



Aftermath: Women and Women's Organizations In Postconflict Societies

The Role of International Assistance

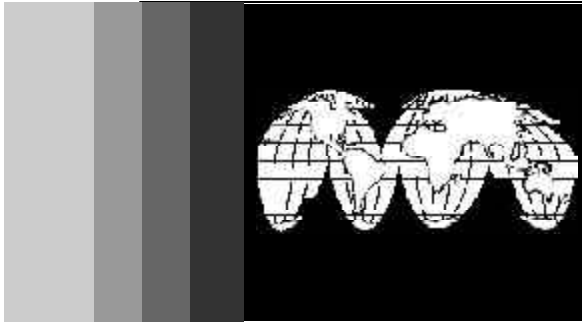
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Aftermath: Women and Women's Organizations In Postconflict Societies

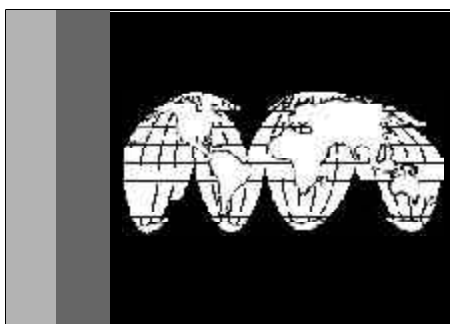
The Role of International Assistance

by

Krishna Kumar

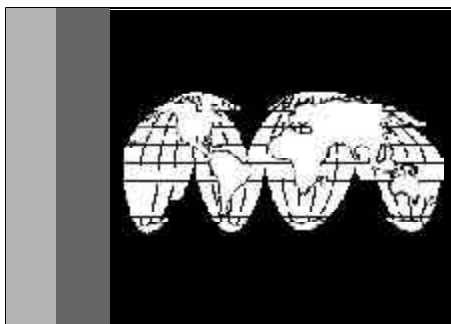
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I HAVE TAXED THE GENEROSITY of several colleagues, friends, and outside experts in directing the multicountry assessment on intrastate conflicts and women. While it is not possible to mention all of them, I must acknowledge a few whose support has been critical.

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Robin Silver, senior fellow at the Democracy Center; Thomas Buck, research assistant, and Stephanie McNulty, senior research analyst, at CDIE. The assessment design was discussed in a workshop held in June 1998. I very much benefited from the thoughtful comments of many colleagues and outside experts, including Sally Yudelman, Judy Benjamin, Sidney Schuler, Martha Walsh, Comfort Lamptey, Hannah Baldwin, Anne Hudock, Cate Johnson, Catie Lott, Susan Merrill, and Joe Lieberman.

Development Alternatives Inc. provided technical support for the assessment. Peter Davis and Meloney Lindberg managed study teams with remarkable efficiency. Judy Benjamin and Alice Morton served as Women in Development specialists at different times.

Sean Loughna, Kate Frieson, and Thomas Buck wrote country background papers for Guatemala, Cambodia, and Georgia, respectively. The country case studies were authored by the following experts on the basis of their fieldwork: Martha Walsh (Bosnia and Herzegovina);

Hannah Baldwin, Judy Benjamin, and myself (Cambodia); Lynn Stephen, Kelly Ready, and Serena Cosgrove (El Salvador); Virginia Garrard-Burnett (Guatemala); Alice Morton, Susan Allen Nan, Thomas Buck, and Feride Zurikashvili (Georgia); and Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin (Rwanda). These case studies provided much of the material on which the present assessment is based.

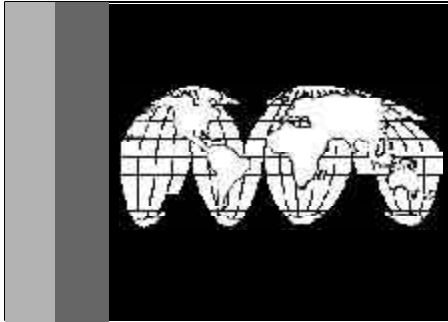
Throughout the assessment, Thomas Buck conducted exhaustive searches for project and program documents, books and articles, and unpublished reports. Without his help, I could not have completed this report. Jean DuRette, Heather

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I could not think of a better editor than Michael Hopps.

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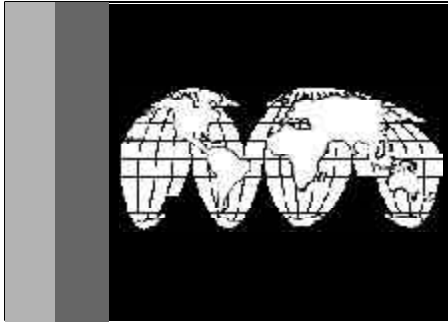
Preface

THIS EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT of conflict on women and the role of women's organizations in the aftermath of conflict proved to be more challenging than I expected. Not only is this a relatively new topic of study, it is also one on which practitioners hold strong views. Data collection for the country field studies has been particularly difficult. The teams faced serious problems in gathering or accessing data, especially comparable quantitative data. Often government departments and struggling women's organizations did not keep precise records. Or when kept, records were difficult to reproduce or not readily available. Multiple language use

also complicated data collection. Thus the field teams relied largely on qualitative information gleaned from in-depth interviews or group meetings, reports on ongoing and past programs, and observation. Although I have drawn from the individual country field studies, I have extensively used published and unpublished studies and reports by individual scholars or by national or international organizations. In addition, I have consulted many country experts and practitioners, who reviewed and commented on the draft. However, I alone am responsible for the views, conclusions, and lessons presented here.

