

DRAFT PAPER (8-21-00)

WOMEN AND WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

by

Krishna Kumar

Center for Development Information and Evaluation
United States Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C. 20523

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a part of its ongoing studies on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the societies ravaged by civil wars, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation undertook a multicountry assessment of gender issues in postconflict societies. The assessment focussed on the following three sets of questions.

- What has been the impact of intrastate conflicts on women? How did these conflicts affect their economic, social, and political roles and responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges facing women in these societies?
- What types of women's organizations have emerged during the post-conflict era to address the challenges that women face and to promote gender equality? What types of activities do they undertake? What has been their overall impact on the empowerment of women? What factors affect their performance and impact?
- What has been the nature and focus of assistance provided by USAID and other donor agencies to women's organizations? What are some of the major problem areas in international assistance?

The purpose of the assessment was to generate a body of empirically grounded knowledge that could inform the policy and programmatic interventions of USAID and other international donor agencies.

In addition to extensive literature review, CDIE conducted fieldwork in six countries -- Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. This synthesis paper has drawn from these field investigations as well as from the studies and investigations by individual scholars or national and international organizations.

IMPACTS OF THE CONFLICTS ON WOMEN AND GENDER RELATIONS

Intrastate conflicts in all case study countries shared a set of common characteristics that had major implications for women and gender relations. First, the belligerent parties deliberately inflicted violence on civilian populations. About 95 percent of the casualties were civilian (men, women and children). Second, substantial numbers of people were displaced because of intrastate conflicts. Women and children generally constituted a majority of the refugees and internally displaced populations. The displacement of people to refugee camps or settlements, often in inhospitable environments, profoundly affected gender relations. Third, women's participation in war contributed to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles. Like men, women were both the perpetrators and victims of violence in intrastate conflicts. Fourth, there was usually a conscious attempt to destroy the supporting civilian infrastructure, leading to increased poverty and starvation. Finally, these conflicts left a legacy of bitterness, hatred, and anger among the belligerent groups within the country that is difficult to heal.

Social and Psychological Impacts. In all case study countries, women, particularly in war zones, suffered from physical insecurity throughout the civil wars. Conditions only marginally improved when hostilities ceased. During the early phase of the post-conflict transition, the presence of demobilized soldiers and unemployed militia continued to pose a serious threat to the life and property of innocent people, particularly in rural areas. It took time before security sector reforms, if introduced at all, produced visible results. Consequently, in many communities, women felt trapped in their homes. The fear of violence and sexual abuse often prevented their moving about freely and restricted their social and economic activities. The continuing animosity and distrust among former belligerent ethnic groups compounded the problem of physical security in many countries.

A significant portion of women was traumatized by conflict. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, and Rwanda particularly experienced high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives. They displayed typical signs of trauma, including depression, listlessness, chronic fatigue, anguish, psychological disabilities, and recurrent recollections of traumatic incidents. Despite severe emotional trauma, women demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage in surviving. Most of these women continued performing their normal responsibilities, possibly because they had few alternatives.

Soldiers in belligerent groups violated women as a tool of warfare. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, rape was an essential part of ethnic cleansing. Women were raped -- often in the presence of their spouses, parents, or other family members -- to humiliate and terrorize members of particular ethnic groups. In Angola and Mozambique, rebels often kidnapped young women. Throughout Africa, belligerents often used HIV/AIDS as tool of warfare. Abject poverty, migration of populations and social disorganization caused by conflicts contributed to the growth of prostitution in many post-conflict societies.

Conflicts profoundly affected the family, often increasing the household burdens of women. They led to the growth of households headed by single women as men were killed, disabled, imprisoned, or off fighting. The burden of raising orphans and abandoned children (unaccompanied children) often fell on extended families or even neighbors, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. Women typically assumed greater economic responsibilities in the face of growing poverty and hardships during and after conflict. These additional responsibilities, however, did not necessarily result in a corresponding decline in their household chores. Intrastate ethnic conflicts often created problems for families of mixed ethnic makeup. Domestic violence by men against women increased in many war-torn countries for a number of reasons.

Economic Impacts. Women-headed households faced many economic and social constraints during the post-conflict transition. A major constraint was the lack of property rights. They were denied ownership of the land owned by the dead husbands or parents. In rural areas, women-headed farm households, particularly those headed by widows and divorcees, often lacked the resources to purchase agricultural inputs and faced difficulty in obtaining labor for heavy agricultural operations. Those who did not own land or other assets worked as landless laborers or sharecroppers. They received minimal compensation for their hard work and barely managed to feed their families. In urban areas, most women worked in the informal

sector, carving out a living mostly by selling cooked foods, vegetables, fruits, clothes, or other household items.

Women's participation in the labor force increased in all post-conflict societies. Desperate economic conditions and the growth of women-headed households forced increasing numbers of women to enter labor markets. Moreover, conflicts eroded the traditional social, which led to women assuming new economic roles and responsibilities. Women's participation in agriculture increased in all countries, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women could work for many industries and in many occupations during the conflict, which were closed to them earlier. As economies shrank during the early phases of the post-conflict transition, female workers in the organized sector were generally first to lose their jobs.

Conflicts contributed to a marked increase in poverty. The consequences of poverty were invariably worse for women in all case study countries as cultural, social, and economic factors worked to their disadvantage. There were proportionately larger reductions in nutrient intake for women than for men. In addition, the health and education needs of girls received less priority than those of boys in the times of economic adversity. The economic conditions of returning women refugees, members of women headed households and women receiving food subsidies generally worsened during the post-conflict transition.

Political Impacts: All case study countries witnessed an expansion of women's public roles and responsibilities during conflict. The challenges of surviving the absence of men, and the opportunities created by conflict, contributed to this expansion. Women generally became more engaged in churches, schools, hospitals, and private charities, usually volunteering their services. They also established self-help groups to assist one another. Furthermore, women often took charge of local political institutions in the absence of men.

Women also entered the public arena to support war efforts. They organized public meetings and marches, raised funds, and mobilized public opinion for war in the name of ideology or ethno-nationalism. They joined militias. In many case study countries, they played supporting roles in military operations by running and managing auxiliary services such as health and intelligence operations. Some women also founded organizations to promote peaceful resolution of the conflicts and became powerful voices in the peace accords. Their participation in public life raised their political skills and expectations.

Despite a brief era of political disenfranchisement immediately at the end of conflict, women in postconflict societies made headway in the political arena. For example, the percentage of women members of national parliaments increased in subsequent elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador and Georgia. Only in Guatemala did the number of women elected to the national parliament decrease since the peace accords signed in 1996. The representation of women in the ministries of national governments also improved over time.

THE EMERGENCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women's organizations refer to all voluntary organizations, led and managed by women, that promote women's welfare and gender equality. Most of the women's organizations in the case study countries fall under three overlapping categories – small grassroots, regional or national, and national supporting organizations.

Contributing Factors: Several factors contributed to the growth women's organizations in postconflict societies. First, the social, economic, and political transformation that took place during the conflicts was a major contributing factor. Conflict not only undermined the traditional social order but also facilitated increased participation of women in public affairs. Second, some women became disillusioned with the leaders of political parties who initially professed commitment to gender equality but later reneged on this commitment. They founded women's organizations to promote feminist agenda. Third, the reforms initiated as a part of the peace process by transition governments created political space to establish women's organizations. The establishment of democracy, the codification of the right to form organizations, and the emergence of relatively free media gave women, as well as other groups, unprecedented freedom to form their own organizations. Fourth, the international community largely channeled through NGOs to build up civil society institutions. It provided them generous assistance. The cumulative result of these factors was the growth of women's organizations in all case study countries.

Women's Organizations' Activities. Women's organizations have been active in almost every important sector—social, educational, economic, and political—in case study countries. They established health clinics, provided reproductive health care, and organized mass vaccination programs. They carried out programs to generate income and employment for women and women-headed households, particularly focusing on vocational training and microcredit. In addition, they addressed various problems such as domestic violence, prostitution, and the plight of returning refugees and internally displaced women. The promotion of democracy and human rights was another area in which women's organizations have been active. They played an important role in organizing post-conflict elections. Women's organizations participated in voter registration drives, held voter education programs, and assisted in monitoring elections. In addition, women's organizations promoted social reconciliation among former enemies. They sponsored meetings, seminars, and marches to promote mutual understanding and goodwill. Finally, they undertook advocacy activities to fight discrimination and promote gender equality. Several organizations also worked to increase women's participation in political affairs. Some organizations developed women's platforms, covering vital matters affecting women, and sought the endorsement of political parties.

Constraints and Limitations. Women's organizations faced numerous constraints in carrying out their activities. Cultural and social factors undoubtedly constrained them. One variable has been the low social and cultural status of women. Because of their low social status, many leaders of women's organizations were not in a position to interact equally with their male counterparts. Often male members of the households were not supportive of the public activities of female members. Another set of constraining factors pertained to the disabling environment of post-conflict societies. All of the case study countries were beset with serious administrative, social and economic problems at the end of conflict, which

caused unnecessary delays and bottlenecks. Still another constraint has been the short term nature of the international assistance, which often prevented long-term planning by women's organizations.

In addition, women's organizations had their internal limitations. Many organizations suffered from management and leadership problems. Their top leadership was reluctant to delegate power and to train junior staff for future leadership. The leaders were concerned that a professionally trained staff might challenge their authority. They also tended to monopolize participation in international training programs, meetings, and conferences. Consequently, middle and junior staff, who found prospects for upward mobility within the organization blocked by the top brass, were naturally frustrated in many organizations. This affected not only the day-to-day operations of these organizations but also their long-term viability. Finally, the lack of communication and cooperation among women's organizations limited their impact. As a result, efforts were often duplicated, the image of women's organizations in the public mind were undermined, and skills and expertise were not shared across organizations.

Contributions of Women's Organizations. The emergence of women's organizations and their myriad activities empowered women in several ways. First, they helped women victims of conflict, such as returning refugees and internally displaced women, those sexually abused during and after conflict, and other women in desperate situations. Their timely assistance was often instrumental in enabling these vulnerable women to take control of their shattered lives. Second, the income generation activities of women's organizations saved women beneficiaries from utter poverty and deprivation. They helped beneficiaries become economically self-reliant and perhaps socially less subservient. Third, by facilitating political participation through political education, voter registration drives, and assistance to women candidates, women's organizations contributed to political empowerment. Fourth, they raised gender awareness among their members as well as general population. They organized meetings, workshops, and discussions to educate people and mobilize women. Finally, in many case study countries, women's organizations succeeded in putting gender issues on the national agenda

Sustainability of Women's Organizations. As far as financial sustainability is concerned, the future of women's organizations remains questionable. Most of the organizations were and continues to be largely, if not exclusively, dependent on international assistance. The condition is not likely to improve in the near future. Neither the government nor the private sector is in a position to fund the activities of women's organizations. However, managerial sustainability does not seem to be a major problem. Women invariably led and managed all these organizations. There is no shortage of well-trained and committed women to manage and run these organizations. The third dimension of sustainability is the capacity of an organization to develop and maintain linkages with its external environment. Women's organizations have no difficulty in establishing rapport with all the three stakeholders — the targeted women beneficiaries, the concerned governmental agencies and departments and the external funding agencies. More importantly, their capacity in this area is likely to improve over time as they accumulate more experience.

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Contributions of International Assistance. The international community provided extensive assistance to women's organizations in all case study countries. The experience of case study countries unmistakably shows that international assistance profoundly contributed to the growth, activities and continual survival of women's organizations. The majority of women's organizations would not have emerged without international assistance. Moreover, the international assistance enabled most women's organizations to initiate projects that benefited women and empowered them. It also contributed to the growth of managerial, accounting and technical skills. For example, as a result of their association with the international donor community, women's organizations acquired expertise in the preparation and submission of proposals to funding agencies, implementing contracted programs and techniques to raise funds from local sources. Finally, international assistance contributed to legitimizing women's organizations. In many cases, international recognition protected women's organizations from undue interference from the various arms of the government.

Problem Areas. International assistance suffered from several limitations. One major problem was the short time horizon for assistance, which in an environment of shifting donor priorities prevented recipient organizations from developing their own priorities. Lacking their own funds, many organizations had to abandon their original plans and struggle to establish new programs in areas in which they did not have any experience. Another problem was the cumbersome and often unnecessary requirements for proposals, progress reports, and monitoring information imposed by international donor agencies. These requirements had high opportunity costs. The third problem, related to the second, was that well-established, large women's organizations, usually led by highly connected women leaders, tended to receive a lion's share of international assistance. Fourth, there has been little or no donor coordination. Donor agencies tended to work independently without adequate information and understanding of one another's programs. Fifth, international donors were unable to disseminate information about resource availability to all interested women's organizations. Consequently, a few organizations received a majority of the international resources, while many deserving organizations were denied assistance. Finally, the international assistance to women's organizations also suffered because the international community lacked a coherent policy framework for assisting women and promoting gender equality in postconflict societies.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Build on economic and political gains made by women during conflict to ameliorate their conditions and to help promote gender equality.
2. Add focus on civilian security for women through security sector reforms, greater representation of women in police forces and judicial processes, establishment of peace committees, and special interventions for vulnerable youth.
3. Emphasize cost-effective, indigenous approaches to treat traumatized women and men.

4. Prevent sexual abuse of women by promoting more women to international judicial posts, protecting witnesses, and raising the awareness of and punishment for international trafficking in women.
5. Promote miccredit with caution. While support microcredit programs, USAID should not ignore structural barriers to the economic advancement of women.
6. Support property rights reforms for women.
7. Promote greater women's participation in postconflict elections by encouraging political parties to field women candidates and assisting women candidates on a nonpartisan basis.
8. Promote political participation of women by providing technical and material assistance to nonpartisan women's advocacy organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

1. Continue to foster women's organizations
2. Impose minimal funding requirements and provide some funds to cover the costs of essential data collection and analysis.
3. Consider multiyear funding for projects being implemented by women's organizations.
4. Promote sustainability of women's organizations by (a) funding a portion of core costs for a limited period of time; (b) providing technical assistance to improve management; and (3) helping them become self-reliant by improving skills in networking, fund-raising and coalition building..
5. Integrate women's organizations in large-scale development initiatives, which could involve (1) awarding them contracts for development initiatives and (2) encouraging large development organizations to include them as partners in bidding for contracts for international projects.

FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN

The assessment proposes the outline of a strategic framework for international assistance for women, which has three essential components. The first is enhancing physical security for women i.e. protection from violence and hunger. The second element is increasing women's access to and control over productive assets without which they can neither become productive members of their societies nor improve their social and economic status. The last element of the framework is political empowerment i.e. increased political participation. These three elements of the framework are important to advance gender equality and empowerment after major societal upheaval.

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

As a part of its ongoing studies on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the societies ravaged by civil wars, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) undertook a multicountry assessment of gender issues in post-conflict societies. The assessment focused on three sets of questions.

- What has been the impact of intrastate conflicts on women? How did these conflicts affect their economic, social, and political roles and responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges facing women in these societies?
- What types of women's organizations have emerged during the post-conflict era to address the challenges that women face and to promote gender equality? What types of activities do they undertake? What has been their overall impact on the empowerment of women? What factors affect their performance and impact?
- What has been the nature and focus of assistance provided by USAID and other donor agencies to women's organizations? How has it affected their performance and impact?

The purpose of the assessment was to generate a body of empirically grounded knowledge that could inform the policy and programmatic interventions of USAID and other international donor agencies. The intention is to help the Agency and its partners improve the performance and impact of their postconflict interventions.

Three premises informed the design and scope. First, a gender perspective is needed to analyze and comprehend the effects of intrastate conflicts on women. Such a perspective examines women's status, roles, and responsibilities not as isolated phenomena, but as an integral part of the web of social, economic, cultural, and political relations, in which men and women participate. Second, women are not passive actors in intrastate conflicts, but active participants from inception to resolution. Because of gender stratification, women often play different roles during the different stages of the conflict. They follow different survival strategies to cope with the arising problems and structure their lives differently during and after conflict. Third, a comparative analysis of gender issues in different war-torn societies would further advance our knowledge and understanding, thereby enabling the international community to implement more effective interventions.

CDIE followed a simple methodology to conduct this assessment. It started with a review of academic literature, project and program documents of the international donor agencies and newspaper and magazine articles. This review culminated in the development of an assessment proposal, outlining the critical issues to be investigated, the methodology to be followed, and a schedule. CDIE then organized a workshop attended by scholars, policy makers, and practitioners to discuss the proposal. The proposal was subsequently revised in the light of comments.

CDIE used three criteria to select the countries for fieldwork. First, to avoid duplication of efforts, the study team was to utilize the findings of available empirically grounded studies instead of launching fresh investigations. Second, the assessment should have global coverage, including Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. Third, the security conditions in the country would have to permit free and unfettered movement for the team. After extensive consultation with the regional bureaus of USAID and outside experts, CDIE decided on eight countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda. Unfortunately, political developments in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone prevented any fieldwork, and CDIE settled on only six countries.

Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI) provided technical support for the assessment, sending teams to six countries to collect information. However, the teams faced serious problems in gathering necessary information and data. Often, the concerned government departments and struggling women's organizations did not keep precise records. When kept, records were difficult to reproduce or were not readily available to the teams. Moreover, shattered communication and transportation systems prevented teams from visiting remote areas where many grassroots women's organizations operated. In many cases, language was a barrier. Hence, the teams had to rely largely on qualitative information, the information gleaned from prolonged interviews or group meetings, reports on ongoing and past programs, and their own observations of ongoing activities.

This synthesis paper has drawn from the field investigations carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. DAI consultant, Alice Morton has also informed this paper. Finally, it has used studies and investigations by individual scholars or national and international organizations.

This paper is organized as follows. Chapter two describes the nature of intrastate conflicts and the ways in which they affect women and gender relations. It also provides a bird's eye view of intrastate conflicts in six case study countries. Chapter three describes the overall impact of the conflicts on women and gender relations. It classifies these effects under three broad categories – social and psychological, economic and political impacts – and briefly discusses the nature of international assistance programs and interventions in these areas. The objective of this chapter is to answer the first set of questions listed earlier. Chapter four focuses on women's organizations, their growth and activities and their impact on women's empowerment. Chapter five discusses the nature of international assistance to women's organizations and discusses a few problem areas. Chapter six presents the main findings and recommendations. It also identifies a strategic framework for international programs and interventions in postconflict societies.

CHAPTER TWO INTRASTATE CONFLICTS

Since the end of the Cold War, the number of intrastate conflicts (i.e., conflicts take place within the recognized boundaries of the state) has proliferated worldwide. A variety of factors contribute to these conflicts, such as poverty and the struggle for scarce resources, declining standards of living, ethnic rivalries and divisions, political repression by authoritarian governments, and rapid social and economic modernization. Although intrastate conflicts vary, most tend to share characteristics that have profound bearings on women and gender relations. This chapter describes the nature of the conflicts that engulfed the case study countries and identifies some common characteristics to keep in mind when analyzing the effects of intrastate conflicts on women and gender relations.

CASE STUDY COUNTRIES IN CONFLICT

Bosnia was the third largest republic in the Federal Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia with a population of more than 4 million in 1997. It consisted of three principal ethnic groups, Muslims (41 percent), Serbs (31.4 percent), and Croats (7.3 percent). Bosnia held an independence referendum in 1992, which was approved by a two-thirds majority. Serb nationalists, however, became apprehensive about independence and started the conflict by laying siege to Sarajevo. Initially, Muslim and Croat factions fought together against the Serbs, but the coalition later broke down, leading to a multiethnic war characterized by ethnic cleansing and systematic rape of women. Towns were “purified” by forced evacuation and execution of minority groups. The Muslim–Croat conflict was resolved in 1994 through international mediation. In December 1995, a peace agreement, known as the Dayton Peace Accords, was signed, establishing Bosnia and Herzegovina as one state with two entities.

Cambodia, a country of 11 million, suffered clandestine military operations by the National Liberation Front, massive carpet bombing by the United States, genocide under Maoist Khmer Rouge, invasion by Vietnam, and recurring guerrilla attacks by the defeated Khmer Rouge and their allies. The Khmer Rouge who came into power in 1975 tried to convert the country into a Marxist utopia. They evacuated all cities, cut off communications with the outside world, abolished money, closed schools and universities, dismantled factories, and banned private property. They killed members of the intelligentsia—teachers, doctors, engineers, and educated people. The Khmer Rouge not only undermined religion but also the institution of the family. More than 2 million Cambodians died as a result of a prolonged war, genocide, and massive starvation. In 1979, Vietnam invaded the country and installed a new Communist government that China and the Western powers found unacceptable. This resulted in a prolonged guerrilla warfare until an international peace agreement was signed in 1992, resulting in national elections and the establishment of an elected, coalition government.

El Salvador, a small but densely populated country, suffered from a civil war from 1980 to 1992. The civil war had an ideological overtone. The leftist Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebelled against the military-dominated government, which denied

civil liberties to the people and perpetuated a highly exploitative economic system. During the conflict, 1 million Salvadorans fled the country, half of them migrating to the United States. It is estimated that nearly 1 percent of the population was murdered or disappeared in this prolonged civil war, which ended when neighboring countries brokered a peace agreement.

Georgia, with a population of 5.4 million people, faced three conflicts in its recent history. Ethno-separatist movements in Ossetia and Abkhazia defeated the Georgian army in 1991 and 1992, leading to their de-facto independence. These wars were followed by a civil war between the supporters of then-President Zviad Gamsakhurdia and the opposition, led by Eduard Shevardnadze. As a result of these conflicts, 1,000 people died and 400,000 people were displaced. Some 200,000 people continue to be housed in temporary quarters today.

Guatemala is the only country in Latin America with an Indian majority, the Maya. However, the economic and political power in the country has been vested in a small elite primarily of European origin and *ladinos* (people of mixed Indian–European origin and acculturated indigenous people). In 1954, the democratically elected, leftist government was overthrown by an anti-Communist movement supported by the United States. This resulted in a prolonged conflict between the succeeding governments and leftist guerrillas. The worst phase was between 1979 and 1985, when the military initiated a reign of terror upon the Mayan people, commonly referred to as *la violencia*. It is estimated that more than 200,000 people died or disappeared during the conflict and more than 1 million were uprooted. After long negotiations, the warring factions, civil and religious leaders, and indigenous Mayan leaders signed a peace agreement in 1996, bringing some normalcy to the country.

Rwanda, a small, densely populated country in central Africa, witnessed the worst ethnic cleansing in modern times. At the time of independence, hundreds of thousands of the Tutsi minority had to flee to neighboring countries. In 1993, the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), based in Uganda, staged a military offensive and occupied large portions of northern Rwanda. The Hutu-dominated government retaliated by inciting ethnic tensions to consolidate its power. When the plane carrying the Rwandan president crashed on April 6, 1994, extremists blamed the Tutsis for the crash and started systematically killing Tutsis. Between 500,000 and 700,000 people were mercilessly butchered. The genocide stopped only after the RPF defeated the government. In the aftermath of RPF's victory, 2 million Hutus fled to neighboring countries. Most returned in 1996.

CHARACTERISTICS RELEVANT TO WOMEN AND GENDER RELATIONS

All intrastate conflicts, including those in the case study countries, share a set of common characteristics that have implications for women and gender relations. First, belligerent parties deliberately inflict violence on civilian populations. Approximately, 95 percent of the casualties in intrastate conflicts are civilians (men, women, and children), a disturbing trend which alters a country's demographic composition and its citizen's social relations (OECD, 1999). In traditional wars between nations, warring parties are obliged to follow certain international norms intended to minimize direct harm to civilian populations. Although these

norms are not fully enforced or practiced, they nonetheless exist and circumscribe armed forces' behavior. This is not the case in intrastate conflicts. In all of the countries covered in this assessment, either party to the conflict—and in most cases both—directed violence against innocent civilians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda, state-supported groups carried out ethnic cleansing with marked impunity.

Second, substantial numbers of people are displaced because of intrastate conflicts. The wholesale destruction, physical insecurity, disruption in livelihoods, and food shortages, leads to people fleeing from their homes and seeking refuge in other parts of the country or in neighboring countries. In Rwanda, 500,000 citizens fled to Tanzania to escape the genocide. In Cambodia, the Pol Pot regime forced all city dwellers to move to remote rural areas for political and ideological reasons. Massive displacement of people also took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Georgia, and Guatemala. Women and children generally constitute a majority of the refugees and internally displaced populations. The displacement of people to refugee camps or settlements, often in inhospitable environments, profoundly affects gender relations. Often the traditional roles of men and women are redefined, and the institution of the family comes under severe stress, resulting in divorce and desertion.

Third, women's participation in war contributes to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles. In El Salvador, 25 percent of the forces of the FMLN were women. In Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, women were involved in ethnic cleansing. In many case study countries, women performed important roles in military operations, particularly in medical, transportation, communication, and intelligence operations. However, in Guatemala and Georgia, women's participation was more limited. Women's motives for joining war efforts were often the same as men's, although some felt compelled to support the conflict because of their husbands' positions or were pressed into supportive roles out of political pressure. Culture, ethnicity, class, and age affected the nature and extent of women's involvement. Like men, women were both the perpetrators and victims of violence in intrastate conflicts.

Fourth, there is usually a conscious attempt to destroy the supporting civilian infrastructure. Warring factions lay waste to buildings, factories, roads, and other types of infrastructure and even destroy crops and agricultural facilities to create economic and political instability. Such activities contribute to increased poverty and starvation. In Cambodia and Rwanda, the conflicts created serious food insecurity and malnutrition. Only the timely help of the international community prevented large-scale death and destruction.

Finally, these conflicts leave a legacy of bitterness, hatred, and anger among the belligerent groups within the country that is difficult to heal. An important difference between intrastate and interstate conflicts is that once an interstate war is over, citizens in the warring countries live separately, and their interaction is usually limited. The situation is generally different in intrastate conflicts. Unless the country is partitioned, the formerly warring contingents and populations continue to face each other daily. In Cambodia and Rwanda, perpetrators of the atrocities often continue to live with their victims in the same villages. Conditions were only marginally better in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In many countries, ex-combatants of opposing groups sometimes settled in the same community, reviving bitter memories.

“Twarababaye (“we have suffered”)—the men made war, and the women suffer.”

“We felt as if we had lost all—as if we had been stripped of our skin. People lacked food, clothing, housing.”

“The social fabric was ripped apart—indeed the person herself had been torn apart.”

—*Voices of Rwandan women*

Because of these characteristics, intrastate conflicts profoundly affect the social, economic, and political status, roles, and responsibilities of women and alter their relations with men. Not all of these effects are necessarily harmful and undesirable. As discussed later, intrastate conflict also creates an opportunity for change because it is so pervasive and disrupts the very fabric of social life through the targeting of civilians and livelihoods and through displacement. Although imposing severe hardships and deprivation, conflict also provides space for gender equality and can pave the way for women’s empowerment in the social, economic, and political life of their countries.

CHAPTER THREE

IMPACTS OF INTRASTATE CONFLICTS ON WOMEN

The previous chapter identified the characteristics of intrastate conflicts and the way in which they affect women and gender relations in post-conflict societies. This chapter describes these impacts under three broad categories—social and psychological, economic, and political. There are, of course, great variations across and within countries. The nature, intensity, and breadth of these impacts varies with the country's social, economic, and political situation; the nature, location, and duration of the conflict; and class and caste differences among the populations. This chapter also briefly mentions the types of assistance programs funded by the international community to address the problems and challenges faced by women in these countries.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS

Physical Insecurity

In all case study countries, most women suffered from physical insecurity throughout the civil wars, but the plight of women in the war zones was undoubtedly worse. They lived in terror.

Unfortunately, conditions only marginally improved when hostilities ceased. During the early phase of the post-conflict transition, the presence of demobilized soldiers and unemployed militia continued to pose a serious threat to the life and property of innocent people, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, the behavior of military and paramilitary organizations, long accustomed to abusing power and violating human rights, did not always improve. It took time before security sector reforms, if introduced at all, produced visible results.

