowledgeable enough to participate in decision making. Limited education, which disproportionately affects older women, was also noted as a reason for women to feel they were unable to contribute.

Organisations in Pakistan also identified inequality in education as a major challenge to their programmes, both in terms of literacy and a lack of awareness of women’s right to participate in peacebuilding activities. In Sierra Leone, low self-esteem, coupled with intimidation by men, is recognised as limiting women’s involvement in peacebuilding, and illiteracy and a lack of

education are cited as the main reasons for low confidence. As a result, women do not stand for leadership positions at local level, and during elections they report often voting for men.

“[A main obstacle is] lack of education of women and a low literacy rate among women. They might have competencies but lack confidence to come forward.”

– Key Informant, Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs (MSWGCA), Sierra Leone

In the Afghanistan study communities, men and boys tended to focus more on women’s illiteracy as a barrier to being involved in higher-level decision making. While women and girls also recognised inequality in access to education as a barrier, with specific examples of families forbidding girls from attending higher education, they also recognised that they had many skills that are useful for conflict resolution and peacebuilding that do not necessarily require high levels of education.

“Before joining FEDO, I was limited to just household work. Now I have boosted my confidence, and acquired knowledge and education. I realised that I needed to be more educated so that I could motivate and help other women, so I re-joined school and continued onto

higher education. I also became District President of FEDO, and was approached by the Nepali Congress Party to get involved after they saw my work with Dalit women. My ambition is to be a political leader and a role model for the Dalit community.'

– Pabitra Bishwokarma, FEDO President for Makhanpur District, Nepal

5.5 Devaluing women's role as peacebuilders

"Women can't contribute to big issues – but men can. Men are the ones who participate in these discussions."

– Women focus group, Community C, Afghanistan

Despite their peacebuilding achievements (discussed in section 6), women in the research sites do not necessarily recognise the important role they play in building peace. For example, in Afghanistan when asked to identify key players in the community who build peace, no women identified themselves or their groups/networks. They focused much more on the importance of state actors (government) and traditional leaders as the key actors in peacebuilding. When prompted women did talk about activities they are doing to promote peace and to prevent and resolve conflict in their communities. For example, through the ActionAid Paralegal Project, women paralegals are establishing community groups and providing support to women survivors of violence.⁷⁹ However women's current or potential role in peacebuilding was downplayed by both women and men. In Nepal, there was also a contrast between what women view as their limited contribution to peace, and their actual participation in peacebuilding forums, forest user groups⁸⁰, paralegal committees, civil society groups, and Mahila Adhikar Manch.⁸¹

In both study communities in Sierra Leone, women also do not regard themselves as 'peacebuilders'. They see peace as being achieved by the authorities that have traditionally been engaged in conflict resolution and mediation, including town and section chiefs and religious leaders.

However, after training and sensitisation on women's rights and access to justice, the 'Mamy Queen' (traditional women's leader in the community) and Women's Chairlady (leader of a women's group or forum) in each community was also recognised as forming part of these official structures.

In Pakistan, due to the patriarchal structure of Pakistani society, women have never been part of major decision making and formal peacebuilding efforts. Organisations advocating for women's involvement face great challenges explaining to women that they have the right and capacity to contribute to decision-making structures, and that their perspective might be missing if they do not participate. Some organisations interviewed felt this was not affected by socio-economic standing and formal education as even educated women rarely challenge their roles within their families and are deeply set in cultural traditions which restrict women's participation in non-family related activities.

Specific support and training on women's rights and the links between gender equality and peacebuilding can make a difference. For example, in Afghanistan, in Community B, where training has not focused on women's participation in peacebuilding, both male and female Community Development Councils (CDCs) concentrated on projects such as construction, road building and income generation where women's involvement was limited. In contrast, where there has been specific support and training on the links between gender equality and peacebuilding (with both men and women in the community) such as in Communities A and C, there is a marked difference in women's confidence about being involved in conflict resolution and mediation and more support from men for women's participation in decision making.

5.6 Sustainability of support for women's organisations

Organisations working to support women in peacebuilding activities also face barriers which impact on the sustainability of their work with the communities in various countries. All the local NGOs and CSOs met

"Specific support and training on women's rights and the links between gender equality and peacebuilding can make a difference"

79. ActionAid 2011, p.8.

80. Forest user groups are committees of community members that manage local forests in Nepal.

81. Nationwide rural women's network, which translates to English as women's rights forum: for more information, see www.nwrf.org.np (accessed 23/08/2012).



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

ActionAid

“Inadequate infrastructure also hinders the work of organisations, particularly within remote communities”

by the researchers are entirely dependent on external funding. The funding they receive tends to be short term in nature and restricted to specific project areas, such as livelihood training or counselling. The local organisations struggle to set their own agendas, and are often influenced by the funding preferences of donors. For example, several of the local organisations that participated in the research identified a need to engage in income-generating activities, including skills training and education, but they have been unable to obtain funding for this.

Organisations in Nepal also noted challenges, particularly with regard to accessing funding, which impacts on the geographical reach of their work and the number of activities they can support. Funds to cover women's loss of earning during activities are limited or unavailable, which can make it difficult for women living in poverty to attend. In Pakistan, local organisations also described the lack of resources and capacities available to support their existing work. In Sierra Leone, local NGOs, including women's rights organisations, identified severe challenges particularly in terms of capacity and

resources. For example, they explain funding is never enough to combine training and awareness activities with livelihood support initiatives. According to representatives of local organisations, the limited access to funding is in part due to increased direct budgetary support to central and local government.

Inadequate infrastructure also hinders the work of organisations, particularly within remote communities. In Liberia, respondents noted that the severe lack of national infrastructure and wide geographical spread of communities are the biggest barriers for local organisations in reaching women in remote areas. This includes not only roads and transport infrastructure but also health services and schools. Organisations in Sierra Leone stated that this often means that remote communities will remain outside projects' target populations. One female focus group participant in Nepal explained, “When facilities are provided that is when there is peace. We had no access to roads and couldn't go anywhere when it rained. Now there are roads and we can go places even in the rainy season.”

6. Women building peace

“This research demonstrates that at the local level women continue to build peace within their homes and communities and to come together collectively to create change”

“For generations, women have served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.”⁸²

The skills of women as mediators, decision makers within the home and their experiences building trust and dialogue in their families and communities are frequently dismissed as irrelevant or not sufficiently valued by national governments, the international community or by women themselves. Yet this research demonstrates that at the local level women continue to build peace within their homes and communities and to come together collectively to create change.

6.1 Building peace in families and across communities

“... Even during the war [women] were the ones that initiated peace. Even now, they are the ones holding the topic.”

– Hannah Koroma, WAVES, Sierra Leone

Despite the fact that many women tended not to describe themselves as ‘peacebuilders’, female respondents across communities and countries described the importance of their role building peace within their own families. In Afghanistan, mediation and building peace within homes and families is described by women as the ‘easy’ and ‘natural’ place to start, and supported by gender norms and traditions, particularly in relation to raising children. Women’s conflict mediation in the domestic sphere is also recognised by male members of the community. As the Secretary of the High Level Peace Council in Afghanistan described:

“Society is men and women both, so with every process – social and cultural – we have to consider them both... You can see

women’s role in peace as described in Islam. Women’s role is related to men and the family... My main message for my sisters is to teach their sons how to speak and behave. Women have to raise sons to raise their consciousness about peace.”

In Nepal, women explain that what they refer to as ‘quarrels and disputes’ are typically solved by eight to ten male elders and/or educated people gathering to discuss the issues. Traditionally, women, who have largely not accessed formal education, do not have a decision-making role within these meetings. Thus, many women see their role as contributing to future peace through educating their children: “We are hoping that there will be peace and law and order in the community but directly we have not done anything as such, except for educating our kids which we think is a big responsibility.” – Female key informant, Community A, Nepal.

Despite the barriers to participation that face women in Pakistan, they are nevertheless involved in promoting peace and social cohesion. Women in the community resolve family disputes and prevent conflict and are, at times, successful in persuading men to refrain from resorting to violence. As one male focus group participant described, “Most of the women try to dissuade their male relatives from taking part in violent action and provocative activities. They effectively solve family disputes.” However, the role of women is largely restricted to the household, with communication and relationships restricted to close relatives.