—KRISHNA KUMAR

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Summary

SINCE THE END of the Cold War, intrastate conflicts have increased worldwide. Poverty, the struggle for scarce resources, declining standards of living, ethnic rivalries and divisions, political repression by authoritarian governments, and rapid social and economic modernization—all these factors contribute to intrastate conflicts.

All intrastate conflicts share a set of common characteristics that have major implications for women and gender relations. First, the belligerent parties deliberately inflict violence on civilian populations. Second, the intrastate conflicts displace substantial numbers of people, mostly women and children. Third, women's participation in war contributes to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles. Fourth, there is usually a conscious attempt to destroy the supporting civilian infrastructure, leading to increased poverty and starvation. Finally, these conflicts leave among the belligerent groups within the countries a legacy of bitterness, hatred, and anger that is difficult to heal.

Both men and women suffer from such conflicts. This study examines specifically the effects on women in six case-study countries: Cambodia, Bosnia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. It looks as well at the rise of indigenous women's organizations—their role, their impact, their future.

Teams from USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation visited those countries during 1999. They found the effects of war on women to fall into three broad categories:

Social and psychological. Women often were traumatized by the conflict. After the hostilities, many feared for their physical safety. During the early phases of post-conflict transition, unemployed militia continued to pose a serious threat to the lives and property of women and children. Fear of violence and sexual abuse (rape had actually been used as a tool of war, to subjugate, humiliate, terrorize) often kept women from moving about freely. Abject conditions in many postconflict societies contributed to the growth of prostitution.

Economic. A major problem was lack of property rights. Women were denied ownership of land their dead husbands or parents had owned. Rural women who owned no land or other assets worked as laborers or sharecroppers, at minimal wages. Urban women carved out livings mostly by selling foods and household items. During conflict, women could work in many occupations. As ex-combatants returned to civilian life, though, female workers were the first to lose their jobs.

Political. In the absence of men, all six countries witnessed an expansion of women's public roles during the conflict. Women volunteered in churches, schools, hospitals, and private charities. They often took charge of political institutions, enhancing their political skills – and raising their expectations.

The conflicts created a ripe environment for the emergence or growth of women's organizations. For one thing, the wars undermined the traditional social order; women found it easier to take part in public affairs. Moreover, governmental reforms after the wars created political space to launch women's organizations. Another factor was disillusionment. During or in the immediate aftermath of the wars, women's expectations of increased political participation had risen. Those expectations were never fully realized. Finally, the readiness of the international community to provide assistance to such organizations contributed to their growth.

In the case-study countries, women's organizations have been active in virtually all sectors: social, educational, economic, political. They have established health clinics, provided reproductive health care, organized mass vaccination programs. They have carried out programs to generate income and employment for women, emphasizing microcredit and vocational training. They have grappled with domestic violence, prostitution, and the plight of returning refugees and internally displaced women. And they have promoted democracy and human rights, supported social reconciliation, and worked to increase women's participation in political affairs.

International assistance has been important to the development of women's organizations – and will be far into the foreseeable future. Beyond financial support, international bodies have helped indigenous women acquire managerial, accounting, and technical skills. International assistance has also helped legitimize women's organizations, for example by sheltering them from government interference.

Attending the emergence of women's organizations is an array of obstacles. They are social and cultural, imposed from without, and organizational, imposed from within. Chief among the former is women's low social status. At the family, community, and national levels, women confront a lack of support for their public

activities. Another outside encumbrance is the short-term nature of international assistance, which prevents long-term planning. Chief among internal obstacles is the reluctance of women leaders to delegate authority and to train junior staff for future leadership. There is, moreover, a lack of communication and sharing among organizations.

The six individual CDIE country evaluations yielded a number of recommendations aimed at making assistance to women's organizations more effective. Among them:

1. *Build on women's economic and political gains.* Because the postconflict 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.

2. *Pay greater attention to civilian security.* USAID can assume a leadership role in publicizing the problem of civilian security and the need for concerted action to protect women. The Agency can also encourage other organizations to carry out programs that can enhance physical security for women.

3. *Make concerted efforts with the rest of the international community to prevent sexual abuse of women.* Measures might include protecting witnesses, training international peacekeepers in gender issues, and

promoting more women to international judicial posts.

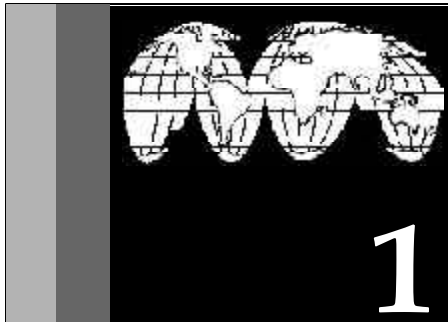
4. *Promote microcredit.* USAID should support microcredit programs but not ignore their limitations. They are not cures for all economic problems facing women in postconflict societies.

5. *Support property rights for women.* USAID should continue supporting property-rights reforms affecting women. This should include not only constitutional and legislative reforms but also their effective implementation.