“What security you are talking about. The conditions (law and order) have gone bad after the peace accord. I do not feel safe in my own home.”

—A Mozambican women

In addition, law and order often deteriorated. The social disorganization and erosion of the authority of traditional institutions of social control, coupled with abject poverty, usually contributed to an increase in the incidence of crime and delinquency. Many societies had a large reservoir of unemployed young men who had become socialized to violence and brutality during the war. These men often formed gangs, particularly in urban areas, and posed a constant threat to the security of women and children.

Consequently, in many communities, women felt trapped in their homes. The fear of violence and sexual abuse often prevented their moving about freely and restricted their social and economic activities. For example, women were afraid to go to their farms or collect firewood for cooking in many parts of Rwanda. In El Salvador and Guatemala, despite the fact that human rights violations decreased, violent crime increased, posing grave risks for women workers who worked late in the evening. Rural women were also at risk from civil action

patrols, death squads, and, in substantially fewer instances, armed guerillas. In Cambodia, where criminal violence increased, many families chose not to send their girls to school fearing for their safety. In Rwanda, high levels of violence continued, although not necessarily of a criminal nature.

The continuing animosity and distrust among former belligerent ethnic groups compounded the problem of physical security in many countries. In Rwanda, returning Hutu women refugees and internally displaced persons encountered social ostracism, even physical violence. Hutu women whose spouses were imprisoned for their alleged participation in the genocide felt socially stigmatized. In mixed ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, minority women did not feel safe. Conflicts had shattered dense local friendship networks in the community that had previously provided women emotional and social security.

The international donor community has not given adequate attention to physical security issues for many reasons. Development and relief agencies lack technical expertise in this area. Some agencies, particularly USAID, are constrained by legislative mandates that restrict involvement in police and military affairs. Nonetheless, international donors have expended considerable resources on the demobilization and re-integration of ex-combatants, which indirectly affected civilian security. USAID and other donors also promoted police reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Although these efforts reduced government-perpetrated human rights violations, they have thus far failed to make a dent in the growing problem of lawlessness and violence.

Psycho-Social Trauma

The brutalities of war—extreme violence, cruelty, separation from loved ones, sexual abuse, forced migration, and starvation—had left undeniable marks on both women’s and men’s psyches. Until recently, the socio-psychological effects of intrastate conflict had not received much attention from the international community. However, events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda stimulated greater interest in this area.

Anecdotal data suggest that a portion of women were traumatized by conflict in all case study countries.¹ Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mayan women in Guatemala, and Rwandan women experienced high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives and displayed typical signs of trauma, including depression, listlessness, chronic fatigue, anguish, psychological disabilities, and recurrent recollections of traumatic incidents. These symptoms are commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a traumatic condition observed among combat veterans, particularly U.S. soldiers who took part in the Vietnam War.

¹ Women are often particularly reluctant to participate in surveys or research, or to seek therapy—especially around an incident of sexual abuse or rape. This is due to the social stigma attached, their lack of exposure to the issues, and a general fear of becoming the focus of unwanted attention. Therefore, it is difficult to collect data, and many researchers suspect that the incidence of trauma is dramatically higher than visible.

Although not denying the presence of symptoms associated with PTSD among men and women in post-conflict societies, many researchers question the applicability of PTSD to the conditions of wartorn societies for many reasons. They point out that PTSD is based on the premise that traumatic events have ended and victims have returned to a normal living environment, as is the case with Vietnam War veterans. In war-torn societies, however, many conditions that contributed to trauma—such as physical and psychological insecurity, separation from loved ones, and threats of violence—tend to persist for some time. These researchers also argue that the construct ignores the cultural and social context of perceptions and behaviors. Belief on the causes of aberrant human behavior and faith in karma, afterlife, and ancestral and malevolent forces can affect the way individuals from different cultures experience as well as deal with traumatic events. Moreover, critics argue that the basic notions of trauma and particularly therapy are foreign to many societies. The Western hubris of providing assistance in this very sensitive, yet poorly understood area often preceded a more thorough examination of local culture and social biases. In Rwanda, for example, where impassivity is a highly prized social attribute, the use of Western-style therapy was deemed inappropriate by many observers. There is considerable truth in these criticisms and the presence of trauma among men and women in postconflict societies does not necessarily mean that they suffer from PTSD.

Despite severe emotional trauma, women in the case study countries have demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage in surviving. Their suffering and trauma, however, often remained unvoiced and were expressed instead through abusive relationships with their spouses or children, often exacerbated by alcohol. Most of these women continued performing their normal responsibilities, possibly because they had few alternatives. Interestingly, in Georgia, internally displaced women appeared to be adjusting better than their male counterparts. Although men became passive and moody, women took outside work to feed their families. Some attributed the women's behavior to their nurturing nature, others suggested that their comparatively low status within the family led women to be more willing than men to take on work below their skill level.

The international community tested a variety of programs to deal with psychological trauma and associated problems, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda. These programs ranged from efforts to train caregivers, teachers, health workers, and others in identifying the signs and symptoms of trauma to activities aimed at helping establish mental health programs in hospitals, to the development of counseling programs at women's health care centers. Yet other programs—usually those associated with children—focused on sports or arts as a method of psychological healing. In a few cases, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) promoted traditional mechanisms for dealing with trauma. For example, USAID supported projects in Angola and Mozambique where indigenous healers performed ritual purification ceremonies to help traumatized children. In both countries, the therapy seemed to be effective, at least in the short term (Green and Honwana, 1999).

International programs, however, generally suffered from three limitations. First, they were based primarily on Western notions of trauma and treatment. As alluded to earlier, these were inappropriate when they failed to take into consideration the local context and culture. Not much data exists on best practices of psycho-social assistance. Second, interventions were

often short lived, providing training and short-term support to local entities. Because trauma counseling is a relatively long-term need, any positive outcomes were often lost over time. Third, most of the programs focused on women and children, thereby excluding men. Unless men, especially those young men exposed to the brutalities of war, are treated, women are bound to remain the victims of their aggression.

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Closely related to psychological trauma is the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation of women during and even after conflict. During war, soldiers in belligerent groups violated women as a tool of warfare. Security forces in El Salvador and Guatemala often abused young women suspected of rebel sympathies. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, rape was an essential part of ethnic cleansing. Women were raped -- often in the presence of their spouses, parents, or other family members -- to humiliate and terrorize members of particular ethnic groups. In Angola and Mozambique, rebels often kidnapped young women. Throughout Africa, HIV/AIDS often was used as tool of warfare. In practically all war-torn societies, young women living in combat zones were frequent sexual victims² of rebel forces as well as of the army supposedly guarding them.

Little hard data exist on the extent of the abuse and the number of female victims. Because of prevalent social taboos, victims are eager to hide the crime and silently suffer from shame and humiliation.³ However, conservative estimates of rape victims ran in the thousands in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda. In Rwanda alone, it is estimated that more than 5,000 women were impregnated from rape; most are now raising children fathered by those who killed their spouses or family members.⁴ Little is known about these mothers and children, but their social and psychological agony can be imagined. Guatemala's Truth and Reconciliation and Reconstruction of Historical Memory projects recorded the testimony of thousands of abused women, but they hesitated to delve deeply into issues of rape.

Rebel militia in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique abducted young women and kept them as sexual slaves. When the conflict was over, these women were abandoned. Although some survived without severe trauma, most had difficulty in readjusting to the new situation. Often, their families and communities did not accept them. Without resources or work experience, they became destitute and beggars, and some became prostitutes. In Rwanda,

² Use of the term "victim" is not wholly accepted in international circles for the reason that it connotes helplessness. An alternative is the term "survivor," which is commonly used in discussions about rape and domestic abuse in the United States. However, this implies that rape is survived, which is not always the case, and suggests more participation in the act than does the term "victim." For this reason, this paper uses "victim."

³ The stigma attached to rape and other incidents of trauma to women has enormous application in the discussion on psycho-social issues where the understanding of trauma in other cultures is extremely limited because of a lack of data.

⁴ This is cited by El Bushra and Mukarubuga (1995). Abortion was not an option to these women. Many have since remarried. Often, other family members have accepted the children.

women were forced to have sex with members of the military as “payment” for their victory or were raped by men of the opposing group in revenge.

Intrastate conflicts contributed to the growth of prostitution in many post-conflict societies, particularly Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Rwanda. Poverty pushed many helpless young women to prostitution. For example, in Cambodia, some families sold their young daughters out of economic desperation. In the face of poverty, many housewives were reported to have engaged in prostitution in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda with the tacit approval of their families. Marketing in women also grew as a part of the post-conflict increase in general crime, drug trafficking, and other socially denigrating activities. Women were abducted or lured into prostitution with false promises and essentially became slaves to their male bosses. Moreover, because the very institution of the family was undermined during conflict, families could not exercise control over their male or female members who were engaged in sex rings, and extended family watchdog protection measures disintegrated. The large scale of migration also eroded community ties, contributing to deviant behavior.

War created a demand for prostitution by separating families and stationing young male soldiers far from their homes; the presence of international peacekeeping forces increased demand in many countries. Organized prostitution began in Cambodia when a large number of male expatriates, particularly members of U.N. peacekeeping forces, arrived to enforce the cease-fire and organize elections. Realizing the opportunity at hand, local entrepreneurs set up brothels, which became extremely lucrative. Over time, the local elite—particularly military and police officials, senior government servants, and affluent business owners—started frequenting the brothels. Today, more than 14,000 women work as prostitutes in brothels in Cambodia (UNDP, 1998). Similar occurrences took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Rwanda, although not always on the same scale.

“In Cambodia, more than twenty five years of civil war and the consequent social disruption have torn apart the bonds of families and communities alike, so that the demands of survival often take precedence. Family disruption, abusive behavior, the death of one or both parents, step-parents with weak attachments, and the larger issues of social and community disruption are all risk factors that may propel women and children into the commercial sex industry.”

—*Physicians for Human Rights (1997)*

The international community undertook a variety of programs that focused on the sexual abuse of women. USAID and other international donor agencies funded projects to counsel and rehabilitate abused women. International NGOs worked with local groups to focus on the problems of commercial sex workers, particularly within an HIV/AIDS prevention context. International organizations also strengthened legal and institutional mechanisms to punish culprits of sexual abuse and sex marketing. International agencies, however, faced many social, cultural, and even political barriers in reaching out to perpetrators of prostitution: victims were not forthcoming, often for fear of retribution from their bosses; male counterparts in control were reluctant to forfeit their livelihoods; communities did not want to highlight the problem; and government officials did not give it top priority or instead reap

financial benefits in the form of kickbacks. Moreover, the international donor community lacked the technical and organizational experience needed to deal with this delicate issue.

Family Roles and Responsibilities

Intrastate conflicts profoundly affected the family, often increasing the household burdens of women. For one thing, it led to the growth of households headed by single women as men were killed, disabled, imprisoned, or off fighting. In such households, the traditional division of labor between men and women was blurred, with women assuming traditionally male roles—disciplining male children, building or repairing houses, dealing with community leaders and government officials, and fulfilling religious and social obligations. Most important, they had to feed and support their families single-handedly.

The growth in the number of orphans and unaccompanied children⁵ also added to their burden, running into hundreds of thousands in some countries.⁶ Many children lost their parents during conflict; others were separated from their families during conflict and forced migration. Still other parents abandoned their children because of severe economic or psychological stress. The burden of raising these children often fell on extended families or even neighbors, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. In Rwanda, the rapid exodus of hundreds of thousands of people created thousands of unaccompanied children. Women throughout the country immediately volunteered to care for them, in part as a protection of their ethnic group's future.

Women typically assumed greater economic responsibilities in the face of growing poverty and hardships during and after conflict. These additional responsibilities, however, did not necessarily result in a corresponding decline in their household chores. In all case study countries, women continued to perform tasks such as cooking, washing clothes, and caring for children despite their spending more hours on farm work or other jobs. In Georgia, many internally displaced women who started working in the informal sector to feed their families complained that their unemployed spouses refused to seek work and wasted their meager resources on cigarettes or vodka.

"We are dead tired like a dead snake."

"We work mad like a mad cow."

—Two Cambodian women

Intrastate ethnic conflicts often created problems for families of mixed ethnic makeup. In Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, mixed couples often were targeted during ethnic cleansing. Those who survived came under intense pressure to separate or assume false identities. Both men and women left their spouses, and some women were forced out of the house. In Somalia, where people married into different clans, couples whose clans later became enemies had to divorce. Women were forced to return to their parents, while the children remained with the father. The predicaments of mixed couples did not always end with the end of the conflict. In Rwanda, Hutu women married to Tutsis were accepted neither

⁵ The term "unaccompanied children" refers to those who have lost their parents during the fighting or while migrating. Children are not considered orphans unless it is known that their parents have been killed.

⁶ The estimate in Mozambique alone was 200,000 orphans (Baden, p. 18).

by their own parents nor by their in-laws, and vice versa. The situation was only slightly better in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In post-conflict Kosovo, members of mixed marriages were targets of abuse and murder and rejected by both sides.

Finally, conflict also contributed to a decline in the status of women, at least in some countries. Several researchers observed this phenomenon in Cambodia, where bride price declined in spite of inflation.⁷ Men could easily divorce their spouses and find new ones. Polygamy is reported to have increased in Cambodia and Mozambique since the wars ended, forcing single women to enter into formal and informal marital arrangements with married men out of desperation.

Domestic Violence

Anecdotal evidence indicates that domestic violence by men against women and by women against children increased in many war-torn countries for a number of reasons.⁸ The conflicts generated a subculture of violence—one that condoned violence and viewed violent behavior as normal. Moreover, both men and women were traumatized by war, which exacerbated family tension. Alcohol consumption increased in nearly all countries, contributing to the increased domestic abuse of both women and children. Since the status of women often declined in the family, they became more susceptible to maltreatment by male members. Finally, some women became more independent and self-reliant during the prolonged absence of men during war. Some returning men resented the independence women had gained and turned to violent behavior.