“Men resort to collective action for example, rallies, strikes, sit-ins whereas women’s role is limited to their household and women and children of their neighbourhoods. Women play

82. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Open Session of the UN Security Council on Women, Peace and Security, New York, 24 October 2000.



Above: Afghanistan
Womankind

“Women’s potential is not adequately exploited. They have limited outreach due to economic deprivation, political powerlessness and social seclusion”

effective roles in psychological rehabilitation and in cooling the sentiments of their male counterparts. Women’s potential is not adequately exploited. They have limited outreach due to economic deprivation, political powerlessness and social seclusion.”

– Male key informant, Pakistan

In Sierra Leone, women’s lack of recognition of their role as ‘peacebuilders’ contrasts with their acknowledgment of the vital role they play for the community, particularly in relation to their responsibilities for raising,

educating and providing for children. Women highlight the positive impacts on peace from their involvement in income-generating activities, such as gardening and farming, which contributes to economic stability in the household. They also recognise their role in easing physical and psychological traumas. As a female teacher explained, “A woman is a strong leader in the house and she is the one who finds new ways to earn a livelihood.” – Female teacher, Community A, Sierra Leone

Afghanistan: Addressing violence against women and girls

Women and girls in Community A highlighted how extended conflict had led to normalisation of violence, increasing violence against women and the disruption of peace in their community. The Afghan Women’s Resource Centre, supported by Womankind, has built a safe women-only space providing a range of activities including literacy classes, a basic gym, English and computer short courses, tailoring, awareness-raising and agriculture and kitchen gardening workshops. They have also facilitated the creation of women and girls’ committees which decide on the focus of future projects. Because of their work, they have also seen a large increase in the number of women coming to them for support in cases of VAW.

“Membership has greatly increased now and more and more families are allowing their girls to attend the centre. We’ve never had any security problems here. A survey that we did shows that it is really essential to have these centres and is important for people to come and share their experiences and ideas.”

– Head of Centre for women, Community A

6.2 Collectively organising for peace

“In a patriarchal society, it is extremely difficult for women to be heard, so it is important that women come together. Unless they act together, no one is going to hear them. They find security and strength in each other’s experiences.”

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

Some of the most important advances in women’s rights – including for example UNSCR 13253, various legal reforms in all countries that expand women’s rights, and institutions such as UN Women – have been secured through the efforts of international and national women’s movements. This research has revealed that women’s peacebuilding efforts at the local level are no different – with women and girls organising themselves collectively to achieve change.

A key characteristic of women’s involvement in peacebuilding in Afghanistan is that women and girls

organise themselves collectively. Not only does this give them more influence and impact, but it also offers a greater degree of protection and support. Safe women-only spaces are vital for allowing women and girls to meet and organise. Across the Afghanistan communities, this research found that men are much less likely than women to form groups. Where men do act collectively, this is through more formal systems such as jirgas.⁸³

Women in both communities in Liberia have also organised themselves collectively and formed support networks at the local level. They explain that when someone has a problem, everybody has a problem. This has helped them to overcome obstacles created by 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 to seek justice for survivors of violence and sexual abuse. In contrast, men usually go individually to the clan chief or local officials to solve their disputes as they can be heard without the need to be organised or supported by other

“In a patriarchal society, it is extremely difficult for women to be heard, so it is important that women come together”

Liberia: Women supporting women can lead to change

For women in Community A, peace means not only physical security, but also being able to educate the next generation. Decision making in the community had traditionally been dominated by men, including the school Parent and Teacher Association (PTA), but through awareness-building, the women began to realise their right to participate. The school building in the community had fallen into disrepair and was no longer safe to be used by the children. The local women’s rights forum identified the PTA elections as an opportunity for change, and organised to support and elect a new PTA leader. Maima, a woman from the local community, was elected as chair of the previously all-male PTA.

Having identified a well-functioning school as the key to the success of girls in the community, Maima took action to begin the rebuilding process. The PTA subsequently secured assistance from the Ministry of Education, as well as local and international aid organisations, to begin the construction of a new school, and a plan was put in place to improve the overall quality of education provided and to ensure that girls continue their schooling.

With the support of the women’s forum, the community has taken a big step towards the peace that they have identified. As Maima explained:

“It is through the women’s forum that I am now serving as the PTA chairperson. It was the women who gave me the support. Someone came and told us that the men were going to have the PTA election but there is no woman candidate. So the women stood and said we are going to bring somebody. And so it was through the women’s forum that I succeeded. They pushed me and gave me support.”

83. Jirga, meaning ‘council’ in Pashto, is an assembly of elders under the traditional governance system of Afghanistan, with wide-ranging powers to take decisions, impose law and provide justice in all spheres of life. Jirga can be at the village level up to the national level.

“Seeing a woman standing in front of them makes them feel more able to talk in public”

Below: Sierra Leone
Womankind

Sierra Leone: Women’s rights awareness and self-confidence

Martha is a young woman in Community A, who is currently teaching grades 1 to 4. She is also a member of the ‘Saturday’ group, a facilitator of the STAR circle, the secretary of the women’s forum, and the ‘chairlady’ of the nutrition group. The confidence gained through training and her position within different women’s groups in the community helped her to assume the role of teacher for young children (before her there was no teacher) and make clear and positive impacts on the welfare of the community as a whole.

“... I went to school and got to Grade 5, but I was not able to take my exams because my family could not afford it. I was given away for marriage and had six children. My husband works away as a miner and so when I did not receive money from him I had to sell Fufu [local alcohol made from Cassava] to make money. I suffered a lot. But through ActionAid I learned about my rights... The community decided they wanted a female teacher and nominated me. I was taken to the school as a teacher and now I am a female mentor for the children, which builds my confidence and their confidence. Seeing a woman standing in front of them makes them feel more able to talk in public.”



“Women build peace among themselves. They mediate and solve disputes at the community level. Most men solve conflicts at ‘chief’ level”

men. According to a male member of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, “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, they must gain the support of other women, or have contacts with local authority figures. 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 presence had been very limited, women had still found ways to come together and collectively work towards peace.

This practical approach to peacebuilding is also evident in the women’s influencing of the local community police force. The local community police force was previously made up of men, which made reporting of rape and domestic violence very difficult for women. The women’s forum influenced the community police force to form a female unit.

In Sierra Leone, traditional customs and laws act against the equal involvement of women in formal decision making at both national and local levels. However, women in the communities in Bo have challenged this by creating informal spaces for

collective organisation. Spaces set up with support from ActionAid and its partners include ‘women’s forums’⁸⁴, safe spaces that facilitate support to women in the community providing mediation to families, referral pathways in cases of violence, and are involved in farming and petty trading; mothers’ clubs that work with teachers to promote school attendance of children and are also involved in the cleaning and sanitation of the town; STAR circles⁸⁵ that include reproductive health education especially relating to HIV and AIDS as well adult literacy classes.

“Anything that happens, as women, we talk about it in our spaces, the women’s forum, STAR circle, mothers’ club... We meet every Saturday and with contributions from the members we provide micro-credit to our members, and also invest in educating children from poor families, and address other needs.”

– Women Focus Group, Community A, Sierra Leone

The existence of spaces to discuss their issues and support each other has had significant impacts on the daily lives of women, particularly in terms of increased awareness of gender-based violence, women’s rights monitoring and the education of girls. This has positive effects such as the creation of cooperative livelihoods schemes, or the promotion of women into leadership roles within the community.

Nepal: Women supporting women to access entitlements

An important issue for conflict survivors, and particularly widows, is the government relief packages offered to women widowed through conflict. In order to receive these payments forms have to be filled out – something many women need help with due to high levels of illiteracy. Women for Human Rights (WHR), Society for Environmental Education Development (SEED), Boat for Community Development (BCD) and other women’s rights groups supported women through this process.