6. *Consider multiyear funding.* The assurance of assistance for periods longer than 6–9 months will help build institutional capacity and boost staff morale.

7. *Promote sustainability of women's organizations.* USAID could provide technical assistance, when necessary, to improve management; consider funding a portion of core costs, in addition to program costs, for a limited period; and help organizations become self-reliant by such means as improving skills in advocacy, fundraising, networking, and coalition building.

8. *Promote greater women's participation in elections.* USAID should consider steps to encourage political parties to field women candidates and assist women candidates on a nonpartisan basis.



Introduction

AS PART OF ITS ongoing studies on the rehabilitation and reconstruction of societies ravaged by civil wars, USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) undertook an assessment of gender issues in six postconflict societies: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. The assessment centered on the following three sets of questions:

- What has been the impact of intrastate conflicts on women? How did these conflicts affect women's 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 postconflict era to address the challenges women face and to promote gender equality? What activities do these organizations undertake? How successful have the organizations been in empowering 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 empirical knowledge that could inform the policy and programs of USAID and other international donor agencies. The intention of the project was to help the Agency and its partners improve the performance and impact of their postconflict interventions.

Three premises informed the design and scope of the assessment. First, an analysis of gender issues is needed to comprehend the effects of intrastate conflicts on women. Such an analysis should examine women's status, roles, and responsibilities not as isolated phenomena but as integral to the web of social, economic, cultural, and political relations in which men and women participate. Second, women are not passive victims in intrastate conflicts but active participants from

inception to resolution. Because of gender stratification, women often play different roles during different stages of the conflict. They engage in a variety of survival strategies to cope with problems and structure their lives differently during and after conflict. Third, a comparative analysis of gender issues in several war-ravaged societies will further advance our knowledge and understanding of the subject, thereby enabling the international community to implement more effective interventions.

CDIE followed a simple methodology to conduct this assessment. The work started with a review of academic literature, project and program documents of the international donor agencies, and articles from newspapers and professional journals. 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 for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners, who discussed and evaluated the proposal. The proposal was then revised in light of comments generated at the workshop.

Three criteria were used in selecting the countries for field studies. First, to avoid duplication of effort, the study team should use the findings of existing empirically grounded studies, rather than launch fresh investigations. Second, the assessment should span the globe, including Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Third, the security conditions in the cho-

sen countries should permit unfettered movement by 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, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, political developments in Afghanistan and Sierra Leone prevented any fieldwork there, and CDIE settled on the remaining six countries.*

Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI) provided technical support for the assessment, sending teams to all six countries to collect information. However, the teams faced serious problems in gathering the necessary data. Often 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, inadequate communication and transportation systems prevented teams from visiting remote areas where many grass-roots women's organizations operated. Language was frequently a barrier. Hence, the teams relied largely on qualitative information gleaned from prolonged interviews or group meetings, reports on ongoing and past programs, and their own observations. CDIE teams prepared case studies for all six countries.

*The authors of the country reports are Martha Walsh (Bosnia and Herzegovina); Krishna Kumar, Hannah Baldwin, and Judy Benjamin (Cambodia); Lynn Stephen, Serena Cosgrove, and Kelley Ready (El Salvador); Alice Morton, Susan Allen Nan, Thomas Buck, and Feride Zurikashvili (Georgia); Virginia Garrard-Burnett (Guatemala); and Catharine Newbury and Hannah Baldwin (Rwanda). Their reports are cited in the bibliography.

This synthesis draws from the field investigations carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. Finally, the synthesis also uses studies by individual scholars or by national or international organizations.

Chapter 2 describes the nature of intrastate conflicts and the ways they affect women and gender relations. It also provides a bird's-eye view of intrastate conflicts in the six case-study countries.

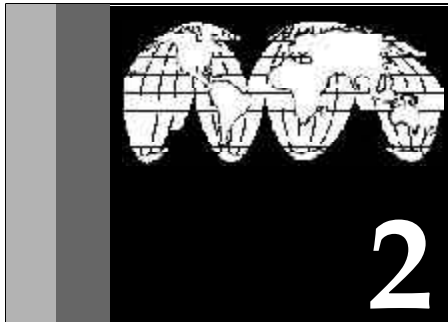
Chapter 3 recounts the impact of these conflicts on women and gender relations. It classifies findings under the three broad categories of social and psychological effects, economic effects, and political effects

and briefly discusses the nature of international assistance programs in these areas.

Chapter 4 examines women's organizations, their growth and activities, and their impact on women's empowerment in case-study countries.

Chapter 5 discusses the nature and impact of international assistance on women's organizations and describes a few problem areas.

Chapter 6 presents conclusions and recommendations. It also identifies a strategic framework for international programs and interventions in postconflict societies.



Intrastate Conflicts

SINCE THE END of the Cold War, intrastate conflicts have increased worldwide. Poverty, the struggle for scarce resources, declining standards of living, ethnic rivalries and divisions, political repression by authoritarian governments, and rapid social and economic modernization—all these factors contribute to intrastate conflicts. Although these conflicts vary in nature, most share characteristics that have a profound effect on women and on gender relations. This chapter describes the nature of the conflicts that engulfed the case-study countries and identifies common characteristics to consider when analyzing the effects of intrastate conflicts on women and on gender relations.