The international community supported, albeit on a modest scale, programs designed to assist victims of domestic violence. The programs counseled victims and, if necessary, arranged for legal assistance. In addition, they provided for temporary shelters and often arranged vocational training so that victims could learn skills to earn a living. They also undertook public education activities. The fact that the elite of these countries did not usually perceive domestic abuse as a major problem prevented these interventions from attracting substantial resources from national and international bodies. Women were often unaware of the help available from donors funded interventions. Even when they have known, they did not seek outside help in fear of being subjected to more violence by their spouses. Consequently, only a very small minority of women victims benefited from international interventions in domestic violence.

“After 1979, men changed. Nine out of ten men are broken, nasty. During the Khmer Rouge period they had no happiness. So now they are free, men do what they want. . . . When a husband dislikes something, even the smallest thing, he will become violent. He will hit his wife.”

—A Cambodian woman

⁷ The CDIE case study of Cambodia emphasizes this point and supports the findings of Ledgerwood (1966) and Frieson (1998).

⁸ In Guatemala, there is no evidence of a direct association between an increase in domestic violence and the end of the conflict. However, there are data to show a correlation between increased alcohol abuse and increased domestic violence. There also was a correlation between men who had served in the war and increased domestic violence and between women’s alcohol abuse and child abuse. This was associated with family disruption and the disappearance of traditional restraints and mechanisms.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Women-Headed Households

As indicated earlier, intrastate conflicts contributed to an increase in women-headed households in practically all case study societies. Although rare before the war in Cambodia, women-headed households now constitute between 25 and 30 percent of all families.⁹ In the Ixcan region of Guatemala, women-headed households were not uncommon before the conflict, but their proportion increased during the war and now constitutes between 30 and 50 percent of all households.

There are obvious reasons for this development. More men than women were killed in the conflicts, resulting in demographic imbalances. Consequently, many women were widowed, while others of marriageable age could not find suitable husbands. More important, large-scale movements of populations, social and economic stress, and the prolonged absence of men contributed to the breakdown of families, resulting in divorce and permanent separation. In El Salvador, there was an additional factor: a significant portion of the male population left the country in search of income and employment, leaving their families behind.¹⁰ In Georgia, many men were so ashamed of not being able to provide for their families that they abandoned them.

Women-headed households faced many economic and social constraints during the post-conflict transition. A major constraint was the lack of property rights. In Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Rwanda, widows had difficulty in acquiring legal rights to the land owned by their husbands. Until very recently, Rwandan women could not inherit land and property under customary law. Consequently, thousands of war widows were deprived of the legal ownership of their husbands' or parents' farms. The situation was different in Cambodia where laws provided for the legal ownership of land, but widows encountered numerous problems in gaining legal possession because of their low social status and the indifference of local authorities. In El Salvador, women were denied their fair share in the post-war redistribution of land.¹¹ In Guatemala, women had difficulty exercising newly legislated land ownership and inheritance rights because of institutional negligence, pervasive machismo, and ignorance of their own rights.

"I cannot inherit land. If I stay on my father's land, I am put in prison. I have already been beaten. My life is very bad since my parents died. I cannot even grow a potato or cut down a tree."

—A Rwandan woman

⁹ UNDP (1998).

¹⁰ In one area alone in western Kosovo, more than 2,000 men were missing, some of whom were being held in Serbian jails.

¹¹ Women's land in El Salvador was the first to be confiscated during the land reform effort.

Women-headed agricultural households, particularly those headed by widows and divorcees, often lacked the resources to purchase seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and starter livestock. In Cambodia, Kosovo, Mozambique, and Rwanda, international donors provided seeds and simple implements to a substantial proportion of subsistence farmers. These efforts, although not always adequate, gave much-needed relief to many women farmers. However, with the exception of Rwanda, such assistance was not available to all women farmers. Moreover, some women farmers consumed the seeds instead of planting them because of food shortages. Women farmers also experienced shortages of farm labor. Lacking the resources to hire workers, they often had to depend on the generosity of their relatives and friends, which was not always forthcoming. In Guatemala, because Mayan women were forbidden by tradition to cultivate corn, many had to force their young sons to perform the necessary work. In addition, new women farmers in most post-conflict societies found it difficult to get technical advice on agricultural operations. Agricultural extension services did not exist in most cases; even when available, they rarely reached women farmers. Finally, lacking the capacity to transport goods to bigger markets, women farmers often had to sell their agricultural surplus locally, thus depriving them of a higher price for their produce.

A substantial number of women-headed households did not own land or other assets. Women heading such households worked as landless laborers or sharecroppers. They received minimal compensation for their hard work and barely managed to feed their families. In urban areas, most women worked in the informal sector, carving out a living mostly through petty trading. Since many women lacked the requisite skills, experience, and education, only a small portion could secure employment in organized industrial and service sectors. Women also were easy targets for labor contractors who recruited for sweatshops in Guatemala and other countries but paid very low wages.

Most women-headed households represented the poorest of the poor in a majority of the case study countries. However, a caveat is necessary. Many women-headed households had male members working in other towns or other countries who regularly sent remittances home. Such households were often in a better position, and even better off, than other women-headed households.

The international community has learned that programs targeted exclusively to women-headed households are not very effective. Often precise information about such households is lacking, and the cost of identifying them is high. Moreover, targeted programs can create dissension locally between women-headed and other poor households. Poor households resent special treatment of any specific group. In addition, the cost of delivering targeted assistance can be high. Nevertheless, experience also shows that women-targeted programs

War Widows in Guatemala

“Among the women-headed households, those headed by widows face a series of particular problems and hardships. Widows are disadvantaged by virilocal residence patterns, the tendency to patrilineal inheritance, the sexual division of labor and a lack of employment opportunities for women. The high level of loss of male kin suffered by some households only exacerbated these problems. The war widow, and those close to her, became stigmatized and isolated; her children often labeled as ‘children of the guerrilla.’”

—Loughna and Vicente (1997, p. 41)

are necessary to get adequate assistance into the hands of women, some of whom may be heads of households. Therefore, the international community followed a twofold strategy in post-conflict societies: (1) it provided assistance to all women, not exclusively women-headed households and (2) it promoted property rights for women, which would then directly benefit women-headed households.

Poverty and Its Consequences

In all case study countries, intrastate conflicts contributed to a marked increase in poverty. In Cambodia and Rwanda, conflicts also led to severe food shortages in certain areas. There are indications that the number of women living in poverty increased disproportionately to men; however, hard data are not available.

The consequences of poverty were invariably worse for women in all case study countries. Cultural, social, and economic factors worked to their disadvantage. Because women traditionally nurture their family, they usually sacrifice their own welfare for that of other family members during economic adversity. Moreover, since men controlled most of the assets, the household allocation of food and resources was always biased toward men.

Consequently, there were proportionately larger reductions in nutrient intake for women than for men.¹² In addition, the health and education needs of girls received less priority than those of boys.

"My children and I came back to my village. We had no food, nothing. . . . Our neighbors took pity and gave us some food. We often went to bed without food."

A women refugee in Mozambique

"When government sold the factory, I lost my job. Now, I work as a housemaid."

—A housemaid in Cambodia

The economic conditions of three categories of women worsened during the post-conflict transition. The first group is women refugees who returned at the end of the conflict. While they lived in camps, they received food and shelter and had access to health and education facilities.¹³ After repatriation, however, they were generally on their own, with less consistent and often greatly reduced outside assistance. Consequently, in many cases, their standard of living declined. The second category is composed of poor women who depended on food subsidies and social services, particularly health and education, before the conflict. They often suffered when the government reallocated resources from social expenditures and toward the military effort during the civil war. In many situations, their conditions worsened, at least in the short run, during the post-conflict transition because of economic reforms. International financial institutions insisted on economic stabilization through monetary and fiscal discipline, resulting in cuts in social expenditures. Although such reforms were essential in putting the economy on a sound footing, they imposed heavy sacrifices on vulnerable groups, particularly women. The social safety-net programs funded by the international community were not sufficient to make up the loss. The final group is members of women-headed households, whose problems have been discussed earlier. The addition of

¹² World Bank, Chapter 5. Dercon and Krishnan (1999).

¹³ Some refugees living abroad sought shelter with family, ethnic, or community members. These refugees found their own means of survival without the assistance of the international community.

unaccompanied children, mental and physical stress, and HI/AIDS all contributed to the burden of women heads of households.

The international community supported a wide array of programs to relieve extreme poverty and deprivation in post-conflict societies. It provided substantial food aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Rwanda and took steps so that women and women-headed households received a fair share of food assistance. It funded social safety-net programs to alleviate economic hardships during transition and promoted income-generation activities among women through microcredit. It undertook training programs for women and supported health care programs that often included reproductive and mental health components. Finally, it supported legislative and administrative reforms to increase women's access to productive assets. For example, in practically all case study countries, international donors and NGOs funded projects to ensure property rights to women and end discrimination in labor markets.

Labor Force Participation

Women's participation in the labor force increased in all post-conflict societies. Although the increase cannot be attributed solely to conflict, civil war directly or indirectly contributed to it. Desperate economic conditions and the growth of women-headed households forced increasing numbers of women to enter labor markets. Moreover, conflicts eroded the traditional social and political order, which led to women assuming new economic roles and responsibilities.

"Some women in Mozambique have attained relative economic and political autonomy from male domination. This has been primarily through entrepreneurial activity in the grassroots war-economy."

—Mark F. Chingano

Women's participation in agriculture increased in all countries, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the absence of men, women performed many agricultural tasks that previously had been done only by men. They worked on their family farms, on others' farms as sharecroppers, and as landless laborers. In Guatemala and El Salvador, women found work in the growing nontraditional agricultural export sector. Their employment, although tedious, increased their incomes and provided a modicum of economic security and social freedom, which they so desperately needed.

Because of the shortage of labor, women could work for many industries and in many occupations during the conflict. These openings provided them both experience and confidence, thus helping them during post-conflict transition.¹⁴ Many examples can be cited. In Cambodia, women held jobs in textile industries, construction, and salt and rubber production during the conflict and have been working in them ever since. Women workers in

¹⁴ It is important to note the difference between rural and urban women in their increased role in the labor market. Rural women who had taken over male roles were often simply more tired; urban women, on the other hand, tended to gain status in society. It also is important to point out that this is dependent on the stage of the post-conflict period: as the economic situation adjusts, the availability of jobs for women changes.

textile factories gained experience as well as good reputations, which partly facilitated their employment in the garment industry after the war. Women currently constitute more than 80 percent of the workers in Cambodia's garment industry. In El Salvador and Guatemala, women made up most of the employees in assembly plants for processing exports. The increased presence of the international community also created significant employment opportunities for women. International organizations recruited women in large numbers as secretaries, translators, office managers, and professional staff. However, employment tied to the international community declined over time.

On the other hand, as economies shrank during the early phases of the post-conflict transition, female workers in the organized sector suffered. Often they were the first to be laid off during retrenchment and replaced by returning ex-combatants. This was particularly true if a woman was associated through her husband with the "losing side." Women workers also suffered from the privatization of state-owned enterprises in former Communist economies. The experience of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Georgia shows that women frequently lost their jobs during privatization because of the retrenchment of employees or the closing of the enterprises themselves. Even when they continued working in privatized firms, women frequently lost many medical and other benefits.

Women generally faced discrimination in both the public and private sectors. They received lower wages than men for the same work and they were less likely than their male counterparts to have advancement. Moreover, they tended to be employed in menial jobs in which men were not interested. Although many countries had passed legislation or formulated rules prohibiting discrimination against women, such measures were not satisfactorily enforced. Authorities' indifference, bureaucratic inertia, low social and economic status of women, and general political confusion contributed to the slack implementation of the laws.

Most women workers were in the informal sector, earning their living by selling cooked foods, vegetables, fruits, clothes, or other household items. Although women were a significant part of the informal sector before the conflict, their numbers increased during the post-conflict transition. This increase reflected the addition of women who had lost jobs in the formal sector, as well as the wives of men who had lost jobs. In fact, there was a "feminization" of the informal sector in countries like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda.

The international community supported microcredit programs targeting women in the case study countries. Loans were advanced to small groups, ranging from 5 to 11 borrowers, and required no collateral or minimal group collateral. The international community was highly innovative in using microcredit in post-conflict settings. For example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it supported the Gorazde Cow Bank, which provided cows to women to produce milk and cheese for income. The conditions stipulated that each woman return her cow's first calf to the project. Once women gave these calves, they were free to keep or sell any additional calves. A similar project was undertaken in Cambodia, where it also proved successful.

Microcredit programs were generally successful in case study countries, with high rates of loan repayment. An overwhelming majority of borrowers used loans for productive purposes. Although interest charged did not always cover the total cost of lending, it recovered most of it. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, however, some microcredit programs grew into communal lending services, creating local business. Most important, microcredit programs provided much-needed relief to vulnerable women populations in rapidly changing environments. Many illiterate and inexperienced women started their own businesses. Although their income and profit margins were invariably low, these women were able to survive.

POLITICAL IMPACT

Expansion of Public Roles

All case study countries witnessed an expansion of women's public roles and responsibilities during conflict. The challenges of surviving the absence of men, and the opportunities created by conflict, contributed to this expansion.¹⁵

Women became active at the community level during the conflict. They organized formal and informal local groups, which provided relief to vulnerable populations. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina managed schools and day care facilities and oversaw voluntary health services in seized communities. Women participated in the distribution of food aid in Rwanda. In El Salvador, they founded organizations to press for the release of political prisoners and to provide relief to families of the victims of political repression. In most case study countries, women became more engaged in churches, schools, hospitals, and private charities, usually volunteering their services. They also established self-help groups to help one another in urban and rural areas.

Furthermore, women often took charge of local political institutions in the absence of men. In El Salvador, a substantial number of women were elected mayors: 33 out of 262 (12.6 percent) mayors were women between 1985 and 1988. Because the women had organized themselves before the peace accords and the formation of political parties, when the conflict ended, they were successful in obtaining seats in Parliament. After the fall of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, women's representation in village councils drastically increased. Other countries, like Lebanon and Mozambique, witnessed a similar phenomenon.