In Community A, one widow, aged 23 with three children, was denied payment from the government because another woman from the same village had the same name and had already claimed widow’s compensation. With the support from the Mahila Adhikar Manch (women’s rights forum) and SEED in the form of advice and assistance with paperwork, she proved that she was a different individual and managed to secure the relief package, which enabled her to send her children to school. In Community B, women help one another to gain citizenship and access compensation: “Some women had no citizenship and when their husbands were killed in the war they were left with nothing. We helped them.” – Female Key Informant, Community B, Nepal

84. Women’s forums set up with support from ActionAid Sierra Leone and its partners are known as ‘uman tinap tranga wan’, meaning ‘women stand up strong’.

85. An ActionAid participatory method to engage people and communities affected by HIV and AIDS, which empowers communities to discuss issues affecting them and collectively come up with actions to address these issues.

Men's voices on women's involvement in local peacebuilding in Bhakkar, Pakistan

"Presently women's role is limited to the households where their persuasion works wonders in resolving disputes. There is need for their organised work at a wider level. Women are good at reconciliation." – Young Men focus group

"Whenever allowed, women have proved to be more efficient than men in persuading the parties to the conflict to discuss the issues and solutions. Men easily flare up at such occasions usually spoiling the effort by resorting to violent argument." – Men focus group

"Women's role at community level, although desired, is not as profound as it should be. They are however effectively taking part in reconciliation at the family level. People are receptive to their taking part in conflict resolution. They should come forward for intervening at the wider community level." – Male key informant

"Women need to be organised to play a meaningful social role. It is in fact the need of the hour." – Male key informant

"Women need to be organised to play a meaningful social role. It is in fact the need of the hour"

Increases in confidence and awareness of their rights reduces women's dependence on men for solving disputes, as they now consult the Chairlady before taking cases to the Chief. For example, in inheritance cases women are now claiming property and assets that they are entitled to by law. Gladys, the women's forum leader in Community A describes how awareness of her rights empowered her to reclaim her property: "Previously we had no rights, but now we are involved in decision making. Previously, as a woman, if you weren't married, they would drive you out of your home. Now women can have a share in family assets. Now, even though I don't have a husband, I'm sitting in my father's house and know I cannot be driven out... This is peace for me."

In Nepal, the various forums and groups that women have collectively participated in have achieved notable results. Peacebuilding forums support conflict survivors to access their rights, run communication and decision-making training for both men and women in the communities, and work on cases of domestic violence. The women's rights groups support women whose parents were killed to acquire citizenship. Citizenship for women in Nepal is accrued through male relatives, and is one of the requirements for access to public resources such as

compensation for conflict survivors. The paralegal committee provides legal support so that women are aware of their legal rights when they experience violence, abuse and discrimination.

Women's groups are also active in supporting village development. In one of the villages supported by SEED, the organisation helped to form a women's group that successfully pressurised an electricity office to provide electricity. The government had collected fees for electricity, but the village had not been connected to the supply. The other villagers, once very sceptical about the women's group, are now turning towards them for help if they face problems.

In Pakistan, the role of women is largely restricted to the household, with communication and relationships restricted to close relatives, which makes collective organising more difficult. However, many of the women in the focus groups had participated in activities organised by the Awam Dost Foundation (ADF), such as workshops on human rights, dialogues on peace, and theatre performances. Some women are members of a theatre group and some are part of organisations which focus on women's rights and activities for the promotion of tolerance. While still seeing their role as largely restricted to the family/household, women also report



Above: Women engage in activities to mark World AIDS Day, Nepal.

Brian Sokol/ActionAid

“The post-conflict period has given women space to organise collectively and to assert their power in decision making”

taking the opportunity to talk among gatherings of women and children about tolerance, and trying to influence other women to persuade their male relatives to refrain from violence. According to the respondents, many family disputes are settled by women’s interventions. One respondent highlighted how a feud in a neighbouring village was resolved by women who organised collectively, and mobilised residents of the neighbouring area to intervene and reconcile the dispute through setting in motion the traditional reconciliatory mechanism known as sathh. Interestingly, some of the participants in the girls’ focus group in the Pakistan community perceived that individual women’s social work is not approved of, but that collective efforts by women’s groups and organisations are welcomed by the community. One of the key informants observed that “people at large are receptive to the idea of women’s collective effort. Initiative is lacking.” This is an interesting perspective to take further in future works by local NGOs and CSOs active in these areas. This is supported by the views of male research participants which indicate they would like to see women’s involvement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding on a wider level.

6.3 The post-conflict window of opportunity

While there is evidence in this research that in many study communities, women’s rights have regressed in the aftermath of conflict, it also appears that the post-conflict period has given women space to organise collectively and to assert their power in decision making. Many women speak of a new confidence. This is particularly the case in Liberia, where women describe a new standing for women in the post-conflict period. They are proud that they overcame adversity, and have continued to speak out and assert the decision-making power (where possible) that they carved out during the conflict period. The women started this change themselves, with and without the intervention of external actors, but they feel that they need support to further these changes, to empower themselves and their daughters for the future. Importantly, this was observed both in a community with direct support from NGOs as well as in a community with no direct support:

“So, after they came back [from refugee camps in Côte d'Ivoire] they built a house: the women have decided to come together and contribute. From the farm they put together yellow rice [to sell] and were able to construct a house for



Above: Women in Grand Cape Mount county, Liberia, take part in an ActionAid project training peer educators in peacebuilding skills.

Anastasia Taylor Lind/ActionAid

“Slowly, there is an increase in men listening to women’s voices, in families and the community”

the women to meet. During the war the women are 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 in here again?’ So, they came together and decided to call their children, both boys and girls, to talk to them that if there is war, if there is anything that would bring destruction to this town they shouldn’t partake.”

– Women focus group, Community B, Liberia

There was also evidence across other countries of how the transformation of gender roles during conflict as well as the post-conflict recovery work of external organisations has led to the emergence of women leaders. For example, in Afghanistan, women, at great personal risk, ran clandestine literacy courses for girls during the Taliban rule. These women have emerged as leaders in their communities during the post-Taliban period and provide support and safe spaces for other women to

become literate and independent within the constraints of the conservative society in which they live.

External organisations working to respond to post-conflict issues have also increased women’s empowerment. As one female key informant in Community A, Nepal remarked, “SEED helped in the beginning. They encouraged them [women] and said they cannot confine themselves inside the household and cry and lament about what they went through. But instead come out and fight for your rights, and find a way to find peace.” Community members and staff of larger organisations in Nepal reported that many groups have formed over recent years and women are more empowered in terms of raising their voices and exhibiting knowledge about political processes and rights.

“Ten or fifteen years ago, women were illiterate and unknowing of their rights, and didn’t participate so actively. It is not like that now [...] Slowly, there is an increase in men listening to women’s voices, in families and the community.”

– Male key informant, Community B, Nepal

7. The missing link – local to national

“There are clearly few spaces for the voices of those working for peace within their communities to have dialogue with decision makers”

“Once I was in a community talking to women, and they said “What do we care about the UN? Why does it matter to us?” Water was scarce in that community, and one woman said to me, ‘Take this bucket of water – you can wash your feet with it, or you can use it intelligently and start from your head and wash your whole body.’ That reminds me why we need to join the dots and lobby at all levels...”

– Bandana Rana, Executive Chair, Saathi and member of UN Women Global Civil Society Advisory Group, Nepal

7.1 The disconnect between local peacebuilding and national processes

“Yes, the government has a national action plan on 1325 and 1820, to ensure women’s participation. But it is not rolled out at local level, and does not address discrimination in the community. It needs to include marginalised groups, including Dalit women.”

– Renu Sijapati, Project Coordinator, FEDO.

Across the study communities, participants expressed concern at the disconnect between national peace and decision-making processes and the community. Central government and associated politicians and political parties were not seen as contributing to local level peace by the majority of respondents. In some circumstances, their actions were even associated with the creation of local conflicts and local discontent with the broader political system. In Nepal and Sierra Leone, in particular, opposing political parties were reported to have threatened local populations if they did not vote for them. In Afghanistan it was noted that the sense of insecurity based on confusion

about what is going on at the national and international levels acts as a barrier to women’s active participation in peacebuilding in the community. As a women’s rights activist explained: “There are many people who do not know a single thing that is happening at the national level in Afghanistan. This creates an image – the situation is bad, the project failed, these people are leaving us so let’s be prepared. Maybe it means other groups will be coming back – like the Taliban.”