Case-Study Countries in Conflict

The small southeastern European nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has four million people and includes three principal ethnic groups: Muslims (40 percent), Serbs (38 percent), and Croats (22 percent). Formerly a republic within Yugoslavia,

Bosnia held an independence referendum in March 1992 that was approved by two thirds of the electorate. Serb nationalists became apprehensive about independence and laid siege to Sarajevo in April. Initially, Muslim and Croat factions fought together against the Serbs, but the coalition later broke down, leading to a complex war characterized by “ethnic cleansing” and systematic rape of women. Communities 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 brokered peace agreement, known as the Dayton Peace Accords, was formalized, establishing Bosnia and Herzegovina as one state with two entities.

The Southeast Asian country of Cambodia now has 12 million people. The Cambodian people suffered years of violent conflict throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including clandestine military operations by North Vietnamese forces and the Viet Cong, carpet bombing by the United States, genocide under the Maoist Khmer Rouge, invasion by Vietnam, and

recurring guerrilla attacks by the defeated Khmer Rouge and their allies. The Khmer Rouge came into power in 1975 and tried to convert the country into a Marxist utopia. The regime evacuated all cities, cut off communications with the outside world, abolished money, closed schools and universities, dismantled factories, and banned private property. The Khmer Rouge killed teachers, doctors, engineers, and other educated Cambodians. The regime undermined not only religion but also the family institution. Between one million and three million Cambodians died in this era as a result of war, genocide, and massive starvation. In 1979, Vietnam installed a new government in Phnom Penh that both China and the Western powers found unacceptable. Guerrilla warfare continued until an international peace agreement was signed in 1991, resulting in national elections and the establishment of an elected coalition government in 1993.

El Salvador, a small Central American country of 6.3 million citizens, survived a civil war that raged from 1979 through 1991. The leftist Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) rebelled against a military-dominated government that denied civil liberties to the people and perpetuated an exploitive economic system. During the conflict one 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, a former western Asian republic of the Soviet Union, with a population of 5.5 million people, faced three conflicts in its recent history. Separatist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia defeated the Georgian army in 1991 and 1992, leading to their de facto independence. These wars coincided with a civil war between the supporters of then-president Zviad Gamsakhurdia and opposition forces 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, in Central America, has 12.7 million people, more than half of them tracing their ancestry to the indigenous Maya. Economic and political power in the country, however, has been vested in a small elite of European origin and *ladinos*, people of mixed Indian-European origin. 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 occurred during 1979–85, when the military initiated on the Maya people a reign of terror, commonly referred to as *la violencia*. It is estimated that more than 200,000 people died or disappeared during the conflict and more than a million were uprooted. After long negotiations, the warring factions, civil and religious leaders, and indigenous Maya leaders signed a peace agreement in 1996, bringing some normalcy to the country.

Rwanda, a small central African country of 7.2 million people, endured among the worst episodes of ethnic cleansing in modern times. When the nation became independent under ethnic Hutu rule in 1961, tens of thousands of the Tutsi minority fled to neighboring countries. In 1990 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 6 April 1994, Hutu extremists blamed the Tutsi for the crash and started systematically killing them. Between 500,000 and 800,000 people were butchered. The genocide stopped only after the RPF defeated the government late in 1994. In the aftermath of RPF's victory, two million Hutu fled to neighboring countries, but by 1996 most had returned.

Relevance to Women And to Gender Relations

All intrastate conflicts, including those in the case-study countries, share five broad characteristics relevant to women and gender relations.

First, belligerent parties deliberately inflict violence on civilian populations. In fact, about 95 percent of the casualties in intrastate conflicts are civilians, a trend that alters a country's demographic composition and social relations (OECD 1999). In

traditional wars between nations, warring parties are obliged to follow international norms to minimize direct harm to civilian populations. Although these norms are never fully enforced or practiced, they exist nonetheless and may circumscribe combatants' behavior. This is not the case in intrastate conflicts. In all countries studied in this assessment, at least one party of the conflict—and, in most cases, both parties—directed violence against innocent civilians. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda, state-supported groups carried out ethnic cleansing with impunity.

Second, intrastate conflicts displace substantial numbers of people. The wholesale destruction, physical insecurity, disruption in livelihoods, and shortages of food lead people to flee from their homes and seek refuge in other parts of the country or in neighboring countries. To escape the genocide in Rwanda, two million citizens fled across the borders to adjacent countries. In Cambodia the Khmer Rouge, under leader Pol Pot, 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 refugees and internally displaced populations. The displacement of people to refugee camps or settlements, frequently 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 own participation in such wars also contributes to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles. In El Salvador, 25 percent of the forces of the FMLN were women. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda, women participated in ethnic cleansing. In many case-study countries women performed impor-

"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*

tant roles in military operations, particularly in medical care, transportation, communications, and intelligence. In Georgia and Guatemala, women's participation was more limited. Women's motives for joining war efforts were often the same as men's, but some felt compelled to support the conflict because of their husbands' positions or political pressure. Culture, ethnicity, class, and age affected the nature and extent of women's involvement in war, but like men, women were both the perpetrators and victims of violence.