Women also entered the public arena to support war efforts. They organized public meetings and marches, raised funds, and mobilized public opinion for war in the name of ideology or ethno-nationalism. They joined militias in Cambodia and El Salvador. In many case study countries, they played supporting roles in military operations by running and managing

¹⁵ Although women's participation in the political process increased during conflict, there are instances when conflict undermined it. Somalia provides an interesting case. With the breakdown of political authority, political power passed into the hands of clan elders. Councils of elders, which replaced government officials and party functionaries, consisted of male members only. Thus, women were deprived of any say in community affairs.

auxiliary services such as health and intelligence operations. Some women also founded organizations to promote peaceful resolution of the conflicts and became powerful voices in the peace accords.

In many cases, the expansion of women's public roles enhanced their social and political positions. It projected a new vision of gender equality, redefined their traditional roles, and gave them new self-confidence. Further, it contributed to an increase in the number of committed and politically perceptive women leaders, many of whom would assume leadership roles in the post-war era. Other women became disillusioned with mainstream political parties and broke ranks with them. For example, women leaders who had worked hard for FMLN in El Salvador felt that FMLN's leadership was not committed to gender equality and founded Women for Dignity and Life (Dignas) to promote a feminist agenda. The organization disassociated itself from FMLN and established close working relationships with a cross-section of governmental and voluntary institutions to promote women's empowerment. In Cambodia, women refugees who had gained skills and organizational experience in overseas refugee camps returned to play prominent roles in grassroots and advocacy organizations.¹⁶

Retrenchment and Political Participation

Once hostilities stopped, most case study countries witnessed a retrenchment of women from public life. This was most visible in post-conflict elections held to establish democratic governments. Although women comprised at least half of the electorate, they were only marginally represented in national legislatures in most countries. For example, only five women were elected to the National Assembly in Cambodia, representing only 5.7 percent of elected representatives. The situation was no different in Guatemala, where women represented only 7.5 percent of the seats in Parliament. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the House of Representatives had only one woman in the 42-member chamber. The conditions were better in El Salvador and Mozambique, where women represented 10.7 percent and 25.2 percent of the seats, respectively.

Several factors seemed to have contributed to this post-war retrenchment. One factor is that the psychological stress of war generated nostalgia for the traditional social and political order, which assigned only marginal roles to women in public life. After the peace accord in Cambodia, for instance, some of the Cambodian elite began clamoring for the old order, which was seen as free from social and cultural strife. Some social and religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Guatemala demanded a return to traditional values and norms. The most vivid example of cultural revivalism is Afghanistan, where women were completely deprived of their political and social rights.

Another factor contributing to retrenchment is that, as with men, war fatigue often gripped a segment of women leaders and workers. Many women who shouldered heavy public burdens

¹⁶ In both the Cambodia and Guatemala case studies, however, the new skills and experience gained in refugee camps did not transfer into higher status upon their return, and many eventually lost their newfound skills.

in addition to their familial responsibilities were physically and emotionally exhausted by the end of the conflict. A final and perhaps largest factor is that when freed from the preoccupation with war, men sought to reassert their authority in public life. Although they regarded women's participation as a necessity during conflict, many considered it inappropriate in normal times.

Fortunately, many forces pushed for increased women's political participation, mitigating the effects of the above factors. First, the establishment of democratic political systems opened new political space for women. As a part of the peace accord, many war-torn societies—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Guatemala, in particular—drafted new constitutions based on the principles of democracy and equality. In El Salvador, the existing constitution was revised to pave the way for democracy. One distinguishing feature of the revised or new constitutions was the explicit recognition of gender equality. All constitutions provided equal political rights to women, and a few tried to establish quotas for them in local and national legislative bodies. Such openings created new opportunities for women—and women responded to them.

"If women continue to perform the public functions that they assumed during the crisis, the men will have nothing to do, and we will end up taking care of lazy men who become yet another dependent (child) for us to look after."

—A women leader from Somalia
(Lewis 1997)

Second, as discussed in the next chapter, the growth of women's organizations further expanded women's public roles during the post-conflict era. To promote women's welfare and gender equality, women leaders and workers founded many new organizations and revitalized existing ones in all case study countries. Women's organizations have emerged as a powerful force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda, although their influence was quite limited in Cambodia and Georgia.

"Noting the fact that Eritrean women's heroic participation in the struggle for independence and solidarity based on equality and mutual respect generated by such struggle will serve as an unshakable foundation for our commitment and struggle to create a society in which women and men will interact on the basis of mutual respect, fraternity and equality . . ."

—Preamble to Eritrean Constitution

Finally, the international community pushed for the social, economic, and political empowerment of women, which influenced the political aspirations and behavior of women in the case study countries. Many multilateral and bilateral donors funded visits by women leaders to international meetings and conferences on gender issues. International women's NGOs established branches or affiliated themselves with indigenous groups. The democracy promotion activities funded by international donor agencies, although not exclusively focusing on women's political participation, also helped struggling women's groups and organizations assume new political roles and responsibilities.

Despite a brief era of disenfranchisement, women in post-conflict societies had made headway in the political arena. For example, the percentage of women members in national parliaments increased after conflicts ended in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El

Salvador, and Georgia. Only in Guatemala did the number of women elected to the National Assembly decrease since peace accords were signed in 1996. The representation of women in ministries of national governments also improved over time in case study countries. Likewise, women made substantial gains in elections to local bodies. For example, the percentage of women city councilors increased from only 3 percent during the conflict in El Salvador to 13.7 percent in the 1993 elections; in the 1999 elections, the percentage of women almost doubled.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EMERGENCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The previous chapter examined the impact of intrastate conflicts on women and gender relations. This chapter focuses on the emergence—and in many cases re-emergence—of women's organizations in the case study countries that addressed these problems and promoted gender equality. It discusses their activities, their contributions to the empowerment of women, and the problems faced. It also discusses the factors affecting their performance and impacts and the vexing issue of their sustainability.

GROWTH OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS DURING POST-CONFLICT TRANSITION

As conceptualized here, the term “women's organizations” refers to all voluntary organizations, led and managed by women, that promote women's welfare and gender equality. This definition includes a variety of women's organizations, ranging from grassroots women's groups to national advocacy organizations designed to influence public policies.

It is difficult to estimate the precise number of women's organizations in the case study countries. Official statistics included only those organizations registered with the government or a regulatory agency. On the other hand, many registered organizations existed simply on paper. Moreover, many grassroots women's organizations were classified simply as welfare or economic organizations. Despite these problems, there is a consensus among experts that the number of active women's organizations ran into the hundreds in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda but their numbers were much smaller in Cambodia and Georgia. Most of these organizations emerged at the end of conflict.

Several factors contributed to their growth. First, the social, economic, and political transformation that took place during the conflicts was a major contributing factor. As indicated in the previous chapter, conflict not only undermined the traditional social order but also facilitated increased participation of women in public affairs. Many women acquired new confidence, new skills, and a new vision for the future. Consequently, at the end of the conflict, women were able to take the lead in forming their own organizations to pursue their interests and agendas.

Many women's groups and organizations emerged in El Salvador and to, a limited extent, in Guatemala during the civil wars. They drew support from leftist political parties, churches and other religious organizations, and trade unions. These women's organizations focused on the problems generated by political repression. El Salvador's Fenestra, CO-MADRES, and Dignas and Guatemala's National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) illustrate this category. In addition, international humanitarian agencies formed partnerships with existing or newly created groups to deliver assistance to the targeted populations. For example, UNHCR helped form many volunteer groups led by

women during the conflict in Bosnia. With the establishment of peace, many of these groups expanded their activities, establishing themselves as full-fledged women's organizations.

The experience women gained in refugee camps prepared them for leadership roles and indirectly contributed to the formation of women's organizations. Women often received education and training in camps and participated in camp activities. They also formed groups and organizations to promote their welfare. For example, women refugees from Guatemala established several organizations in Mexico in the 1990s (Loughna, 1999). After returning home, they transplanted them in their communities. Mama Maquin, an organization of Mayan women established in 1990 in Mexico, provides a good example. Its members transferred the organization to Guatemala after their repatriation. They also expanded its objectives and redefined its mandate. In El Salvador too, returning women refugees resurrected their organizations, albeit in small numbers. In Cambodia, many leaders of women's organizations came from the ranks of women refugees living in camps at the Thai border. In Georgia, women refugees successfully established numerous organizations to address their problems.

Second, some women became disillusioned with the leaders of leftist political parties who initially professed commitment to gender equality but later reneged on this commitment. This disillusionment led women to organize their own groups to advance feminist agendas (Stephen, 1997). The establishment of Dignas, a women's organization in El Salvador, illustrates this point. At the beginning of the peace process, Dignas's founders declared their independence from the National Resistance Party, which was affiliated with the FMLM, and started an organization to work on women's problems. The conditions were slightly different in Nicaragua, where disillusioned women leaders did not abandon Sandanista. It is interesting to note that many former women leaders of the ruling parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Georgia founded nonpartisan women's organizations.

Third, the reforms initiated as a part of the peace process by transition governments created political space to establish women's organizations. Before the advent of peace, the scope for forming such organizations, especially those with active political agendas, was extremely limited. Only El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda provided some freedom to form voluntary organizations. But even then, the government carefully monitored these organizations and repressed those suspected of disloyalty. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Georgia, totalitarian regimes did not permit independent organizations. The concept of voluntary, civil society organizations was an anathema to them. These conditions changed during and after the peace process. The establishment of democracy, the codification of the right to form organizations, and the emergence of relatively free media gave women, as well as other groups, unprecedented freedom to form their own organizations.

Fourth, the international community provided case study countries assistance for relief and reconstruction. One distinctive feature of international assistance that contributed to the growth of women's organizations is that it was largely channeled through NGOs. The international community wanted to build up civil society institutions in these countries as a counterweight to the state. Moreover, public bureaucratic structures were extremely fragile in

most of the case study countries and were unable to deliver goods and services to needy populations.

There was an additional reason for the international community to channel assistance through women's organizations. Experience had shown that women's organizations are generally more effective than mixed or male-dominated organizations in reaching out to women.¹⁷ Women's organizations have a comparative advantage over mixed or male-dominated organizations because they can better empathize with women. In addition, they contribute to the social and psychological empowerment of women by teaching self-reliance and leadership skills. Consequently, the international community made a concerted effort to establish and strengthen women's organizations in case study countries. In addition to channeling assistance through existing women's groups, many international private voluntary organizations (PVOs), such as CARE, OXFAM, and the Catholic Relief Society, encouraged women to form new organizations to avail themselves of humanitarian and developmental assistance.

Factors specific to each country determined the success of such efforts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the international community could easily mobilize large numbers of highly educated women professionals who had become unemployed because of the conflict. A similar course was not feasible in Cambodia, where the Khmer Rouge had wiped out the entire educated, middle class. Therefore, international donors depended on a small group of educated women, drawn from expatriates, refugees, and former leaders of state-run women's organizations. As mentioned earlier, many women's organizations emerged in El Salvador and Cambodia during the prolonged conflict. The international community strengthened them and used them to channel its assistance during post-conflict transition. In Rwanda, genocide and massive migration destroyed practically all women's organizations. International donors helped revive some of them and started new ones in partnership with the government. In Georgia, international donors primarily targeted women's organizations to help internally displaced families and promote women's political participation.

In addition to the above factors, two others deserve mention. One is the role of feminist scholars and organizations, based in the United States and Europe, who shaped the intellectual horizon of women leaders, providing them a new understanding of gender issues. Another factor was the return of educated women who had migrated to Western countries during the conflict. These women imbibed the ideas of freedom and gender equality, which they sought to pass along to their societies. They often helped and assisted nascent organizations. Their role, for example, was quite significant in Cambodia.

NATURE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Most of the women's organizations in the case study countries fall under three overlapping categories – small grassroots, regional or national, and national supporting organizations.

¹⁷ The unpublished studies by Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, both from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace indicate that women's organizations were relatively more efficient and effective than other civil society organizations.

The first category consists of small, grassroots women's organizations formed to help women victims of the conflict and focused generally on the most vulnerable—the displaced, traumatized, sexually abused, destitute, and widowed. Examples include Zena Zenama, an organization that promoted psycho-social healing in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Khemera, an organization established to help poor and destitute women in Cambodia; and Koka, a cooperative farming society based on the principles of mutual help in Georgia. Microenterprise groups promoted by the international community to provide loans also can be grouped in this category.

Often, these grassroots women's organizations were not known outside their communities. Many were not registered and not included in official statistics. Their leaders were not always well known or well connected, although they generally came from the intelligentsia. These grassroots women's organizations represented the true face of civil society in the case study countries. They reflected the values of trust, mutual help, and democratic participation, contributing to what Robert Putman calls "social capital." The international community directly funded many of these organizations. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives also supported some of these organizations with small grants.

The second category consists of national or regional women's organizations. These organizations were usually patterned on Western NGOs. They had a written constitution, a management structure, and a board of directors with varying levels of involvement in the affairs of the organization. They employed paid, full-time professional and technical staff. Their leadership came from the middle and upper middle classes. Some of them had close ties with the bureaucratic, political, and economic elite of the country. Depending on their objectives and resources, these organizations operated in different sectors, such as agriculture, microenterprise, education, health, and family planning. Many organizations also undertook advocacy work on gender issues. These organizations received funds from more than one international donor organization.

CONAVIGUA in Guatemala

The National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) was founded in 1988 to help widows and orphans of the civil war in Guatemala. In addition to providing food, health care, and education, it also filed lawsuits on behalf of women who had suffered from illegal detention, rape, kidnapping, and destruction of property. Its activities have directly and indirectly helped thousands of Mayan women in various parts of the country. In 1996, the organization expanded its mandate to include fighting against gender and class discrimination at the local and national levels.

The last category consists of the national associations or organizations that supported and assisted grassroots organizations. They were invariably located in the capital city. Often, international donor agencies established partnerships with them to channel assistance to grassroots groups and organizations. Their activities included training and technical assistance, channeling national and international assistance, and lobbying on behalf of their members. These organizations were generally quite similar to the first category, except that they were not engaged in managing their own projects.

Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe Collective is the largest association of women's organizations in Rwanda, with 35 member-organizations. Most have their offices in the capital city but work in towns and cities nationwide. Pro-Femmes contributed to dialogue between the government, women's organizations, and donor agencies on the need to target development assistance to women and influenced national policies and programs.

ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women's organizations were active in almost every important sector—social, educational, economic, and political—in case study countries. The breadth of their interventions is quite impressive. The following discussion gives an indication of the type of activities they undertook in different sectors during the postconflict era.

Health. Because health services were in shambles after conflict, women's organizations entered early in the health sector. They established health clinics, provided reproductive health care, and organized mass vaccination programs. Many organizations also developed modest programs in psycho-social healing for traumatized women. These programs organized support groups, provided psychological counseling, and, in a few cases, arranged for psychotherapy. With the growing awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, women's organizations also started focusing on these diseases. Since the treatment of HIV/AIDS is expensive, only a few organizations that had received substantial grants from international donors were able to afford it. Others, like the Indradevi Association and the Cambodian Women's Development Agency, engaged in research and prevention.

Income Generation. Women's organizations carried out programs to generate income and employment for women and women-headed households. They organized vocational training programs to generate employment opportunities for women. With the influx of the expatriate population in the early 1990s, Cambodia faced an acute shortage of secretaries, receptionists, waiters, and cooks. Women's organizations sponsored training programs to prepare young women for these occupations. In El Salvador and Guatemala, organizations provided women training in auto repair, poultry and cattle raising, carpentry, and masonry. Women's organizations were heavily involved in microcredit programs, enabling women to start their own microenterprises. A few women's organizations were also active in the agricultural sector. In Cambodia, grassroots women's groups provided agricultural extension services to struggling women farmers. In El Salvador and Guatemala, they supported women farmers engaged in nontraditional agricultural exports.

Social Problems. These organizations addressed the social problems that plague post-conflict societies. For example, they launched programs against domestic violence in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda. They provided legal, medical, and emotional support to the victims of domestic violence. Organizations such as the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center, as well as CONAMUS and MAM in El Salvador, ran shelters for abused women. In addition, women's organizations organized media events to educate people about this problem. In Cambodia, women's organizations focused on the plight of commercial sex workers. Their activities included legal assistance to abused workers, screening for sexually transmitted diseases, and sheltering those who wanted to leave the profession. In El Salvador, they tackled the problems of child abuse and child support. Women's organizations ran literacy classes in Cambodia and El Salvador and Spanish classes in Guatemala. These organizations often combined literacy training with maternal and child care to reach a wider audience.

Democracy and Human Rights. The promotion of democracy and human rights was another area in which women's organizations have been active. In El Salvador, CO-MADRES was a pioneer in raising human rights issues. It publicly denounced the disappearance, arrest, and assassination of people by the regime. Several Guatemalan organizations struggled for human rights during the civil wars. Women's organizations rendered valuable services in organizing post-conflict elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Guatemala. They participated in voter registration drives, held voter education programs, and assisted in monitoring elections. In addition, women's organizations promoted social reconciliation among former enemies. They sponsored meetings, seminars, and marches to promote mutual understanding and goodwill. Pro-Femmes and its member organizations, for example, assisted Hutu women whose husbands were in jail in Rwanda.

Advocacy. Women's organizations also undertook advocacy activities to fight discrimination and promote gender equality. Several organizations worked to increase women's participation in political affairs. They provided assistance to women candidates, irrespective of their political affiliations. Some organizations developed women's platforms, covering vital matters affecting women, and sought the endorsement of political parties. Some publicly demanded that mainstream political parties field more women candidates. Furthermore, women's organizations lobbied legislatures and governments for specific reforms. Mama Maquin and many other women's organizations successfully lobbied for the legislation granting land rights to women in Guatemala. CONAVIGUA lobbied members of Parliament on gender and human rights issues. Women's organizations in El Salvador, Cambodia, and Rwanda also worked on behalf of property rights for women. Women's organizations also organized public education programs on gender issues. For example, the Women's Media Center of Cambodia successfully used television to create gender awareness.

EXTERNAL CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITATIONS OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

In carrying out the activities mentioned earlier, women's organizations faced numerous constraints. Moreover, they suffered from their internal weaknesses, which undermined their performance and achievements. A few common constraints and limitations faced by the

majority of women's organizations are identified here to indicate the challenges that lie ahead.

Cultural and social factors undoubtedly constrain women's organizations. One variable has been the low social and cultural status of women. Practically in all case study countries, women played subservient roles to men. Moreover, in the aftermath of conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda experienced some cultural revivalism, an euphoria for cultural traditions that often glorified the role of women as mothers and housewives. Consequently, an influential segment of the political and bureaucratic elite did not relish the prospect of women taking on leadership roles in public affairs.¹⁸ At the same time, because of their low social status, many leaders of women's organizations were not in a position to interact equally with their male counterparts. This was particularly true in Cambodia and Rwanda and, to a lesser extent, in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Language also proved to a major barrier. For example, because members of Mayan women's organizations could not converse well in Spanish, they were disadvantaged when compared with *ladino* organizations. Grassroots women's organizations in Cambodia, El Salvador, and Rwanda faced slightly different problems. Their members and leaders generally came from the lower socio-economic strata, thus government officials and political leaders did not pay adequate attention to their grievances and demands. Moreover, they could not effectively communicate with the officials of international organizations. As a result, their problems and achievements often remained unappreciated by the international community. In addition, the male members of their households often did not approve of their participation in these organizations. They were concerned that if women became involved in outside activities, they would not be able to devote adequate time to household chores. As mentioned earlier, some men also felt threatened by the new awareness and initiative shown by women.

Another set of constraining factors pertains to the disabling environment of post-conflict societies. All of the case study countries were beset with serious social and economic problems at the end of conflict. They suffered from social unrest. In ethnically divided societies, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda, the resentment and anger toward members of opposition ethnic groups were rampant. Adverse economic conditions and a demoralized public bureaucracy contributed to both corruption and inefficiency. It was not uncommon for members of these organizations to bribe government officials to procure goods and services for their beneficiaries. In a few cases, the surviving police and military officials from the old regimes resented those organizations that had raised their voices against them in the past. This was particularly true in El Salvador and Guatemala. Cambodia was bereft of social capital, as well as technical manpower, because of the genocide. All these factors and conditions created constraints for women's organizations and undermined their effectiveness. These bottlenecks were not unique to women's organizations; other groups also faced them.

The inability of international donors to make long-term commitments was a persistent problem for women's organizations. The maximum donor commitment was for five years; however, in most cases, the grant was renewed every year. Renewals were not necessarily

¹⁸ This has been a general complaint, particularly of smaller women's organizations.

automatic because of shrinking levels of assistance to post-conflict societies. Consequently, many organizations carried out activities in an environment of uncertainty and were unable to engage in long-term planning. Such uncertainty was hardly conducive to the morale of staff facing the prospect of unemployment. Nor did it help in developing sectoral specialization.

In addition, women's organizations had their internal limitations. Many women's organizations suffered from management and leadership problems. Some were founded by charismatic leaders. Although such leaders inspired people and impressed officials of the donor agencies and their own government, they were not necessarily the best managers. Often, they had little patience for strategic planning and could not adhere to budgets and other bureaucratic procedures, which, although cumbersome, are essential for efficient management.¹⁹ At the same time, some opportunistic women with little commitment to a cause started women's organizations to profit from the abundant donor resources initially available in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cambodia, running these organizations as personal businesses.

The top leadership of many women's organizations were reluctant to delegate power and to train junior staff for future leadership. The leaders were concerned that a professionally trained staff might challenge their authority. They tended to monopolize participation in international training programs, meetings, and conferences. Consequently, middle and junior staff, who found prospects for upward mobility within the organization blocked by the top brass, were naturally frustrated in many organizations. This affected not only the day-to-day operations of these organizations but also their long-term viability.

Finally, the lack of communication and cooperation among women's organizations limited their impact. These organizations often saw one another as competitors rather than as partners working for the same cause. Personal rivalries and animosities between the leaders of organizations, differences in ideological orientation, a lack of tradition for voluntary organizations in many countries, and, above all, the competition for resources in an environment of declining assistance, contributed to this tension. As a result, efforts were often duplicated, the image of women's organizations in the public mind were undermined, and skills and expertise were not shared across organizations.

"Members felt that the leaders took advantage of them and compromised their ability to gain higher positions within the organization."

—An unpublished case study of
CONAVIGUA in Guatemala

"The leaders of women's organizations treat their organizations as their own fiefdom, because they had founded them. Often the junior staff members are treated as personal servants. Workers have no choice; there are no jobs."

—An informant in Cambodia

"You cannot expect these nascent women's organizations to have an effective management structure. You have to be realistic."

—A Guatemalan expert

¹⁹ Management has been quite a problem. For example, an unpublished paper "Gender in Guatemala; Case Studies of the Association of Mayan Ixil Women, Mama Maquin and Kichin Konojel" by Gloria Zamora de Garcia and Maria Rosenda Camey notes it. Authors studies in Cambodia and other countries also highlighted the management shortcomings of women's organizations.

WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS AND EMPOWERMENT

Did the aforementioned activities contribute to the empowerment of women? This is a legitimate question, although almost impossible to answer. The post-conflict transition has been a recent phenomenon, and most women's organizations are relatively new, between six and eight years old. This is too short a time to examine the long-term, cumulative effects of these organizations. However, a few general observations based on anecdotal evidence can be made.

It is necessary to explain what is meant by empowerment. Although there are serious differences among experts, the term "empowerment" generally refers to an individual's or a group's ability to influence matters affecting its welfare and interests. In the context of gender relations, it connotes that women have the freedom to decide for themselves. They interact with men from the position of equality, rather than from perpetual dependence. Thus, women are empowered when social, cultural, economic, or political barriers to their freedom are removed or eliminated and they can realize their full potential.

The emergence of women's organizations and the myriad of activities they undertook seem to have contributed to women's empowerment in the following ways.

First, women's organizations helped women victims of conflict, such as returning refugees and internally displaced women, those sexually abused during and after conflict, and other women in desperate situations. Their timely assistance was often instrumental in enabling these vulnerable women to take control of their shattered lives. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of vulnerable women profited from the activities of women's organizations in case study countries. This is undoubtedly one of the most important contributions of women's organizations.

Second, the income generation activities of women's organizations saved women beneficiaries from utter poverty and deprivation. They helped beneficiaries become economically self-reliant and perhaps socially less subservient. Empirical studies have demonstrated a close relationship between economic independence and social empowerment. When women become earning members of the household, their bargaining position with male members tends to improve (Schuler and Hashemi, 1993). One can assume that this finding also applies to the case study countries. The beneficiaries of income generation programs often told stories of

"In my view, what really matters in these situations is money, income. I have seen it in many countries, Bosnia, Guatemala, and Mozambique and even Kosovo. . . . The moment women start bringing money, they are better treated by their husbands, sons, and every body else. Women's organizations have helped a lot through microcredit and small loans programs targeted to women."

—A women official of a leading PVO

how their income not only saved them from extreme poverty but also gave them a new sense of identity and enhanced social status.²⁰

Third, by facilitating political participation through political education, voter registration drives, and assistance to women candidates, women's organizations contributed to political empowerment. By working in these organizations, many women acquired leadership skills and experience. Some officers of these organizations also assumed leadership in political parties, contested elections, and even held public office.²¹ For example, the founder of CONAVIGUA in Guatemala was elected to Congress.²² In fact, the organization aligned itself with a political party. The founder of Khemera, one of the first women's organizations in Cambodia, became a minister in the current government.²³

Fourth, women's organizations raised gender awareness among their members. They organized meetings, workshops, and discussions. Grassroots organizations, like the Association of Mayan Ixil Women, Mama Maquin, and Kichin Konojel in Guatemala, routinely held workshops for their members. Workshops also were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina and El Salvador. In addition, women's organizations were instrumental in disseminating the findings of international meetings and conferences on women and gender issues through their networks. As a result, more members became aware of their social and political rights, structural factors contributing to their low status, and the ways in which they could improve their predicament.

"In organizing ourselves, we had the opportunity to learn new things [and to] get to know our rights as women. We did not participate before, but now we have the opportunity. For example, we now participate in the elections of our preferred candidates."

"A consciousness about the importance of our participation in the development of our families and communities and the knowledge gained through training and experience in the organization were two important impacts of Mama Maquin."

—Two women members of
Mama Maquin

Finally, in many case study countries, women's organizations succeeded in putting gender issues on the national agenda. This is particularly true in El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. As a result, national leaders, the intelligentsia, and public officials started discussing issues such as women's property rights, discrimination in employment and credit, girls' education, domestic violence, and family planning. Women's organizations were able to accomplish this for many reasons. Often, their leaders were related to the political and

²⁰ The author has heard such stories firsthand in many post-conflict societies, including Cambodia and Rwanda. Such stories also have been documented in a WIT report for USAID prepared by Hannah Baldwin.

²¹ Most women's organizations kept a respectful distance from active involvement in politics. Their leaders and members often were disillusioned with party politics and viewed political parties with an indifference often bordering on contempt. They were convinced that dominant political parties only pay lip service to gender issues. To them, only nonpartisan women's organizations could represent the true interests of women.

²² The director of the organization, Rosalina Tuyuc, was elected a member of Parliament as a candidate for the New Guatemalan Democratic Front.

²³ It should be noted that many women political leaders preferred not to be associated with women's organizations because they wanted to cultivate a mainstream public image. This was particularly true in Georgia where women political leaders did not want to be known as women leaders because this would alienate male voters.

bureaucratic elite as spouses, daughters, and other close relatives. Therefore, they had access to important policy makers and could communicate their organizations' concerns and suggestions. Moreover, since many grassroots women's organizations had acquired followings in their respective communities, local politicians gravitated toward them to strengthen their political base. In El Salvador and Guatemala, mayors of small towns and cities started consulting them.²⁴ Finally, as indicated earlier, women's organizations lobbied their governments and parliaments on matters affecting women's rights and problems.

