

Issue Brief

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Cohort 3: Gender Responsive Peacebuilding

Gender responsive peacebuilding and the inclusion of faith Based organisations – a reflection

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Introduction

This issue brief highlights the role that faith based organisations (FBOs) play in post conflict peacebuilding and recovery processes. It suggests how the work of these organisations can be harnessed alongside that of secular organisations to support women to be an integral part of conflict resolution and peacebuilding and to build cohesive societies.

FBOs' proximity to grassroots makes them key development players. Churches/mission institutions have a long history of providing education and health care facilities in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa and FBOs often fill the provision gaps when governments are unable or unwilling to meet the basic needs of communities. In some crisis situations churches play a vital role in bringing different groups and factions together to receive support under one roof or in the community, effectively improving social cohesion.

Equally, secular organisations play a varied and vital role in supporting women to be equal partners in the prevention of armed conflict, in the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in forging lasting peace. For instance, Isis-WICCE, a global feminist organisation based in Uganda, engages with governments and the United Nations through the Commission on the Status of Women, to share information on sexual gender based violence (SGBV) in armed and post conflict situations. Secular organizations generally also lobby UN member states to take concrete steps to

reduce incidences of SGBV, by developing National Action Plans to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325.¹

Women involved in peacebuilding in FBOs tend to focus on efforts to build sustained inter-faith and intra-faith relationships within and between communities. Their abilities to reach across lines of difference in tense environments often mobilize communities and lead to non-violent protests. However, this work goes largely unrecognised by governments and development agencies.

Many agencies have negative pre-conceptions about how religious organisations can be involved in peacebuilding work. Support from outside sources, including resources and training, has been lacking. The lack of attention from mediation platforms, largely controlled by men, has obscured from view potential avenues for resolving conflicts and promoting post conflict healing and reconciliation.

Women in conflict and peacebuilding

In conflict situations women pay a particularly high price. Conflict often aggravates women's pre-existing vulnerabilities, exacerbates poverty and reinforces gender inequalities and discrimination. Access to education, water, sanitation and hygiene and health centres, including for sexual and reproductive health, are all compromised, with women particularly affected.

They often have to head households – having lost their husbands, assets, livelihoods and all forms of financial

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¹ In 2000, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) formally acknowledged through the creation of Resolution 1325 the changing nature of warfare, in which civilians are increasingly targeted, and women continue to be excluded from participation in peace processes. The resolution specifically addresses how women and girls are differentially affected by conflict and war, and recognizes the critical role that women can and already do play in peacebuilding efforts. UNSCR 1325 affirms that peace and security efforts are more sustainable when women are equal partners in the prevention of violent conflict, the delivery of relief and recovery efforts and in the forging of lasting peace. (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/>)

security. They face greater difficulties accessing aid and other resources needed to care for their families because they are likely to be less educated. They may resort to transactional sex in order to feed their families, early/forced marriage of their daughters, selling their remaining assets, participating in the illegal drug trade, reducing food intake, or re-selling humanitarian assistance.

Cultural norms often prevent displaced women from leaving their shelters, impeding their access to markets, humanitarian assistance and livelihood opportunities. Sometimes increased insecurity leads to men being more protective towards women, but also to greater restrictions on their mobility and access to education, aid and employment. Sexual and gender based violence is often used as an instrument of war – and fear of it also limits women's mobility. Displaced women and children (particularly those who are unaccompanied, single heads of households, child mothers or disabled women) are disproportionately vulnerable to SGBV in poorly lit, overcrowded IDP/refugee settlements, which offer minimal privacy and security, and when they collect firewood/water, bathe, or use non-locking latrines.

However, there is also evidence that women are often empowered by their new found independence and redefined status as heads of families, and are able to take the lead in tackling norms, in bringing people together and finding a voice to play a vital role in sustainable peace and development.

A well-planned and inclusive peace process addresses the impact of conflict on women, and is essential in the management of trauma-related conditions. Women need to be included in peace negotiations to ensure that reconstruction processes and peace agreements identify with their realities and are more likely to succeed. Research shows that half of exclusive peace processes fail within the first five years, but when civil society and women in particular are included, the failure rate drops by over 50 percent.²

The potential of faith-based approaches

This issue brief focuses on the author's experience of working with FBOs in Uganda. The post conflict period in northeastern Uganda of the late 2000s was characterised by a spirit of revenge, land-grabbing, trauma, intimidation and lack of knowledge of rights. The impact on women of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency included abductions, sex slavery, rape, mutilation of facial parts and HIV/AIDS. The conflict left many women without shelter and forced them to give birth under trees.

Uganda can be classified as a highly Christian country. According to the 2018 population census, more than 70 percent of Ugandans are practising or loyal members of a religion, 83 percent of them Christians. To capitalise on this enormous potential reach FBOs should work together to reach the maximum number of people.