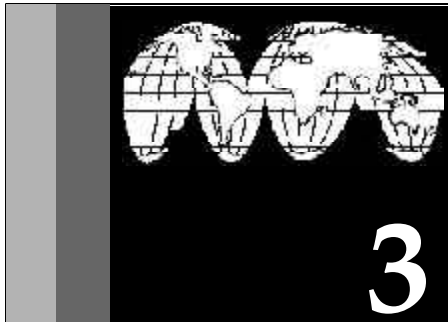
Fourth, there is usually a conscious attempt to destroy the supporting civilian infrastructure during intrastate conflicts. Warring factions lay waste to buildings, factories, and roads and even destroy crops and agricultural facilities to create economic and political instability. Such activities inevitably increase poverty and starvation, clearly affecting women and children as much as, or more than, men. In Cambodia and Rwanda the conflicts created food insecurity and significant malnutrition. Only the timely help of the international community prevented even greater death and destruction.

Finally, such conflicts leave a legacy of anger, bitterness, and hatred among the belligerent groups 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. In intrastate conflicts, unless the country is partitioned, the formerly warring populations continue to face each other daily. In Cambodia and Rwanda, perpetrators of atrocities often continued to live with their victims in the same villages. Conditions were only marginally better in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In many countries, former combatants of opposing groups settled in the same communities, keeping alive bitter memories.

These characteristics of intrastate conflicts profoundly affect the social, economic, and political status, roles, and

responsibilities of women and alter their relations with men during and after conflict. Not all these effects are necessarily harmful and undesirable. As discussed in chapter 3, intrastate conflict also creates opportunities for change because the very fabric of social life is torn by violence

against civilians and massive displacement. Although it imposes severe hardships and deprivation, conflict also provides space to develop gender equality and can pave the way for women's empowerment in the social, economic, and political lives of their countries.



Impacts of Intrastate Conflicts on Women

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER identified the characteristics of intrastate conflicts and the ways they affect women and gender relations in postconflict societies. This chapter describes those effects under three broad categories: 1) social and psychological impacts, 2) economic impacts, and 3) political impacts. Of course, the nature, intensity, and breadth of the effects of conflict on women's lives and relations between men and women vary with each country's social, economic, and political milieu. Much depends on the nature, location, and duration of the conflict and

"What security are you 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 woman

on class and caste differences within the populations. This chapter also mentions the assistance programs funded by the international community to address the challenges faced by women in these countries.

Social and Psychological Impacts

Physical Insecurity

In all case-study countries, women suffered from physical insecurity throughout the civil wars. But the plight of women in the war zones was the worst. They lived in terror. The fear of violence and sexual abuse often prevented women from moving freely. Most women in rural areas, while working on their farms or collecting firewood for cooking, were always concerned for their safety. Those belonging to ethnic minorities or whose family members were suspected of sympathizing with one of the parties to the conflict were in constant danger.

Conditions improved only marginally when hostilities ceased. Early in the postconflict transition, the presence of demobilized soldiers and unemployed militia posed a serious threat to the life and property of innocent people, particularly in rural areas. The behavior of military and paramilitary organizations, long

accustomed to abusing power and violating human rights, did not always improve when fighting ceased. Security sector reforms, if introduced at all, produced results only slowly.

In fact, 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 crime and delinquency. Many societies had to cope with a large reservoir of unemployed young men who had become accustomed to using violence and brutality during the war. These men formed gangs, particularly in urban areas. They posed a constant threat to the security of women and children.

Consequently, in many communities, women continued to feel trapped in their homes. In El Salvador and Guatemala, although human rights violations decreased with the end of civil war, violent crime increased, posing risks for women who worked late in the evening. Rural women were at risk from civil action patrols, death squads, and, in fewer instances, armed guerrillas. In Cambodia many families chose not to send their girls to school because they feared for their safety. In Rwanda high levels of interpersonal violence (although not necessarily of a criminal nature) continued.

The continuing animosity and distrust among former belligerent ethnic groups compounded the problem of physical security in many countries. In Rwanda,

Hutu women who had fled their homes encountered social ostracism and physical violence when they tried to return. Hutu women whose spouses were imprisoned for alleged participation in the genocide felt socially stigmatized. In mixed ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, minority women did not feel safe. Conflicts shattered local friendship networks in the community that had previously provided women emotional and social security.

The international donor community has not paid adequate attention to physical security issues. 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. Nevertheless, international donors have expended considerable resources on the demobilization of ex-combatants and their reintegration into civilian society. Some donors, including USAID, promoted police reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Although these efforts reduced government-perpetrated human rights violations, they failed to make a dent in the growing problem of lawlessness and violence.

Psychosocial Trauma

The brutalities of war—separation from loved ones, forced migration, sexual abuse, starvation, and extreme violence and cruelty—leave deep scars on both women's and men's psyches. The psycho-

logical and social effects of intrastate conflict had not received much attention from the international community until events in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda stimulated greater interest in this area.

Anecdotal data suggest that significantly high numbers of women were traumatized by conflict in all case-study countries.* Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Maya women in Guatemala, and Rwandan women experienced high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives. These women displayed symptoms typical of trauma, including listlessness, chronic fatigue, anguish, recurrent recollections of traumatic incidents, and depression. The symptoms are commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), an age-old disabling psychological condition given new prominence – and a clinical name – through its high incidence among American combat veterans of the Vietnam War.