Remote geographic location and technology barriers also contribute to this disconnect. In Liberia, the representatives of the different communities highlighted how difficult it has been to accomplish change particularly in remote rural areas. They feel a disconnect between their community and national decision-making processes and state that large groups of people are 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

Across the communities, there are clearly few spaces for the voices of those working for peace within their communities to have dialogue with decision makers. Even peacebuilding mechanisms at the district level in Afghanistan such as District Peace Councils (where it is stipulated that there should be at least two women participating per Council)⁸⁶ are not well known. In all of the research communities in Afghanistan, no one mentioned the District Peace Councils in discussions as a key stakeholder, even when prompted. There is increasing frustration that it is ‘the same people’

86. Interview with the Secretary of the High Level Peace Council, Prof. Aminiddin Muzafary.

“If members of councils are chosen from the community then this process will be better”

speaking to each other about the issues at the national level while paying little attention to what is needed at the community level or how to build peace at all levels in Afghanistan. As a representative at the Ministry of Women’s Affairs described, “All the people at the national peace council are not related to the community... We also have a lot of expert people – religious people, etc. But if members of councils are chosen from the community then this process will be better.”

The women who participated in this study in Sierra Leone also did not see links between their own peacebuilding activities at the community level and national level activities. They perceived big differences between themselves and urban women, particularly in terms of education, causing the rural women to feel less able to contribute. Despite national-level organisations and networks increasingly collaborating with each other in advocacy work, there is often a disconnect with the concerns of rural women, as noted by women’s activists and leaders of national organisations. Further, even if changes in practices and legislation are achieved at the national level, their effectiveness depends on implementation at the local level, a factor often forgotten. As Bondu Manyeh,

Graceland Counselling Service (GLCS) National Coordinator, describes, introducing a mechanism at the national level does not mean it is implemented at the local level: “People talk about the 30% quota as if it were happening but it is not. We need to think first about issues like girls leaving school early due to forced marriage or teenage pregnancy.”

National and regional organisations in Liberia also discuss 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. Local residents feel that politicians visit them only during election times, make empty promises and then leave, never to return. During a discussion in Monrovia with representatives from NGOs and the Liberian Government, the attendees agreed on several key points. Firstly, that women’s roles are crucial in peacebuilding and in governing the country; secondly that the link between grassroots work and national-level work is vital for achieving sustainable peace; and thirdly, that at this point in time, the link is not functioning as it should or could. This concern at the disconnect between the national and local agendas for peace was evident in all the study communities.

Local to National – Women need to come together to ensure a voice in formal decision making

Women’s involvement in formal politics both at local and national levels remains extremely limited and difficult. Female respondents in Nepal note that women who aim for positions of power (for instance, a chairperson) struggle against men who do not want to give up power, while a lack of women voting in elections means that women candidates do not have a strong female voting mass behind them, which compounds the problem. A similar issue was noted in Liberia:

“...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 elections in Liberia.

7.2 From one drop it becomes a river – the bottom-up approach

“At the national level it’s the same people all the time. We need to start at the community because we’re not changing anything at the moment.”

– Maryam Rahmani, AWRC, Afghanistan

A large number of research participants across the study communities agreed on the need for a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding with peace built from the individual, to the household, to the community level, before it can be achieved nationally (see Figure 3). In Afghanistan, community members expressed their belief that peacebuilding from the grassroots upwards is just as important as top-down national and international approaches. While different groups and communities vary in their suggestions of ‘who’ is most important in maintaining peace at the community level, all (both women and men)

talk about the importance of the individual and the family unit. As an old Afghan saying notes – setting an individual example is vital: “From one drop it becomes a river.” The potential impact of community peace initiatives on wider regional peace was also identified by local community members. In Sierra Leone, participants mentioned how they are building links with neighbouring communities. For instance, as the hospital in Community A is used by members of nearby communities, Community A use it to transfer their knowledge of women’s rights, access to justice for cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and teenage pregnancy, to other women. Similarly, in the Afghan study areas, community members (both women and men) see that their community can be an example to other communities. In Community C, where ActionAid and its partners have been supporting a peacebuilding project, villagers say that other villages nearby had seen the

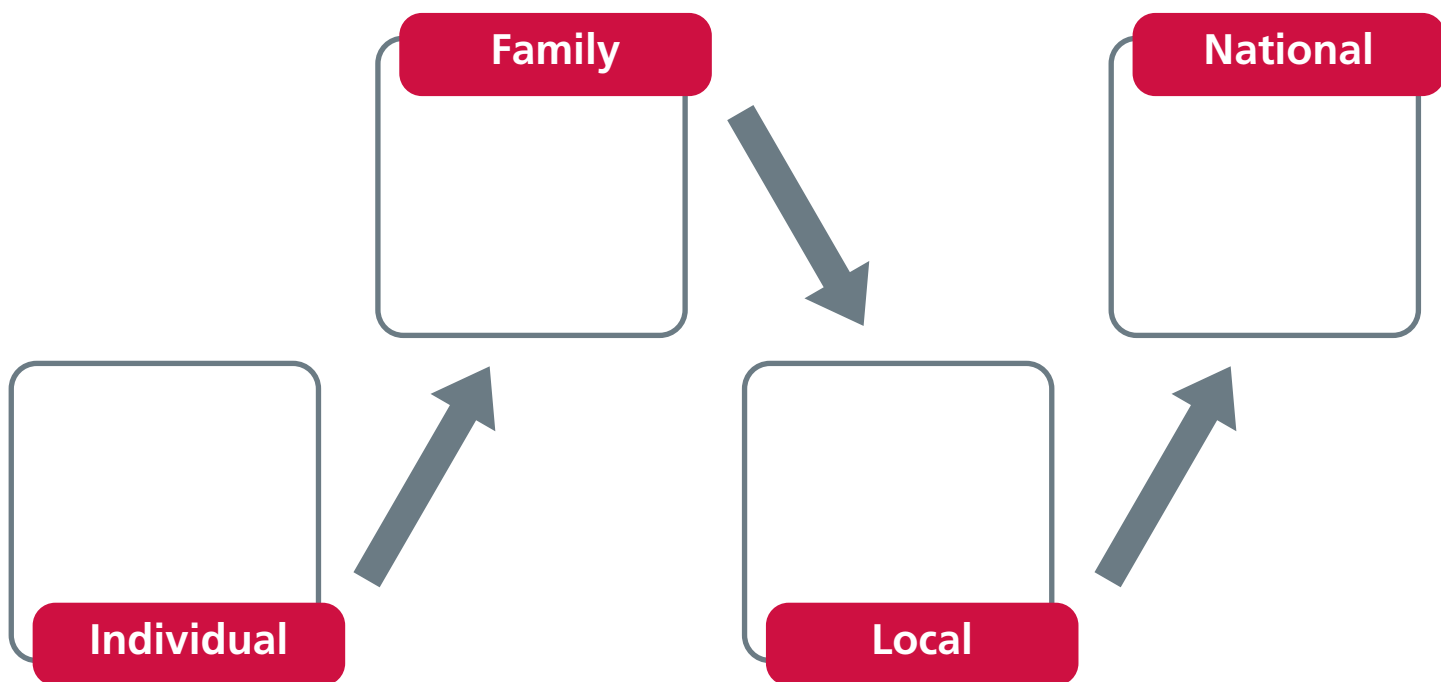


Fig 3: The bottom-up approach to peacebuilding

Nepal: Mahila Adhikar Manch – bringing the local to the national

Mahila Adhikar Manch (MAM) is a women’s network active in 28 districts in Nepal with around 36,000 members, working on issues such as violence against women, harmful traditional practices, and women’s right to land. It also engages in campaigning and policy advocacy at the community and national level. Two key informants mentioned that if cases such as violence or discrimination against women are reported, members coordinate and work together. One example is the successful lobbying of the judicial system by MAM to investigate the murder of a woman by her husband and mother-in-law. Women from across Nepal joined and lobbied through protests and strikes for an investigation and legal prosecution.