The Uganda Orthodox Mothers' Union (UOMU) sampled in this paper as an example of a FBO, was founded in 2003 and is a member of the Ugandan Joint Christian Churches. It works for and with women with the aim of empowering them to become change agents with a strong focus on community-based peacebuilding. The churches' women's groups enable women's active participation in the development of both church and community as well as creating conducive conditions for conflict transformation.

UOMU's mission is articulated in periodic activities such as the World Women's Day of Prayer and the International Day of Peace. Specific activities within communities/parishes include informing women and men about women's rights as well as listening and discussing subjects ranging from sexual and reproductive health, childcare, hygiene, education, nutrition and domestic violence. It also links women to relevant secular initiatives of the government such as the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF).

This specific part of their role is not without controversy as the organisation's values often clash with secular societal norms and values. However FBOs – and especially women-led church initiatives – have been highly effective and sustainable in post conflict northeastern Uganda due to the fact that their interventions are mostly in combination with other group activities within the church, e.g. weekly bible studies.

Acting within ecumenical or with other broader faith-based movements, FBOs are effective when they seek to sensitize community members to use non-violent means to solve existing family and community conflicts. These include addressing issues of intimate partner violence and gender based violence in the communities and among church members. However, some of the dogmas, traditions and beliefs both in church and society are still disempowering women and in some cases limit women's active participation in peacebuilding. For instance, the Church has still not joined the movement advocating women's sexual and reproductive rights despite evidence of cases of sexual violence as weapons of war. Another one is its reluctance to allow women to rise within the ranks in most church leadership structures.

Despite the limitations of women FBOs in addressing social justice issues – including the marriage and divorce bill – these organisations still feel encouraged by the mainstream women's movement. The structural challenges that women face within the Church are usually addressed by their collaboration with secular organisations, which are better positioned to speak about such issues or directly challenge the church on gender inequality practices.

The field experience drawn from work carried out over three years with 10 faith-based and secular women's organisations working in post conflict northern and north-eastern Uganda indicates the following:

² Bringing Peace to Yemen by Having Women at the Table What the U.S. Must Do and Why It Matters: A Policy Brief in the 2016-17 U.S. Civil Society Working Group on Women, Peace and Security Policy Brief Series by Sanam Naraghi Anderlini, Rasha Jarhum, Rana Allam, and Devin Cowick.

With regard to post conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation and direct community-oriented poverty alleviation activities, both secular and faith-based organisations have similar objectives: to promote and contribute to the return of normalcy following protracted conflict and restore the dignity of women and girls in post-conflict communities. While mainstream women's organisations will focus on direct interventions with communities such as providing livelihood opportunities and conducting advocacy activities to hold governments accountable, Church based organisations will focus on direct services such as education and economic empowerment activities, ultimately both focussed on improving households' livelihood outcomes.

Some successes that have been achieved by FBO-oriented interventions include:

- Women FBOs focus on establishing income generating activities for women within the faith based institutions to make them more self-reliant. Discussions with these women indicate that such interventions help them meet their essential needs by supporting their children's education, covering health costs and buying food. Ultimately these interventions build social cohesion within and between communities and play a part in the recovery process.
- FBOs play a vital role in the healing process by promoting the Bible's message for reconciliation and forgiveness. In northern Uganda women's faith based groups organise prayer meetings where reconciliation is preached from a biblical perspective.
- FBOs tend to mobilize, empower and equip mothers with knowledge and skills in different fields, such as health, literacy, skills development and income generation.

FBOs also present some weaknesses in comparison to secular organisations:

- Limited networks and weak research, documentation/ reporting capacities and dissemination of information on activities.
- Implementation capacities is less well targeted.
- Strong focus on biblical role models e.g. Ruth, Esther to portray resilience.
- Lack of capacity, and funding prevent FBOs from reaching many parishioners, many of whom are illiterate, poor and food insecure and/or experience Gender Based Violence.

Case study: Isis-WICCE's peace building approach

The goal of Isis Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE), based in Uganda, is to build women's leadership in peace building and conflict resolution and to

contribute to addressing the strategic needs and concerns of women and girls in conflict and post conflict situations. Isis-WICCE integrates research, documentation, post conflict reconciliation, capacity building and advocacy to ensure women and youth effectively participate in peace building and post conflict reconstruction.

Significant achievements include: 15 in-depth research studies and 134 case studies contributing to a body of feminist knowledge and literature on women's experiences of conflict; over 500,000 receiving trauma counselling and treatment for conflict-related sexual and reproductive health complications, 709 receiving surgery and 437 health workers trained to continue offering trauma management.

Some 1650 alumnae of the Feminist Leadership Development Institute have conducted 258 advocacy initiatives, established nine community based groups, joined public leadership and governance, and served in post-conflict communities. Isis-WICCE has partnered with alumnae to run ground-breaking advocacy campaigns including six international peace expositions attracting an average of 2,200 participants (including policy makers and a range of leaders).