Although not denying the presence of symptoms associated with PTSD among men and women in postconflict societies, many researchers question the application of the concept to the conditions of war-torn societies. They point out that PTSD assumes that traumatic events have ended

*Women are often particularly reluctant to take part in surveys or research, or to seek therapy – especially relating to incidents of sexual abuse or rape. This is due to the social stigma attached, lack of exposure to the issues, and a general fear of becoming the object of unwanted attention. Therefore, it is difficult to collect data, and many researchers suspect that the incidence of trauma is dramatically higher than what is quantifiable.

and victims have returned to a normal living environment. In postconflict societies, however, many conditions that contributed to trauma – such as physical and psychological insecurity, separation from loved ones, and threats of violence – persist for some time. These researchers also argue that the PTSD construct ignores the cultural and social context of perceptions and behaviors. Belief in karma, afterlife, and ancestral and malevolent forces can affect the way individuals experience and overcome traumatic events in different societies. Critics also argue that Western notions of trauma and therapy are alien to other societies. Western hubris has sometimes led to international assistance for trauma victims before a thorough examination of the local cultural context. In Rwanda, for example, where impassivity is a highly prized characteristic, the use of Western-style therapy was deemed inappropriate by many observers.

Despite severe emotional wounds, women in the case-study countries have demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage in surviving. Their suffering often remained unvoiced, though, and sometimes was expressed through abusive relationships with spouses or children. Most of these women continued performing their normal tasks, and their clinging to routine work may have helped them cope with trauma. In Georgia internally displaced women appeared to adjust better than their male counterparts. Although men became passive and moody, women took outside work to feed their families. Some observers attributed

the women's behavior to their nurturing nature. Others suggested that their comparatively low status made women more willing to 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 included training caregivers, teachers, health workers, and others to identify the signs and symptoms of trauma, establishing mental health programs in hospitals, and developing counseling programs at women's health care centers. Other programs—usually those associated with children—used sports or arts as methods of psychological healing. In a few cases, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoted traditional ways of 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 effective, at least in the short term (Green and Honwana 1999).

International programs addressing trauma generally suffered from three limitations. First, they were based primarily on Western notions of trauma and treatment, which were inappropriate if they failed to consider the local cultural context. Unfortunately, little data exists on best practices of more adaptive psychosocial assistance. Second, interventions were often brief, providing only short-term training and support to local entities.

Because trauma counseling is a relatively long-term need, positive outcomes were often lost. Third, most of the programs concentrated on women and children, excluding men. Unless men—especially young men exposed to the brutalities of war—are treated, women and children are bound to remain victims of aggression.

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Closely related to psychological trauma is the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation of women during and after conflicts. Soldiers in belligerent groups violated women as a tactic 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 tactic 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 Rwanda, women were forced to have sex with members of the military as “payment” for victory or were raped by men of the enemy group in revenge. In practically all war-torn societies, young women living in combat zones were victims* of sexual

*Use of the term “victim” is not wholly accepted in international circles because 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 report uses “victim.”

abuse by rebel forces and by the soldiers assumed to be guarding them.*

Little research exists on the extent of abuse and the number of female victims in the case-study countries. Victims hide the crimes and suffer silently because of the associated shame and humiliation. Even so, conservative estimates of rape victims ran in the thousands in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda. In Rwanda, researchers estimate that more than 5,000 women were impregnated through rape; most are now raising children fathered by those who killed their spouses or family members.[†] Little is known about these mothers and children, but their social and psychological agony is beyond imagination. Guatemala's Commission for Historical Clarification recorded the testimony of thousands of abused women but hesitated to delve deeply into issues of rape.

Intrastate conflicts and the resulting poverty, family disintegration, and erosion of community contributed to the growth of prostitution in many postconflict societies, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Georgia, and Rwanda.

*Rebel militia in Liberia, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone abducted young women and kept them as sex slaves. When conflict ended, such women were abandoned. Most had difficulty afterward adjusting. Often their families and communities spurned them. Without resources or work experience, they became beggars or prostitutes.

[†]This is cited by El-Bushra and Mukaruguga (1995). Abortion was not an option for these women. Many have since remarried. Often, other family members have accepted the children.

In Cambodia economic desperation led some families to sell their daughters, and in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Rwanda some housewives engaged in prostitution. Trafficking in women grew as part of the postconflict increase in crime, the drug business, and other denigrating activities. Women in many postconflict societies were abducted or lured into prostitution with false promises and became slaves to their male bosses. Conflict undermined family institutions, so families could not control their male or female members who were involved in sex rings. The large-scale migration associated with intrastate conflicts further eroded community ties, contributing to deviant behavior and the spread of prostitution.

War often created a demand for prostitution by separating families and stationing young male soldiers far from their homes. In the postconflict era, the presence of international peacekeeping forces increased demand for sexual workers in many countries. In Cambodia, institutionalized prostitution began when a large group of male expatriates, particularly members of UN peacekeeping forces, arrived to enforce the cease-fire agreements and organize elections. Local entrepreneurs set up lucrative brothels. Eventually the local elite — particularly military and police officials, senior government servants, and affluent business owners — began frequenting them. As of 1998 more than 14,000 women worked as prostitutes in brothels in Cambodia (UNDP 1998). Intrastate conflicts also led to increased prostitution in Bosnia and Herzegovina,

El Salvador, and Rwanda, but not always on the same scale.