Although women's organizations contributed to women's empowerment, their overall impact was modest for two reasons. First, these organizations could reach only a very small proportion of women through their activities because of their limited number, small size, and modest resources. Consequently, they did not make much difference in the lives of the majority of women. Nor could they effect major changes in the existing institutions in these societies. Second, most of the organizations lacked a strategic vision of gender relations. They tried to address specific women's problems, rather than advocate for a radical transformation of their societies.

SUSTAINABILITY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The sustainability of women's organizations is of paramount concern to all those who are interested in the growth of civil society and gender equality. The question often is asked whether these organizations will survive or if they will decay and languish as foreign assistance wanes. There is no simple answer to this question since conditions vary from country to country and organization to organization. However, a few general observations can be made.

The sustainability of women's organizations can be assessed with reference to three dimensions: financial, managerial, and outside linkages (Carr et al., 1996, p.197). Financial sustainability indicates that an organization is able to survive without external funding, while managerial sustainability implies that it is managed and led by women stakeholders, or by someone hired by them. Finally, linkage sustainability means that an organization is able to link up with external actors to achieve its objectives.

²⁴ For example, a case study of the Association of Mayan Ixil Women by Gloria Zamora de García and María Rosenda Camey noted that the leaders of the association have gained political recognition in municipal corporation meetings, in which community planning decisions are made and future activities are planned.

As far as financial sustainability is concerned, the future of women's organizations remains questionable. Most of the organizations reviewed were largely, if not exclusively, dependent on international assistance. Most of their budgets came from outside donors, either as grants or as funds for specific projects. Most of them were unable to charge fees for their services. There were, however, exceptions. Organizations that lent money for microenterprises were able to keep a small percentage of the interest paid by borrowers for administrative expenses. In addition, a few organizations, such as the Association of Salvadoran Women, had established partnerships with government to run specific programs. However, an overwhelming majority of women's organizations were not in a position to be self-sufficient and would not survive in the absence of outside funds.

"Frankly, we cannot survive without international assistance. It is simply not possible."

—*Founder of a women's organization in Cambodia*

"Without external funding, I suspect that 40 percent of these (women's) organizations will close down in Bosnia-Herzegovina without international assistance."

—*A USAID official*

"I believe that grassroots women's organizations have a better chance of survival than the large organizations."

—*A civil society specialist*

Women's organizations found it extremely difficult to raise funds in post-conflict societies. Governments of the case study countries were, and will likely remain, under constant pressure to reduce public expenditure; therefore, they will not be in a position to support many women's organizations for years to come. Even if they were, it is questionable that such a course would be desirable, since it might severely undermine the autonomy of these organizations. The private sector is still at a nascent stage in all case study countries, with the possible exception of El Salvador. Moreover, private firms have yet to develop a tradition for philanthropy and public service in the case study countries. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect that women's organizations will be able to raise sufficient funds for their activities from local sources. The problem is further compounded because these organizations lack expertise in fund-raising.

Smaller women's organizations will be particularly at risk. They are not likely to have the resources and expertise to compete with large women's organizations, which have acquired considerable experience in soliciting funds from the international community. Moreover, many smaller organizations face stiff competition from mixed or male-dominated voluntary organizations, which have started undertaking projects and programs focusing on women.

Managerial sustainability does not seem to be a major problem. Women invariably led and managed all the organizations that were examined for this study. In all case study countries, women had acquired considerable experience in managing public institutions. More important, their technical capabilities had grown. Therefore, there will be no shortage in the future of well-trained and committed women to manage and run these organizations.

The third dimension of sustainability is the capacity of an organization to develop and maintain linkages with its external environment. In the case of women's organizations, at

least, three stakeholders can be mentioned. The first—and undoubtedly most important—stakeholders are the targeted women beneficiaries. Most of the women's organizations examined seem to have been quite successful in establishing a rapport with their beneficiaries because of their commitment and empathy. They held a comparative advantage over other organizations, which will probably continue in the future.

The second category of stakeholders consists of the concerned governmental agencies and departments. A good working relationship with these agencies or departments is essential not only to obtain support and possibly garner funds from the government but also to avoid duplication of efforts. Most women's organizations in the case study countries had started paying attention to local and national public institutions. Even the organizations that initially wanted to keep aloof from the government came to recognize the value of it. Cambodia is a case in point. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when donor agencies were vying with one another to fund women's organizations, the latter adopted an attitude of benign neglect toward the Cambodian government. However, with the decline in external funding and the improvement in the public bureaucracy, these organizations were revisiting their earlier posture.

The last category of stakeholders comprises external funding agencies. Most of the women's organizations that received funds from international donors had acquired a better understanding of the requirements of international donors. However, it is unclear at this stage when and if these organizations will be able to tap other philanthropic resources in their own countries.

The international development community recognizes that many of the women's organizations will not survive. The level of international funding declined over time in the case study countries. In fact, international humanitarian assistance had significantly declined in all case study countries. Moreover, many problems that initially plagued these societies, such as those pertaining to women refugees, demobilized women combatants, and unaccompanied children, were solved, at least partially. Consequently, there will be little or no need for programs focusing on these problems, which will mean that many women's organizations will scale down their activities or even close down. On the other hand, as these countries make economic, social, and political progress, new women's organizations may arise that are more likely to be both sustainable and responsive to the changing needs of their societies.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

The previous chapter discussed the role and activities of women's organizations in postconflict societies. This chapter focuses on the assistance provided to these organizations by the international community. Specifically, it examines the nature of international assistance and its contribution to the functioning of women's organizations. It also identifies problem areas, which deserve attention and action by the international donor community.

NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

As indicated earlier, the international community provided extensive assistance to women's organizations in all case study countries. While precise data are not available, it is safe to assume that most, if not all, the resources for these organizations came from international sources. In addition to the bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, private foundations, international charitable organizations, religious and church organizations, trade unions, professional organizations and other NGOs supported these organizations in various case study countries.

International donors gave general grants as well as funded specific activities of women's organizations. Often foundations, religious organizations, NGOs and small bilateral agencies, particularly from Scandinavian countries, gave grants for institutional development and/or activities. Such grants were generally flexible and did not involve any monitoring by the funding agency. On the other hand, USAID and major bilateral agencies preferred to projectize assistance. They usually funded specific projects and activities of the women's organizations. Women's organizations were accountable for the progress of these interventions.

The most common form of assistance was financial assistance. Both donors and women's organizations preferred it as it provided considerable flexibility to them. International donors also gave in kind assistance. For example, during conflict, UNHCR, World Food Programme and USAID provided food, medicines and other essential commodities to women's organizations to distribute among the targeted populations. Such programs usually ended with the establishment of peace. Many international organizations also donated typewriters, computers, copiers, audio-visual equipment and even automobiles to develop institutional capacities of women's organizations.

In addition, the international community provided considerable technical assistance. Such assistance was necessary as the staff of women's organizations usually lacked managerial and technical expertise. The international community routinely supported short- and long-term training programs for the staff in accounting, management and technical fields. It also arranged for overseas trips for the senior officials of women's organizations to visit technical and educational institutions or to attend international meetings and conferences. In addition, it funded the services of short-term consultants to solve managerial and technical problems. Some international donors also funded expatriate experts on a long term basis, i.e. up to an

year. As the cost of expatriate experts is exceptionally high, international donors have become reluctant to provide them on a long-term basis.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The experience of case study countries unmistakably shows that international assistance has profoundly contributed to the growth, activities and continual survival of women's organizations. There is a consensus among the officials from the international community, leaders of women's organizations, host government officials, and academic experts on this general conclusion. More specifically, they emphasized the following four contributions of international assistance:

First, the majority of women's organizations in all case study countries would not have emerged without international assistance. As mentioned earlier, international organizations helped women leaders establish or revive old organizations at the end of conflict. The creation of these organizations often was donor driven.

Second, international assistance enabled most women's organizations to initiate projects that benefited women and contributed to their empowerment. However, because of donor dependence, there was a perception in some quarters that women's organizations were largely the implementation arms of the international community; they do not enjoy full autonomy. Although there is some element of truth in it, this perception is not fully justified. The reality is much more complex. Even when they carried out programs for international donors, women's organizations enjoyed considerable freedom and flexibility in shaping programs. In most cases, international donors identified priorities, while organizations developed their own programs and plans. There was much give and take between international donors and women's organizations during negotiations, since both sides needed each other. Although international donors had the leverage (funding), women's organizations had bargaining power because of their local roots and capacity to deliver goods and services to the targeted women. Moreover, donors also adopted effective programs developed by women's organizations. Finally, as mentioned earlier, many international donors, particularly those from Nordic countries, and private foundations simply gave grants to women's organizations for the development and implementation their own programs reflecting their priorities and understanding of local conditions.

Third, international assistance contributed to the growth of managerial and technical skills. Many women's organizations in the case study countries received training or technical assistance from the international community. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Cambodia, donors set up independent local organizations to assist women's organizations and other civil society organizations. In addition, women's organizations often had to learn appropriate managerial and budgetary procedures to qualify for funding from international donors. Most of the women's organizations established during and after the conflict did not possess even rudimentary managerial structures. They had to establish management procedures, keep necessary records, and follow appropriate budgetary practices to get international assistance for their programs. The cumulative result was that managerial and technical capacities of women's organizations improved over time.

Women's organizations appear to have acquired the following four sets of skills from their association with the international community; (a) management practices, such as management systems, work plans, job descriptions and individual assignments, management controls, and monitoring and evaluation systems; (b) accounting and budgeting skills, particularly in former Communist countries where such skills were not diffused; (c) expertise in the preparation and submission of proposals to international agencies, and (d) techniques to raise funds from local sources.

Finally, international assistance contributed to legitimizing women's organizations in the case study countries. Receipt of international funds legitimized them. Moreover, in many cases, international recognition protected women's organizations from undue interference from the various arms of the government. Before peace process, many women's organizations fighting for the rights of victims of political oppression in El Salvador and Guatemala survived and sustained themselves partly from the material and moral support of the international community.

CRITICAL ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

International assistance suffered from several limitations in the case study countries. One major limitation, discussed earlier, was the short time horizon for assistance. Consequently, women's organizations operated in an environment of uncertainty. Moreover, limited span of funding in an era of shifting donor priorities prevented recipient organizations from developing their own priorities. Lacking their own funds, many organizations had to abandon their original plans and struggle to establish new programs in areas in which they did not have any experience. In Cambodia, when local organizations found out that funds were available for projects against domestic violence, many started ventures in this field, even without any comparative advantage in this area. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, many women's organizations had to close down their psychological healing projects when international donors focused instead on economic growth and development.

A second problem was the cumbersome and often unnecessary requirements for proposals, progress reports, and monitoring information imposed by international donor agencies. These requirements had high opportunity costs. USAID provides a good example. To receive a grant, USAID once required that voluntary organizations be registered with USAID/Washington or meet the same requirements established for U.S.-based PVOs. (Fortunately, this requirement was dropped in July 2000.) Thus, only a small portion of women's organizations could obtain direct grants from USAID or its missions. Instead, funds were channeled to them through U.S. or international PVOs.²⁵ Moreover, USAID and its development partners often required detailed progress reports and, in some cases, information on the impact of the funded programs. Most smaller women's organizations had to spend considerable resources and time in meeting many requirements.

²⁵ It should be noted that USAID has generally preferred to channel assistance through PVOs for other reasons as well. Direct assistance to local assistance is management intensive and USAID's overseas mission lack manpower to manage it. Moreover, because of their long involvement with grassroots organizations, PVOs are in a better position to deal with women's organizations.

A third problem, related to the second, was that well-established, large women's organizations, usually led by highly connected women leaders, tended to receive a lion's share of international assistance. This was particularly true when international assistance began to decline and the competition for funds became intense. International donor agencies were aware of the problem, but they could do little about it. Because they were accountable for results, donor staff did not want to take risks with relatively unknown, small organizations. It made more sense to go with established organizations. Moreover, it was difficult to reach out to small organizations at the grassroots level which involved more management time and resources. Some international donors tried to solve this problem by channeling resources through international PVOs or by establishing local voluntary organizations to assist small women's organizations.

Fourth, there has been little or no donor coordination. Donor agencies tended to work independently without adequate information and understanding of one another's programs. During the early postconflict phase, there was even competition for funding suitable projects developed by women's organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia and Rwanda. Similar projects were funded by two or more agencies for the same community or region, resulting in a waste of precious resources.²⁶ Moreover, even when one donor was not satisfied with the progress of a program and discontinued funding, others picked it up, resulting in the continuation of ineffective programs. However, the situation improved over time in practically all case study countries. The decline in the levels of international funding and a corresponding reduction in the number of international actors operating in the country facilitated increased contacts if not coordination among the donors.

Fifth, international donors were unable to disseminate information about resource availability to all interested women's organizations. Limited information about other women's organizations, language and geographical barriers, and time constraints contributed to this problem. Consequently, a few organizations received a majority of the international resources, while many deserving organizations were denied assistance.²⁷ Organizations located in capital cities or whose leaders were politically connected or had contacts with the staff of donor agencies clearly enjoyed an advantage over smaller organizations based in distant towns.

Finally, the international assistance to women's organizations also suffered because the international community has yet to develop a coherent policy framework for assisting women and promoting gender equality in postconflict societies. Although the international community has undertaken a wide range of programs, these have been undertaken in an opportunistic manner without a well formulated policy framework.

²⁶ Many keen students of the Bosnian scene have observed this. An unpublished report on civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina supports this view (citation to come).

²⁷ Alice Morton has made this point and suggested that the donor community should be sensitive about this problem.

CHAPTER SIX

LESSONS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Earlier chapters examined the social, economic and political impacts of intrastate conflict on women and gender relations. They also discussed the growth, activities and contributions of women's organizations that emerged or re-emerged in the aftermath of war. They also examined the nature and forms of assistance provided by the international community to meet some of the problems and challenges arising out of conflict. This chapter explores the policy and programmatic implications of the findings presented in earlier chapters. The first section presents policy and programmatic lessons and recommendations, while the second outlines a strategic framework for international assistance for gender and women issues in post-conflict societies.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General Lessons and Recommendations

1. Build on Women's Economic and Political Gains

Not all effects of intrastate conflicts on women and gender relations have been negative. In fact, in all case study countries, conflict undermined the traditional sexual division of labor, creating new economic and political opportunities for women. In most countries, women were able to enter occupations that had been previously closed to them. Moreover, their political participation increased in community and local affairs. In many cases, they assumed the leadership of grassroots civic and political institutions.