MAM was also actively involved in drafting women’s rights provisions for inclusion in the new constitution. They first met in local communities and then put a 16-point demand plan together and handed it over to elected representatives for discussion in the assembly. One of their points, the need to abolish the age limit applied to war widow’s pensions, has been successfully considered and enacted along with the Supreme Court’s verdict. The influence of local women in this process is also recognised by members of national organisations in Kathmandu, who see it as a very good example of the women’s movement working together.

Below: Women in Nepal take part in a rally during the 16 days of activism against gender violence.

Brian Sokol/ActionAid



Leadership – from the village to the parliament

Afghan Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) has been supporting the creation of women's committees in local communities around Afghanistan, where it is still rare to encounter women in decision-making positions.

"We are working at the village level so that we can promote leadership at the community level, for instance, by bringing women to the Community Development Council (CDC) elections. Mostly when you see CDCs, women are not in high decision-making positions. There are female CDCs but the decision makers are still the male CDCs who lead the Council. Women are not the director; they are the secretary or assistant. We want to first bring them to that level of director, the real leadership position, at the community level. Then they can go to provincial level elections." – Maryam Rahmani, AWRC

Eight years ago, AWRC supported a number of women to be involved in committees – two of whom became committee leaders. Soon after this, AWRC supported these two women to become committee leaders at the district level. Following their experience and the increased access to politics that this gave them, they ran for election in parliament. They were both MPs in the previous parliament.

"If one village sees us with peace they think that this is also possible for them – it will have impacts at district and provincial level"

difference created by peacebuilding interventions and wanted to emulate this in their own community. As a male focus group participant explained, "If one village sees us with peace they think that this is also possible for them – it will have impacts at district and provincial level."

NGOs, and in particular networks, are seen as the key connector between local-level peace processes and priorities and the national level. For instance, the National Rural Women of Liberia is a vital link between local and national processes and provides annual reports of the work of rural women to the Ministry of Gender and Development. In Nepal, many local organisations such as the paralegal committees, Mahila Adhikar Manch and civil society groups are working together with support from district-level organisations, such as SEED and BCD, and national-level organisations such as FEDO, WHR and Saathi. This allows for important issues for women to be made public on a larger scale, putting pressure on the government and institutions nationwide. Saathi's National Network against Domestic

Violence is a good example. In Pakistan, institutions such as PEAD and PAT also have a large, co-ordinated programme of work with wide geographical coverage. Some of the focus group participants felt that this approach is more successful than the efforts of smaller isolated organisations and individuals, and should be replicated: "Many journalists, writers, lawyers and sportsmen work for propagating peace at the individual level and among their limited personal circles of influence. Collective or organised effort is lacking." – Male key informant, Pakistan

Creating change at the local level to influence regional and national peace processes requires sustained support and long-term investment. For example, in the Afghanistan study 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 in local governance which can lead to women's participation at regional and national levels.

8. Supporting women – what works?

“Peacebuilding requires long-term support and funding”

This research found that the work of local NGOs and women’s rights organisations is recognised and valued by people across communities. These organisations become the focal point of support for excluded and marginalised women, who struggle to get attention and support from formal state institutions. Support from NGOs and international donors has been important in enabling local organisations and communities in turn to support women’s participation in peacebuilding. This section explores the work of these organisations – the impact they are having in the community and what is working to empower women as peacebuilders at the local level.

8.1 Long-term support and investment

Peacebuilding requires long-term support and funding. As participants in Liberia described, changing structural and cultural barriers that have existed for generations at the local level is a gradual process that takes time and persistence. Yet funding for women’s participation in peacebuilding is

frequently inadequate and not sufficiently long term. In Afghanistan, women’s rights organisations that were interviewed as part of this research describe limited resources and support for peacebuilding work, which they know requires intensive community engagement over long periods of time. Afghan communities express frustration with short-term funding, particularly for peacebuilding work at the community level. Organisations that have been able to make a long-term commitment to a community gain respect from the local people. In Nepal, SEED has supported the development and strengthening of women’s civil society in Community A and is described as gaining loyalty from the people due its long-term commitment. As a female key informant in Community A described: When the conflict just ended, SEED came here and they have not left ever since. They are still working here. It has been a long time. But the other organisations, they came in asked questions and took pictures and things like that, but they did not return with more help. It has only been SEED that has been consistent.”

Nepal: Long-term support for women’s involvement in peacebuilding

SEED was founded in 2001 with a focus on peacebuilding and governance activities in Village Development Committees (VDCs). The formal partnership with ActionAid was established in 2004, with its focus including women’s empowerment, awareness raising and scholarship programs. Since 2008, SEED has focused on education, health, food security and women’s rights, aiming to support the social, political and economic development of the community, focusing on the most deprived and marginalised, through awareness-raising, advocacy and skills development. SEED has seen some success: four out of nine local council members are women, women have become more active members in community groups and are gaining elected positions such as the chair of school management committees or community forest groups, and the school enrolment rate of girls has risen to around 90%.

Nepal: Consortium for Women's Rights (CWR), a partner of ActionAid, started working in 2010. The team, consisting of mainly women lawyers and some men, provides litigation of women's legal rights cases (for example, family matters, divorce cases, etc.), legal counselling through a hotline service, support for the registration of cases with the police, and help with fact-finding at the community level, as well as mediation. They also link their work to policy advocacy at national level, and have filed a public interest litigation against some harmful traditional practices.

"To engage women in peacebuilding we need to promote access to justice"

8.2 Empowering women through access to justice

"I'm proudest of solving conflict cases – particularly domestic violence cases where, as a group, we have held husbands to account and let them know they cannot get away with it. They know that we will take it further, even to court."

– Head of women's Peace Council, Afghanistan, Community C.

Many of the organisations interviewed in this research recognised the importance of access to justice for women in building peace and the empowerment of women through increased awareness of their rights and participation in justice structures.

In Liberia, supported by ActionAid and its partners and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, community members in Community A have received mediation training as an alternative to the traditionally male-dominated mechanism of solving conflict through the clan chief or local officials. This training also includes 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 woman mediator says, "It is the training that I got from ActionAid that made me have confidence," and feels that 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."

The women in Community A, as well as the local organisations interviewed, state that women are now reporting more crimes to the police and courts with the support of local women's groups (including ZWUC – see box). Women report that they have successfully mediated family disputes, both in collaboration with and independently from existing traditional dispute resolution processes. They have also (in a small number of cases) supported women to report rape to the police, with at least one successful prosecution. Men are also increasingly recognising the skills of women as mediators.

"If a woman came to solve a dispute between two men, the men would listen. She would have learned the skills through the mediation training."

– Female key informant, Liberia

Organisations in Sierra Leone are also working to support women's access to justice. WAVES and COME-SL are both grassroots organisations in Bo working to end violence against women and support women's property rights..

"Women have greater difficulties as they face increased barriers in both local and magistrate courts due to discrimination, lack of information and lower educational levels. To engage women in peacebuilding we need to promote access to justice".

– Sama Sandy, COME-SL, Bo

A property rights case in Community B highlights how the support of an organisation (in this case WAVES) can empower women to assert their rights. After the death in the village of a man who had

Zwedru Women United for Change (ZWUC) was founded in 2009 to help meet the needs of women in the community. The founders are a group of local women who noted the inequalities in the living standards between men and women and wanted change. They work towards peace in the community through counselling for women living with mental health problems and HIV, livelihood training, including soap-making and tailoring, and delivering access to justice training, with support from ActionAid. Other support came from UNHCR and USAID. Despite their success in a number of areas, they are still confronted by obstacles including a lack of long-term financial support, logistical difficulties such as transportation, childcare and lack of support from men within the community.

two wives, his brother took over his estate. The two women challenged him and took the case to the chief: “They decided the case in favour of the women but the brother did not accept it. The women referred the case [to WAVES], they came and ruled also in favour of the women. The brother now has accepted to give back the house, but still hasn’t given over the other assets back to the wives, such as the mobile phone, personal items and the loan book (the husband had been a lender and many owed him money). We are calling WAVES back to deal with this case.” – Women Focus Group, Community B

Access to justice also requires providing support and safety for survivors of violence against women (VAW). Many organisations that contributed to this research are working to support VAW survivors as well as to tackle VAW as a fundamental barrier to peace (see boxes on Saathi and Graceland Counselling Services).