The international community has called attention to the sexual abuse of women in a variety of ways. USAID and other international donor agencies funded projects to assist and rehabilitate abused women. International NGOs worked with local groups to counsel prostitutes, hoping to limit the spread of HIV/AIDS. International organizations also strengthened

“In Cambodia, more than 25 years of civil war and the consequent social disruption have torn apart bonds of families and communities alike, so that the demands of survival often take precedence. Family disruption, abusive behavior, and death of one or both parents, stepparents with weak attachments, and the larger issue 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)

legal and institutional mechanisms to punish sexual criminals and marketers of sex. However, many social, cultural, and even political barriers stood in the way of national and international efforts to curb prostitution and trafficking of women. Victims were not forthcoming, often fearing retribution from their bosses, and the male bosses were reluctant to forfeit their livelihoods. Communities did not want to draw attention to the problem, and gov-

ernment officials wanted to continue to reap financial benefits in the form of kick-backs. Finally, 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 families, often increasing women's household burdens. The numbers of households headed by single women increased as men were disabled, imprisoned, dead, or away fighting. Such households transformed the traditional division of labor between men and women, with women assuming male roles, including disciplining male children, building and repairing houses, dealing with community leaders and government officials, and fulfilling religious and social obligations. Most important, women had to feed and support their families alone.

Growth in the number of orphans and separated children* also added to women's burdens. Many children lost their parents during conflict. Others were separated from their families during conflict and forced migration. Still others were abandoned by parents because of severe economic or psychological stress. The burden of raising these children fell on extended families or neighbors, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. In Rwanda the exodus of hundreds

*The term “separated children” refers to those who have lost their parents during the fighting or while migrating. Children are not considered orphans unless their parents are confirmed dead.

of thousands of people left thousands of separated children. Women throughout the country immediately volunteered to care for them.

Women typically assumed greater economic responsibilities during and after conflict. These additional responsibilities did not necessarily result in a corresponding decline in their household chores. In all case-study countries women

“We are dead tired like a dead snake.”

“We work mad like a mad cow.”

—Two Cambodian women

continued to cook, wash clothes, and care for children despite spending more hours on farm work and other jobs. This “double shift” for women often led to tension within families. For example, 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 and vodka.

Intrastate ethnic conflicts often created problems for families of mixed ethnicity. In Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, interethnic couples were targeted during ethnic cleansing. Those who survived came under intense pressure to separate or assume false identities. In Rwanda, Hutu women married to Tutsi men were accepted neither by their own parents nor by their in-laws. Mixed mar-

riages were a priority category for asylum seekers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Under these conditions, some men and women voluntarily left their spouses—and some women were forced to leave.*

Finally, conflict also contributed to a decline in the status of women in some countries. Several researchers observed this phenomenon in Cambodia, where bride prices declined despite general inflation.† Cambodian men could divorce their spouses and find new ones more easily than before the conflict. Polygamy is reported to have increased in Cambodia since the war ended, forcing single women in desperate situations to enter into marital arrangements, both formal and informal, with married men.

Domestic Violence

Anecdotal evidence indicates that, for several reasons, domestic violence by men against women and by women against children increased in many war-torn countries.‡ The conflicts generated a subculture

*In Somalia, where people married into different clans, couples whose clans later became enemies had to divorce. Women returned to their parents, children remained with their fathers.

†The CDIE case study of Cambodia emphasizes this point and supports the findings of Ledgerwood (1996) and Frieson (1998).

‡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 is a correlation between men who served in the war and increased domestic violence and between women’s alcohol abuse and child abuse. All these factors were associated with family disruption and the disappearance of traditional restraints and mechanisms.

of violence—one that condoned violence and viewed violent behavior as normal. Moreover, both men and women were traumatized by war, heightening family tensions. Alcohol consumption increased in nearly all countries, contributing to the increased domestic abuse of both women and children. Since women's status within the family often declined, women became more susceptible to maltreatment by male members. Finally, during the prolonged wartime absence of men, some women became more independent and self-reliant. Some returning men resented that independence and resorted to violence to assert their authority.

"After 1979, men changed. Nine out of ten men are broken, nasty. During the Khmer Rouge period they had no happiness. So now that 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

The international community supported programs (albeit on a modest scale) designed to assist victims of domestic violence. The programs counseled victims and arranged for legal assistance when necessary. 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. But these projects faced social and cultural obstacles.

In many countries, domestic violence is considered normal, a circumstance that prevented such interventions from attracting more resources. Moreover, women are often unaware of the help available from donor-funded interventions. Even when they have known about such programs, women often have not sought help for fear of being subjected to more violence. Finally, programs rarely targeted men, who must be counseled and educated to stop the cycle of domestic violence. Consequently, only a small minority of women victims benefited from international interventions in domestic violence.

Economic Impacts

Woman-Headed Households

As already suggested, intrastate conflicts contributed to an increase in woman-headed households in practically all case-study societies. Although rare before the war in Cambodia, woman-headed households now constitute 25–30 percent of all families in the country (UNDP 1998). In the Ixcán region of Guatemala, woman-headed households were not uncommon before the conflict, but their proportion increased during the war, and they now constitute 30–50 percent of all households in the region.