Because the post-conflict era provides an opening to build on the progress made by women during conflict, it makes sense for USAID to continue to capitalize on this opportunity—as it has largely done in the past—by designing and implementing programs to ameliorate the conditions of women and to help promote gender equality.

2. Add Focus on Civilian Security

The decline of social control, disintegration of the community, poverty, unemployment, presence of demilitarized soldiers, and ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies tend to increase lawlessness and violence in post-conflict societies. Although all strata of society suffer, women and children are undoubtedly the worst victims. The international community has generally supported demobilization of ex-combatants, police reforms, and international monitoring of human rights to reform the security sector. However, the primary focus of its efforts has been political rights and security rather than civilian security. Consequently, while the human rights situation had improved in all case study countries, civilian security remained a major problem.

USAID can assume a leadership role in highlighting the problem of civilian security and the need for concerted action. It can also encourage other organs of U.S. Government, bilateral

and multilateral agencies, and international NGOs to devise and implement programs that can enhance physical security for women. Such programs could include security sector reforms, greater representation of women in police forces and judicial processes, establishment of peace committees to prevent the eruption of violence, and special interventions for vulnerable youth.

3. Emphasize Cost-Effective, Indigenous Approaches to Treat Traumatized Women and Men

International programs for dealing with traumatized women have suffered because of many limitations. They tend to ignore the cultural and social contexts of the trauma and propose solutions that may not be relevant to victims. Moreover, programs are often short-lived and spotty because of inadequate long-term funding and the experimental nature of the sector. Finally, because they focus on women and children, and not in men, they are ineffective in reducing gender violence. Women often become the victims of aggression and violence by traumatized men.

USAID has supported cost-effective, innovative programs, based on indigenous approaches to psychosocial healing, to deal with traumatized children and child soldiers. It will be useful for USAID to examine its experience and explore the possibility of expanding these programs to include both men and women on an experimental basis.

4. Make Concerted Efforts to Prevent Sexual Abuse of Women

The international community has implemented a plethora of programs for helping sexually abused women in post-conflict societies. Because of the nature of sexual crimes and the social stigma attached to them, these programs do not reach most victims. Nonetheless, they are important and should be supported. However, the most important role for USAID is to support initiatives to educate people about these crimes and to prevent their recurrence.

International organizations and experts have put forward several proposals—such as treating sexual violence within the definition of torture under the United Nation’s Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1994); training international peacekeepers in gender issues; promoting more women to international judicial posts; protecting witnesses; and raising the awareness of and punishment for international trafficking in women – for consideration by the international community. USAID should carefully review them and, when appropriate, endorse them.

5. Promote Microcredit with Caution

The experience in many case study countries indicates that microcredit programs have been quite effective. Although not exclusively targeted to women, the overwhelming majority of loans went to women. These programs appeared to achieve the twin objectives of relief and development. However, such programs are no panacea for all economic problems facing women in postconflict societies. They do not address structural barriers to women’s economic

advancement. Although microcredit programs can prevent abject poverty, they do not promise sustained economic advancement.

While supporting microcredit programs, USAID should not ignore their limitations. It should push for removing structural barriers to the economic advancement of women.

6. Support Implementation of Property Rights Reforms for Women

Women's lack of access to agricultural land and other productive assets is a major problem in post-conflict societies. Women are usually denied legal rights to land and other resources owned by their dead husbands, fathers, or other close relatives. Consequently, widows and single women are unable to engage in many productive activities, thereby suffering from abject poverty and deprivation.

USAID has been a pioneer in pushing for property rights for women in post-conflict societies and should continue these efforts. It should focus not only on constitutional and legislative reforms but also on their implementation. It also is necessary to support initiatives designed to build public support for women's property rights and to support actions to help resolve bureaucratic inertia and resistance.

7. Promote Greater Women's Participation in Postconflict Elections

With the exception of Rwanda, post-conflict elections were held in all case study countries. Their main objective was to form governments that enjoyed national and international legitimacy and promoted the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the society. USAID and other donors provided major assistance to organize and conduct post-conflict elections. Although women constituted half or more of the electorate, only a small proportion were elected to national legislatures.

USAID should consider steps to promote greater representation of women in post-conflict elections, encourage political parties to field women candidates, and assist women candidates on a nonpartisan basis.

8. Promote Political Participation of Women

As indicated earlier, post-conflict societies offer openings for women's political participation. Often democratic constitutions are adopted, providing equality between men and women. Such constitutions also provide a legal framework for women's participation in political arena. Because of their increased involvement in public life during conflict, some women not only acquire leadership skills and experience but also become aware of their political rights and responsibilities. The international community has also provided assistance to encourage women to participate in political affairs. Despite these developments, women's political participation has been limited.

Therefore USAID should continue to support women's political participation with increased vigor. It should consider providing long-term technical and material assistance to nonpartisan

women's advocacy organizations engaged in promoting women's participation in local and national affairs.

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Lessons and Recommendations for Women's Organizations

1. Continue to Foster Women's Organizations

USAID and other international agencies have supported the establishment and growth of women's organizations in post-conflict societies for a number of reasons. Women's organizations represent an essential element of civil society and, therefore, are essential to consolidate nascent democracies. Moreover, they help promote women's leadership, thereby contributing to gender equality. Finally, women's organizations are instrumental in channeling humanitarian and development assistance to targeted populations, particularly women. The findings of this assessment show that the expectations of USAID and other donors are fully justified. Despite obvious limitations, women's organizations have started making contributions toward the achievement of all these objectives. Moreover, the findings also demonstrate that the international community can establish and foster women's organizations in post-conflict conditions.

USAID should continue with greater vigor its policy of fostering women's organizations as an integral part of its efforts to rehabilitate and reconstruct post-conflict societies. It also should encourage its development partners to support women's organizations.

2. Review Funding Requirements for Women's Organizations

Women's organizations encountered many problems in obtaining funds from USAID. First, USAID's requirements to qualify for contracts were quite stringent. Although relaxed since April 2000, requirements still pose a challenge to most women's organizations. Second, many organizations viewed reporting requirements for projects and program activities as onerous. They were often required to provide information on the impact of projects, which was not easily available and required considerable time and resources to collect. Finally, USAID funded women's organizations through international PVOs, which also imposed their own requirements. Consequently, some organizations had to meet dual reporting requirements, those of USAID and its implementing partner.

USAID and its partners should seriously examine these problem areas and take steps to redress them. Wherever possible, it is advisable to impose minimal requirements and provide some funds to cover the costs of essential data collection and analysis.

3. Consider Multiyear Funding

A major problem faced by women's organizations in all case study countries was the limited duration of funding. As mentioned earlier, most of the projects funded under humanitarian assistance were for six to nine months only. The life span of other projects was longer, but subject to annual reviews. Women's organizations had to spend considerable time and resources on proposal writing. Moreover, even when a project was funded, the organization was not sure if it funds will be forthcoming next year. Thus a cloud of uncertainty hung over them.

USAID and other donors should consider longer funding horizon for projects being implemented by women's organizations. The assurance of long-term assistance will boost staff morale and help build institutional capacity.

4. Promote Sustainability of Women's Organizations

International donors and women's organizations generally agree that the majority of women's organizations cannot survive without international assistance. Most post-conflict societies face severe shortages of economic resources. They lack a well-developed private sector, which could fund such organizations. Moreover, women's organizations have limited technical and managerial capacity to diversify funding sources.

To promote the sustainability of at least some women's organizations that have done noteworthy work in areas where needs continue, USAID could (1) consider funding a portion of core costs, in addition to program costs, for a limited period of time; (2) provide technical assistance, if and when necessary, to improve management; and (3) help them become self-reliant by improving skills in strengthening local political networks, advocacy and fund-raising, coalition building, and networking with governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

5. Integrate Women's Organizations in Large-Scale Development Initiatives

Because of their gender focus and small size, the international community has tended to treat women's organizations as peripheral and not mainstream. It generally entrusts them with initiatives that focus exclusively on women. It is important to move beyond this tendency for two reasons. First, a gender framework should inform all development projects—not merely those initiatives that focus on women. Second, integration of women's organizations in large development initiatives can strengthen these organization's institutional capabilities.

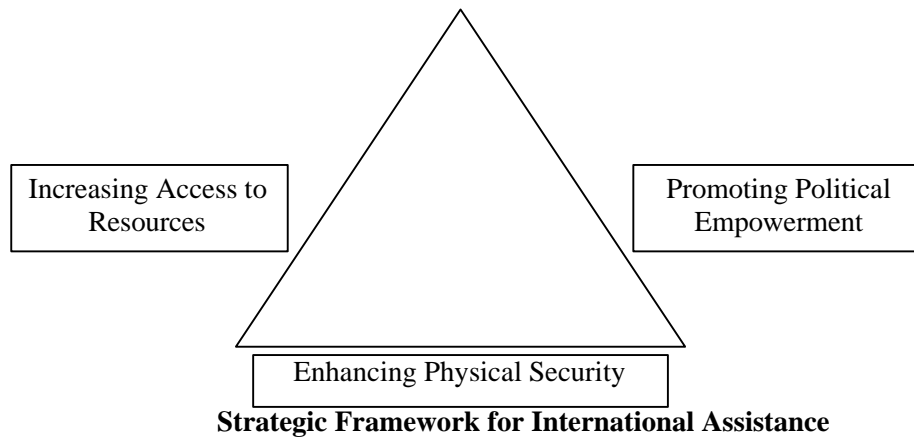
USAID and other donors should explore the possibility of integrating women's organizations into large-scale development initiatives in post-conflict societies. Such integration could involve (1) awarding them contracts for development initiatives and (2) encouraging large development organizations to include them as partners in bidding for contracts for international projects.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Although USAID and other donors have successfully designed and implemented a wide range of interventions to help women and promote gender equality, they still have not developed a strategic framework to inform these assistance programs. A strategic framework not only can provide an overall rationale and policy and programmatic coherence to disparate international interventions but also can help promote meaningful donor coordination.

At the outset, it should be recognized that the purpose of international assistance is not merely to mitigate the harmful effects of conflict but also to transform gender relations by seizing opportunities for women's advancement. Therefore, any framework should be

designed to achieve two objectives: (1) address the urgent and immediate problems that women face in the aftermath of the conflict and (2) to contribute to women's empowerment, thereby promoting more balanced gender relations. Although related, they are distinct objectives. On the basis of the earlier discussions, the outline of a strategic framework is proposed here. The proposed framework has three elements that can be represented as follows:



Enhancing Physical Security. Physical security has two dimensions critical to women's welfare: protection from violence and hunger.

Although both men and women are susceptible to lingering violence from a conflict, women are more vulnerable. They often are easy targets for those seeking revenge, particularly in ethnic conflicts. Moreover, they are usually the victims of sexual abuse and exploitation both during and after the conflict. Finally, domestic violence often increases in the aftermath of conflicts. The international community has limited involvement in protecting women from violence, and more needs to be done.

Hunger represents a prime form of insecurity for women. Women are particularly susceptible to food insecurity in post-conflict societies because of abject poverty, additional economic pressures as single heads of households, and the addition of unaccompanied children to the family. The international community has undertaken a wide range of programs to prevent hunger and starvation both during and after the conflicts. These include the bulk distribution of food, food for work programs to generate employment, nutritional support programs for children, and the provision of agricultural inputs. The international community has also developed mechanisms to ensure that women get their reasonable share of such assistance. .

Increasing Access to Productive Assets. Productive assets include not only physical assets but also technical skills and knowledge. Even in normal times, women do not receive fair access to productive assets. The situation tends to worsen in post-conflict settings because of the pervasive destruction of physical and institutional infrastructure, economic contraction

and general social disorganization. It is therefore essential that concerted efforts be made early during post-conflict transition to give women increased access to and control of productive assets. Without such efforts, women can neither become productive members of their societies nor improve their social and economic status. Worse still, the gains they made during the conflict might even be undermined.

The international community has undertaken many programs to increase women's access to productive assets. First, in rural areas, it provides seeds, pesticides, agricultural tools, and livestock so that farmers can start or resume agricultural production. Experience has shown that women farmers often are underrepresented in such assistance. Second, international donors fund microenterprise programs to enable people to undertake productive activities. The major beneficiaries of such credit programs have been women. Third, the international community supports training and educational programs for women. Depending on the level of the country's development, such programs may range from literacy training to training in computer and business skills. Fourth, international donors also assist post-conflict societies restore communal assets and improve people's access to them. Examples are repair and construction of roads, de-mining, and environmental clean-up. Finally, international donors have supported legal reforms to enable women to inherit and own productive assets. These efforts are in the right direction, but should be pursued with greater vigor.

Promoting Political Empowerment. The last element of the strategic framework is political empowerment. The gains to be made by increasing women's access to and control of productive resources cannot be consolidated without women sharing political power. Nor can the old structures of structural discrimination and subjugation be eradicated without it. The international development community has often underestimated the importance of political participation and power sharing by women in post-conflict societies. Therefore, political empowerment of women should be an essential element of a strategic framework for international assistance.

The international community has undertaken many activities that directly or indirectly increase women's participation in public affairs. First, it has supported the formation of women's organizations that not only provide a wide array of services to targeted women but also nurture self-confidence and efficacy among women. These programs can and often do prepare women to assume leadership roles in the polity. Second, many international NGOs and donor agencies have provided assistance to women's groups working for increased political participation. Such groups articulate agendas, provide support to women candidates, and sometimes work with legislative bodies to fight discrimination.

This strategic framework is, at best, tentative and is designed to promote further dialogue on this subject. However, three elements of the framework are important to advance gender equality and empowerment after major societal upheaval. Any framework incorporating these elements can help policymakers and program managers design and integrate coherent interventions that address women's most urgent problems and help establish the parameters for development of gender equality and empowerment.

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