8.3 Creating safe space for women’s participation

Organisations can help facilitate space for women to engage in peacebuilding in the local community and build on the safe spaces women already create for

Women Against Violence and Exploitation in Society (WAVES) is a grassroots women’s rights organisation based in Bo, working in rural, marginalised communities in Sierra Leone to support women and girl survivors of violence. Supported by Womankind, they have implemented activities related to education and awareness-raising on women’s rights, training on gender laws, support (counselling, accompaniment to report) to women and girl survivors of violence, and advocacy on women’s rights issues such as forced marriage, women’s land rights and domestic violence. They also work with men and male leaders to promote behaviour change and recruit male allies in tackling violence against women.

Community Organisation for Mobilisation and Empowerment (COME-SL) is a civil society organisation working to end violence against women and support women’s property rights in Bo District, Sierra Leone. Their DFID-funded work in partnership with ActionAid promotes the access of women to formal and informal justice systems. They also conduct research on negative traditional laws and advocate on national policies related to women’s rights. In Community A activities have involved: the provision of a legal retainer for women survivors of violence; community-based legal aid clinics; sensitisation using social drama; training of women and traditional authorities on key women’s human rights instruments; economic empowerment initiatives for women; research on customary laws and their effects on women’s access to justice.

Saathi (meaning ‘friend’ in Nepali) was established in 1992 to tackle the challenges facing women in Nepal. They work to eradicate violence against women and children, both through providing services to survivors and through advocacy at the national level. Saathi was the first organisation to open a shelter for survivors of VAW in 1995 and they now run four shelters across the country. They work with women survivors of VAW, trafficked women, conflict-affected women and women affected by HIV and AIDS, and are a partner of Womankind.

Graceland Counselling Services (GLCS) has been providing counselling, psychological support and life skills training for women and girl survivors of violence and conflict, to promote their successful re-integration in communities. They have directly reached more than 4,000 young women and girls in different parts of Sierra Leone. They recently started the implementation of a project aimed at increasing protection, empowerment and support to women survivors of violence, in partnership with Womankind.

“These cultural events provide a positive atmosphere for community members to interact, and to promote tolerance among different religious, social and ethnic groups”

themselves. For example, the creation of a formal mechanism for women’s participation can provide an entry point and give women a safe space to consider their needs and priorities.

Creating space for women peacebuilders is not just about formal mechanisms, but also about the need for safe and secure spaces for women to collectively organise for peace. In Pakistan, support for women’s participation in peacebuilding is limited by the restrictions on women’s movement. The Awam Dost Foundation (ADF – see box) supports a number of activities, including women’s theatre groups and cultural events, which have been successful in bringing together large crowds of people of different faiths and backgrounds. These cultural events provide a positive atmosphere for community members to interact, and to promote tolerance among different religious, social and ethnic groups. Based on the success of existing activities, some of the women in the community point out the need for more collective and organised efforts. Another organisation in Pakistan, PEAD used focus group discussions and meetings with women and religious leaders as a space to raise awareness about gender-sensitive issues and to promote women’s empowerment.

Women’s groups that have been formed for other purposes can also serve as a safe space for generating awareness around gender equality and peacebuilding issues (see box on Tremi Saanjh).

In Afghanistan, Community Development Councils (CDCs) were promoted by various NGOs under the National Solidarity Programme run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and as an implementing partner ActionAid has facilitated the formation of over 450 CDCs in four different provinces, and promoted women-only CDCs to enable women’s participation in a women-only setting. While women have been involved in the national programme, this research found (see section 5.5) that CDCs tended to focus on development and governance projects, and there is a need as well as scope for more targeted support to ensure such spaces can help bring about transformative outcomes for women.

8.4 Changing attitudes towards peace and valuing women’s contribution

“I was a housewife before I joined FEDO and now I am a social activist and am confident to talk about myself.”

– Pabitra Bishwokarma, FEDO, Nepal

Afghanistan: Peace Committees challenging discrimination

In Community C in Afghanistan, ActionAid and its partners have worked with local jirgas and supported the creation of Peace Committees. The men's Peace Committee includes members from the jirga. They have also created a separate women's Peace Committee which works closely with the men's Peace Committee. ActionAid and its partners have provided training and support to the committees – including training on conflict mediation, legislation, rights awareness, gender equality and the formal justice system. The men and women's Peace Committees have also been supported to work together in decision making. These committees are now the forum for the community to take their grievances to and have the authority to mediate conflict without taking it to the jirga, which often discriminate against women and in some cases condone and promote violence against women. Across four provinces in Afghanistan, ActionAid and its partners supported the establishment of 180 Peace Committees, and nearly 40% of the members are women. The project therefore helped move women from their traditional role to a more visible institutionalized structure.

“Across four provinces in Afghanistan, ActionAid and its partners supported the establishment of 180 Peace Committees, and nearly 40% of the members are women”

Blue Veins was formed in 1999 to promote the rights of women in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. Their main areas of operation are education, health and human rights. Despite the difficult circumstances and threats to their security, they have carried out various projects dealing with issues such as violence against women, maternal health and peacebuilding, and actively work on women's rights and gender equality. In response to the 2010 floods in Pakistan, in partnership with ActionAid Blue Veins ran a women's mobilisation project, forming Multi-Purpose Coordination Committees of 8-10 women. Awareness raising and capacity building sessions were conducted on gender issues, violence and human rights, and representatives of the committees successfully lobbied the Provincial Disaster Management Authority to establish a gender cell to address women's issues.⁸⁷

Tremi Saanjh is an organisation of rural women established in 2008 in some of the villages of the two union councils of Bhakkar District where Awam Dost Foundation is active. The primary aim of Tremi Saanjh was to eradicate illiteracy among women from the excluded segments of society. Using its rural literacy centres as spring boards, the organisation has expanded its area of activism to awareness-raising about women and child rights, organising collective action for increased wages of women field workers, arranging legal aid for the survivors of VAW and a host of other activities. The organisation presently has 27 village-based units with a total membership of about 250 women.

“Women must not just be represented in decision-making processes, but also must be actively involved and influence processes through their participation”

Participation but is it meaningful?

“How we can define women’s role? Their representation in decision-making level is a still question mark for us. It is not only patriarchal, but it is also the political agenda.” – Kopila Rijal, WHR, Nepal

Women must not just be represented in decision-making processes, but also must be actively involved and influence processes through their participation. For example, although women have been included in the High Level Peace Council in Afghanistan, as Shalah Farid, Lecturer at Kabul University and women’s rights activist explains, there is little opportunity for them to meaningfully participate: “In the High Level Peace Council there are only nine women – they don’t have real power and time to engage in a real peace process. They are just symbolic. People use security as a way of denying women the right to participate. Also people are saying that women cannot keep secrets so we cannot involve them in confidential discussions.”

Quotas can provide an important entry point. However, they must be coupled with strategies to target the root causes of gender inequality to result in meaningful participation. According to key informants in Kathmandu, despite a 33% quota for women to participate in all governmental bodies, meaningful participation of women to influence decision making is still nominal, even in local Peace Committees. Women who are active in policy-making belong to political parties and candidates are generally confined to parties’ programmes and priorities, which frequently do not prioritise women’s rights. Political parties are also accused of fulfilling their quota requirements by allowing women to be candidates only in areas where they know they will not be elected to office. In Sierra Leone, it was also indicated by respondents that even when women have achieved leadership positions, they are not always representing women’s rights issues, because their commitment to the political party must be prioritised.