Isis-WICCE was central in the design of the International Protocol on Documenting SGBV in conflict (2014) and the global assessment of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2015) in addition to offering evidence on sexual and reproductive health rights to the African Union. It engaged the United Nations through the Human Rights Council, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region on zero tolerance to SGBV, as well as the African Union on the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for DRC. Isis-WICCE has Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic, Social and Cultural Council and is the peace and security cluster head for the AU Gender is My Agenda Campaign (GIMAC). It convened the Women's Situation Room (WSR) in Uganda, an early warning and rapid response mechanism to curb conflict arising from elections. Following the February 2016 elections the WSR has engaged youth and women leaders from 15 districts to ensure violence free elections in Uganda.

Isis-WICCE exemplifies what a feminist organisation can do to influence peace building at country, regional and global level, and therefore offers a model that could be replicated in African countries.

An opportunity for FBOs to involve women in peacebuilding in the Republic of Congo

Since the re-election of President Denis Sassou Nguesso in April 2016 Pool department near the capital Brazzaville in the Republic of Congo, has endured extreme violence. The government blames former members of the disbanded militia group Ninjas Nsiloulou for the attacks while aid and human rights organisations also point to government forces. It is not the first time the department has experienced conflict. Ninja militias have been involved in numerous

insurgencies since the early 1990s including the Congolese civil war in 1997, and the insurgence against government forces in 2002 and 2003.

In December 2017 a cease-fire and cessation of hostilities agreement was signed between the Congolese government and the rebels of Pastor Ntumi's Pool. This latest peace process for the Pool region calls into question where things have gone wrong in the past and who could be viable actors in the stabilisation process.

Although women make up over half the population in the Republic of Congo³, their influence in decision-making spheres even at local level is extremely limited. The entire peacebuilding process in the Pool crisis has been and is still championed by men. The low level of gender parity in advocacy in the country and the recurring nature of the conflict in the Pool region prompts reflection on the role that FBOs and women could play in the ongoing peace process.

Faith and spirituality is a quintessential part of Congolese life.⁴ Given the proximity of churches to all sectors of society, their mobilisation capacity cannot be overestimated. FBOs have great potential to be involved in activities targeting ex-combatants, in reintegration and reconciliation and in assisting women and youth in their recovery. This would be an opportunity to take the peace agreement right to the grassroots. Given their access to women of all ages affected by the conflict, women's church groups have the potential to act as change agents in the recovery and stabilisation processes.

Conclusion

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International actors need to be better informed about the peace work that women do within FBOs and the ways that their work could be amplified - principally through funding and training - to benefit women and the wider community in post conflict settings. Building bridges between women's organisations, especially between secular and religious groups, offers considerable opportunity. Such efforts could strengthen existing peacebuilding efforts and improve understanding of what can be done to create more sustainable peace in different regions. As mothers, wives, sisters and daughters, women are close to male combatants, which gives them great influence and potential to foster cohesion and to sensitise family members during peacebuilding.

FBOs and secular organisations are complementary in their approach and in combination they have the potential of reaching out to many more people and constituting an important support system for women in dealing with conflict and post conflict situations.

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³ 53% of the population according to UNFPA 2012 estimates

⁴ A 2012 survey by the Ministry of Economy, Planning, Territorial Management, and Integration estimated 55 percent of the native-born population is Protestant (of which approximately 33 percent belongs to evangelical churches), 32 percent Roman Catholic, and 2 percent Muslim. So it is a very Christian country - do we trust these figures? Need to back up with some facts

About the PDA Fellowship:

UNDP's Oslo Governance Center in partnership with the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme has established a PDA Fellowship Programme in 2016 consisting of several cohorts, each involving between 4-6 PDA's and/or PDA like conflict prevention specialists over a period of two weeks. The Fellowship Programme involves guided reflections to help draw out the Fellows' experience on pre-identified conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues.

About the Author:

Angeline Nkwenkam Nguedjeu is the Peace and Development Advisor in Congo Brazzaville since May 2017. She has experience working in Sudan, South Sudan and the Great Lakes with the UN Peace keeping Mission as Civil Affairs Officer, amongst others. Her expertise ranges from gender, capacity building, national cohesion and reconciliation processes as well as socio political context analysis supporting peaceful election processes and UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (in Sudan, South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda). She contributed to food security related value chain developments in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda.

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PRIO

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The Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) is one of six UNDP Global Policy Centres, established in 2002 and working since May 2015 with a renewed mandate. It is part of the UNDP Governance and Peacebuilding Cluster in the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS) and works closely with its New York based Headquarters and other relevant UN and UNDP units strengthening the overall analytical and learning ability in the area of Governance and Peacebuilding. It supports policy development and applied research with an overarching focus on democratic governance and peacebuilding in crisis, conflict and transitional contexts.

Joint UNDP-DPPA Programme on Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention

Since 2004, the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) have partnered to strengthen support to the UN's work in building national capacities for conflict prevention. Often times, such support is extended through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (or PDAs), a growing cadre of UN staff who support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams adapt and respond to complex political situations and to develop and implement strategic conflict prevention initiatives and programmes.