As discussed earlier in this report, gender-responsive peacebuilding also involves the prevention of violence against women and the recognition of women’s rights in the household and in the community. This involves awareness raising of the different impacts of conflict on women and a broader understanding of ‘peace’ at the local level. For example, in Afghanistan, work by ActionAid and its partners with local peace committees in Community A has involved training for both men and women on gender equality and women’s rights, including a gendered analysis of ‘peace’ and ‘conflict’. The involvement of women in the Peace Committees has meant that their decision making is more equitable and has led to women’s peace priorities and needs beginning to be addressed. For example, both Peace Committees talked about trying to address issues of domestic violence by intervening in family disputes

or for women to seek justice through the formal justice system.

Media is used by organisations as an important tool to educate local communities about women’s rights and the important role women can play in peacebuilding. LIWOMAC (see box) is a media development organisation dedicated to the promotion of women’s rights in Liberia. As Estella Nelson, Founder and President of LIWOMAC, explains, “We use radio to educate, sensitise and raise awareness amongst women at local level 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 at local level. 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 issues, and now you need to speak up about them.”

“Women-only spaces and activities remain crucial for programmes to increase women's empowerment”

In Pakistan, the use of the media is increasing as a tool to reach out to women in the community. For example, Paiman Alumni Trust (PAT) run the ‘Let’s Live in Peace’ programme. This programme works to build the capacity of youth, women, and government agencies and departments around conflict transformation, peacebuilding, conflict management and social cohesion at community and district levels. They use talk shows on regional television to show the impact of conflict and extremism on women, as well as their role in addressing these issues. This is particularly important given women’s low levels of movement outside the home.

It is important to also note that all of the NGOs and CSOs approached during the research discussed the importance of including men and male leaders in programmes to advance women’s rights and empowerment, so that men can see the positive impacts of women’s involvement in peacebuilding and can

contribute to building peace that responds to women’s rights. There is evidence that programmes on women’s empowerment that target men and boys are effective when they explicitly focus on transforming unequal power relations between women and men, including promoting alternative notions of masculinity.⁸⁸ Conversely programmes targeting men and boys that are less accountable to women and girls risk reinforcing women’s inequality.⁸⁹ It was also recognised by research participants that women-only spaces and activities remain crucial for programmes to increase women’s empowerment and that involving men in projects should in no way compromise this.

8.5 Recognising the diversity of women’s experiences

Women in post-conflict countries are not a homogenous group. Widows, ex-combatants, survivors of sexual violence, displaced women, women living with HIV

Liberia Women Media Action Committee (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 men and women 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.

Awam Dost Foundation (ADF), supported by ActionAid Pakistan, carried out a range of peace-promoting activities, including sensitising people on the issues of peace and social harmony and dialogues with different sect members in order to link with people at the grassroots level and to decrease estrangement across communities. Aman Mela (Peace Carnival) was used to launch a peace campaign aimed at spreading the message to the public at large through songs, poems, skits, banners and brief speeches and a poetry recital session. Further, an alliance of like-minded civil society organisations was formed to coordinate work and resolve common issues of peace. This alliance held meetings with influential politicians, elders and religious leaders, disseminated booklets and poster stickers, organised peace rallies, speech and essay competitions for girls and boys, and women’s theatre group performances. The inclusion of the media was ensured at each of the activities and at different stages of their work.

88. World Health Organisation, 2007, see http://www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf (accessed 23/08/12).

89. International Rescue Committee, 2009

“Since I have been in Kathmandu, I have seen people from all over Nepal in the same situation as me and now I believe that widows can achieve just as much as married women”

Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) was founded in 1994 by a group of Dalit women and is a leading Dalit women’s rights organisation in Nepal. FEDO works to achieve equity for Dalit women who face caste, gender and class based discrimination throughout Nepal. Supported by Womankind, they have been working on a project to increase local women’s participation in peacebuilding and democratic processes in four of the districts most affected by conflict. FEDO works to establish Dalit women’s groups, pressure groups and awareness groups at the Village Development Committee and District levels and to support Dalit women’s access to justice, develop skills and income-generation activities and participate in local governance.

Boat for Community Development (BCD) started working in 1994 with an objective to end bonded labour and the abuse of farmers by landlords. Over the years, BCD has carried out many different projects in areas such as education for older women, income-generating programmes, and empowerment of Kamaiya people. ActionAid’s partnership with BCD began in 2004, and has been focused on education programmes, including a training institute for Kamaiya people. BCD also engages community mobilisers who have conducted awareness campaigns about women’s rights and peace. They discuss women’s rights and land ownership, and undertake advocacy work on behalf of women.

and AIDS or disabilities all face unique challenges and require different approaches to enable their participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. Successful support for women’s participation in peacebuilding requires recognition of the diverse needs, priorities and experiences of women. For example, a range of organisations in Nepal work to support different marginalised groups of women.

In Nepal, Dalit women were particularly vulnerable during conflict and yet they have been excluded from formal peace processes.⁹⁰ As Asha, a Dalit woman described, “Although Nepali law grants me equality, in reality I still face double discrimination as a result of my caste and my gender.” The Feminist Dalit Organisation (FEDO) works to tackle discrimination and empower Dalit women throughout Nepal (see box). As a member of FEDO explained: “I first learnt about FEDO, the Feminist Dalit Organisation, when I heard the National President talking about it on the radio. FEDO has changed my life. Before I joined I was shy and could not introduce myself, but they have given me training to build my confidence. Now I can

go to the municipality and talk to people about my rights and those of other Dalit women.”

Madhesi and Muslim women were also excluded from local peace processes in Nepal. For example, village reconciliation committees were formed following the conflict and Madhesi and Muslim women were excluded from these forums by their own communities. The Fatima Foundation⁹¹ is working to ensure these women are included in peace processes and have a say in their local communities. BCD (see box) has focused on the empowerment of the Kamaiya people.⁹²

Women for Human Rights (WHR) is another organisation working to support a vulnerable group of women in Nepal – widows (see box). Meena, a member of WHR describes, “WHR has increased my self-confidence a lot. I used to be afraid to go out and talk to people, but now I go to women’s groups to share experiences and comfort each other. Since I have been in Kathmandu, I have seen people from all over Nepal in the same situation as me and now I believe that widows can achieve just as much as married women.”

90. Feminist Dalit Organisation, 2010

91. <http://www.mamacash.org/page.php?id=2844> (accessed 20/08/12)

92. Kamaiya people were bonded labourers, bound by the debts of their ancestors. While they were declared free by the Nepalese government in 2000 following a powerful movement, many became homeless when their landlords evicted them, and continue to live in poverty and exclusion. See <http://www.actionaid.org/nepal/stories/secure-housing-nepals-kamaiya> (accessed 03/09/12)

Women for Human Rights (WHR), established in 1994, is a national non-governmental organisation working for the human rights of widows in Nepal. It works in 73 districts and 1,050 VDCs, and has over 84,000 members. One of their work programmes is Chhahari, a shelter that provides skills training to widows, and establishes links with other NGOs and organisations. This programme is funded by Womankind. WHR also holds weekly social mobilisation classes on the rights of widows; networks with local stakeholders; supports awareness-raising campaigns such as street drama and publications on the issues facing widows and supports widows to bring VAW and cases of property-right violations to local authorities.

Below: Nepal
Womankind



9. Conclusion

“The post-conflict period has given women space to organise collectively and to assert their power in decision making”

This study was conducted in five countries – Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan and Sierra Leone, representing a range of different conflict contexts. The research found many contextual differences between the communities and countries visited including the impact of conflict on individuals and communities. For example, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the conflict resulted in a high level of mobility and displacement, and therefore the presence of high numbers of refugees. In Nepal, on the other hand, individuals were temporarily displaced to take part in forced political rallies but were able to return home comparatively quickly. However, there has been a high level of internal and external migration since the conflict. In Pakistan, none of the focus group participants were affected by displacement, but men and women experience considerable mobility restrictions due to current insecurities. The mobility of women in Afghanistan also continues to be affected by insecurity. Another noteworthy difference is the extent to which NGOs, the United Nations, and other international actors were involved in conflict resolution, in national peace processes and in the post-conflict recovery phase. Of all the countries visited, Liberia and Afghanistan have experienced the highest level of external involvement.

While there is evidence that in many study communities women’s rights have regressed in the aftermath of conflict, it also appears that the post-conflict period has given women space to organise collectively and to assert their power in decision making. One of the most striking examples is the position and attitude of Liberian women compared to other countries visited, including neighbouring Sierra Leone. Liberian women describe a new standing for women in the

post-conflict period and are more confident and outspoken about their rights, their desire for change, and their contribution to peacebuilding. However, despite differences in its manifestation, the research also evidenced an increase in women’s agency across all five countries, with palpable effects for the women, their families and communities. A clear relationship was found between increasing women’s awareness of rights and confidence, and their involvement in peacebuilding activities, especially in communities with broader and more sustained interventions.

Despite contextual differences, this research uncovered important commonalities across the countries, which provide clear guidance on how women’s rights and their peacebuilding efforts can be supported in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries. These similarities have been explored throughout this report and include the broader meaning which women attribute to peace, the common obstacles women face as peacebuilders at the local level, the disconnect between local and national processes, and the work by women’s organisations which is making a difference to women’s participation in local peace processes and therefore building sustainable peace.

As this study illustrates, the barriers to participation in peacebuilding which women face contrast with the very active roles women assume within their families to build trust and dialogue, solve disputes, ensure that their children are formally educated (where possible), and counsel their children not to engage in violence. These important actions are frequently dismissed as irrelevant or are not sufficiently valued by national governments, the

“Just and sustainable peace... begins with coherent policy”

international community or by women themselves. Yet many researchers have shown that peace starts with families, the way men and women relate to each other, and how children are educated.⁹³ Cultural and economic barriers considerably hinder the roles of women as peacebuilders outside their families but changes in norms and power relations within families may be just as important to maintaining local peace. There is a need for more rigorous evidence on how conflict transforms family lives and how these changes may (or may not) contribute towards the sustainability of peace in post-conflict settings.

The vital roles that women play as peacebuilders at the local level indicate that

the meaningful participation of women in political structures can have significant positive consequences for peace and stability at a wider level. Given the findings of this research that women are instrumental as peacebuilders within their families and their communities, an ideal gender-responsive approach to peacebuilding should recognise the importance of gender equality for sustainable peace, support the important roles that women undertake within their families and communities as peacebuilders and bring these skills, experiences and priorities to the regional, and national and international levels.

93. Pearce 2006, 2007; UNESCO 2011.

94. Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding: 7 point action plan, 2010.

Recommendations

Develop and implement concrete, coherent policy commitments

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. Women's rights and gender equality should be recognised in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures, and policy on conflict should incorporate views and lessons from women building peace at the local level.

To achieve this all national governments should develop and implement a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in consultation with women's rights organisations at local, regional and national levels, and with adequate resourcing, clear indicators and a robust monitoring and evaluation plan.

Ensure women's participation in peace processes

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 living with HIV and AIDS and disabled women. Furthermore, all communiqués, declarations and agreements resulting from national or international peace processes should have dedicated commitments to women's rights and gender equality.

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 negotiation processes.

Provide long term support and funding to women's peacebuilding

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.

In line with the United Nations target,⁹⁴ 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.

Tackle violence against women and girls

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 and 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 processes, whether at the national or the community level, should result in impunity for serious violations of human rights such as violence against women.

All peacebuilding policy, funding or activity should contain a gendered risk analysis, and include targeted action and ring-fenced financing, to tackle violence against women and girls as a key barrier to peace.

Build an enabling environment for women's peacebuilding

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.

Strategic partnerships 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. Voter registration drives and political education campaigns should be targeted at women, particularly those in remote communities.

In order to achieve this, all national governments should ratify without reservation and implement the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, as well as relevant regional treaties, paying particular attention to institutional reform.

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Appendix: list of interviews and focus group discussions

Afghanistan

Type	Number of participants
Interviews with key informants	11
Focus group discussions: Women under 20	15
Focus group discussions: Women 20 and over	65
Focus group discussions: Men	14

Liberia

Type	Number of participants
Interviews with key informants	12
Focus group discussions: Women 20 and over	35
Focus group discussions: Men	35
Focus group discussions: CSOs, NGOs, and government organisations	11

Nepal

Type	Number of participants
Interviews with key informants	17
Focus group discussions: Women under 20	45
Focus group discussions: Men under 20	18
Focus group discussions: Mixed women and men over 20	23
Focus group discussions: Local leaders, women and men	30
Focus group discussions: CSOs, NGOs, and government organisations	4

Pakistan

Type	Number of participants
Interviews with key informants	5
Focus group discussions: Women under 20	12
Focus group discussions: Men under 20	16
Focus group discussions: Mixed women and men over 20	23
Focus group discussions: Local leaders, women and men	30
Focus group discussions: CSOs, NGOs, and government organisations	4

Sierra Leone

Type	Number of participants
Interviews with key informants	10
Focus group discussions: Women under 20	34
Focus group discussions: Women aged 20 and over	32
Focus group discussions: Men aged 20 and over	28
Focus group discussions: Local leaders, women and men	21
Focus group discussions: District officials, women and men	9

Afterword



“This report highlights the need to formally recognise and support the role of women in local level peacebuilding efforts as essential for building just and lasting peace”

The testimonies captured in this report highlight the valuable role that women can play – and indeed are playing all around the world – in promoting peace and rebuilding their communities during and in the aftermath of conflict.

ActionAid recognises the potential and capacity of women to become leaders in all aspects of humanitarian response – from preparedness, to immediate response, to recovery and rehabilitation – and the positive impact this can have on addressing

inequality at local and national levels. This is never more critical than in conflict and post-conflict contexts where women’s rights are more compromised than at any other time.

The differential impact of conflict on women is well-documented. They suffer disproportionately – exposed to greater violence and multiple infringements of their rights – and are often marginalised from the decision making processes that impact their lives. But, as the experiences of these women show, they also make huge contributions to society during conflict - assuming multiple roles as carers, workers, defenders of rights, responders to crises, and as founders of collective movements for peace. In doing so, they are often able to create space to shift gender dynamics within the home and the community. Sustaining these gains in post-conflict environments is critical.

This report highlights the need to formally recognise and support the role of women in local level peacebuilding efforts as essential for building just and lasting peace. Beyond that, it calls for dedicated, long term support and commitment from governments and the international community to prioritising women in post-conflict recovery strategies. Perhaps most importantly, it gives extraordinary women across the five research countries the opportunity to voice their experiences – to really say what peace means to them, and to articulate how their efforts can and must be supported. That in itself is a huge achievement, and one that we must all commit to building on.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone involved in producing this report, and particularly to express ActionAid’s solidarity with the women who contributed their experiences. Inspired by their stories, we confirm our commitment to taking forward the recommendations from this report in pursuit of a more just and equitable world.

Joanna Kerr, Chief Executive, ActionAid International



“We stand alongside women peacebuilders in their calls for justice”

Womankind Worldwide exists to support the vital work of women’s rights organisations and movements in their quests for a just and equal world for women. This research builds on and learns from the work of our partner organisations and women peacebuilders across five very different countries, in various stages of conflict and post-conflict processes, who are united in working to bring about sustainable peace.

For too long, national and international peace processes have focused on armed combatants and politicians, who are still overwhelmingly male. Yet women are disproportionately affected by conflict, and for peace to be sustainable their

experiences and views need to be heard. At local level, with limited resources, women are creating and living their own solutions. This research highlights women taking practical action – mediating local conflicts, supporting and counselling other women in the aftermath of war, teaching children to not engage in violence, and acting collectively to organise for peace.

As a former member of the UK parliament, I understand the challenges of participating in male-dominated decision-making systems, and admire the many women, some of whom are showcased here, standing up to be counted, and insisting on a peace that works for everyone. We stand alongside women peacebuilders in their calls for justice, and are committed to learning from and being led by their work.

Jackie Ballard, Chief Executive, Womankind Worldwide

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