There are obvious reasons for this development. More men than women were killed in the conflicts, resulting in demographic imbalances. Many women were widowed, while others of marriage-

able age could not find suitable husbands. Conflict also led to large-scale movements of populations, social and economic stresses, and the prolonged absence of men, which contributed to the breakdown of families, permanent separation, and divorce. In El Salvador a significant portion of the male population left the country in search of income and employment, leaving their families behind.* In Georgia many men were so ashamed of not being able to provide for their families that they abandoned them.†

"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

Woman-headed households faced new economic and social challenges during the postconflict transition. A major problem was the lack of property rights. In Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and Rwanda, widows faced obstacles in acquiring legal rights to the land owned by their husbands. Until this past year, Rwandan women could not inherit land and property under customary law. As a result, 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 problems gaining legal possession because of their low

social status and the indifference of local authorities. In El Salvador, women were denied fair allotments in the postwar redistribution of land.‡ In Guatemala, women had difficulty exercising newly legislated land ownership and inheritance rights because of ignorance of those rights, institutional negligence, and pervasive machismo.

Woman-headed agricultural households, particularly those headed by widows and divorcées, often lacked the resources to purchase seeds, pesticides, fertilizers, and starter livestock. In Cambodia and Rwanda, international donors provided seeds and simple implements to subsistence farmers. These efforts, though not always adequate, gave relief to many women farmers. However, except in Rwanda, such assistance was not available to all women farmers. Moreover, because of food shortages, some women farmers consumed the seeds instead of planting them. When harvest season arrived, women farmers often had to sell their agricultural surplus locally because they lacked transportation to take the goods to larger markets, thus depriving these producers of higher prices.

Women farmers also experienced shortages of farm labor. Lacking the resources to hire workers, women often had

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

†This finding has been emphasized by Buck and others (2000).

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

to depend on the generosity of their relatives and friends, which was not always forthcoming. In some countries, traditional gender roles hindered women further. In Guatemala, tradition forbade Maya women from cultivating corn, and many had to force their young sons to perform the necessary work. Finally, new women farmers in most postconflict societies found it difficult to get technical advice for their agricultural operations. Agricultural extension services did not exist in most cases, and when available the services rarely reached women farmers.

A substantial number of woman-headed households in the case-study societies 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 through petty trading. Because many women lacked marketable skills, experience, and education, only a small portion could secure employment in the organized industrial and service sectors. Women were easy targets for labor contractors who recruited for low-paying sweatshops in Guatemala and other countries.

In most case-study countries, woman-headed households were among the poorest of the poor. But some woman-headed households included males who worked in other towns or other countries and regularly sent money home. Such households

were often in a better economic position than other woman-headed households.

The international community has learned that programs targeted exclusively to woman-headed households are not highly effective. Precise information about such households often is lacking, and the cost of identifying them is high. Targeted programs may create dissension locally between woman-headed households and other poor households because the poor resent special treatment of any specific group. In addition to creating such animosity, the cost of delivering targeted assistance can be high. Nevertheless, experience also shows that programs targeted toward women are necessary to provide them adequate assistance. Thus, the international community has followed a twofold strategy in postconflict societies. First, international donors have provided assistance to all women, not exclusively to woman-headed households. Second, international organizations have supported expanded property rights for women, which would directly benefit woman-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 is anecdotal evidence that the number of women living in poverty increased disproportionately compared with the number of men living in poverty, but reliable data are not available.

The consequences of poverty were invariably worse for women than for men in all case-study countries. As the traditional nurturers of their families, women usually sacrificed their own welfare for that of other family members during periods of economic adversity. Because men

While they lived in camps, women refugees received food and shelter and had access to health and education facilities.* But after repatriation, women were on their own, with less consistent or greatly reduced outside assistance. In many cases, their standard of living declined.

“Among the woman-headed households [in Guatemala], 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, 41)

controlled most of the assets, the household allocation of food and resources was often biased toward men and boys. Women’s intake of nutrients declined more than men’s during and after conflict, and girls’ health and education needs received lower priority than those of boys.

The economic conditions of three categories of women—returning women refugees, women who had depended on public assistance, and members of woman-headed households—worsened during the postconflict transition.

Poor women who had depended on food subsidies and social services (particularly health and education) before the conflict often suffered when the government reallocated resources toward the military during the civil war. In many cases, the lives of these poor women worsened—at least in the short term—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 to put economies on sound footing, vulnerable groups—particularly women—bore the majority of sacrifices. The social safety net programs funded by the international community were insufficient to make up the loss.

The economic challenges faced by woman-headed households were discussed in the previous section. Additional burdens, including separated children, HIV/AIDS, and mental and physical stress all contributed to the problems of women who headed households.

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

The international community supported an array of programs to relieve extreme poverty and deprivation in post-conflict societies. International donors provided food aid to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Rwanda and tried to ensure that women and woman-headed households received a fair share of food assistance. The international community also funded social safety net programs to alleviate economic hardships and promoted income-generat-

and to end discrimination in labor markets.

Labor Force Participation

Desperate economic conditions and the increasing numbers of woman-headed households forced more women to enter labor markets. Conflicts eroded the traditional social and political order, leading women to assume new economic roles and responsibilities.

"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 woman refugee in Mozambique*

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

—*A housemaid in Cambodia*

ing activities among women through microcredit. Job training and health care projects—including reproductive and mental health programs—were developed. Finally, the international community also 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 guarantee property rights for women

In all countries except Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's participation in agriculture increased both during and after conflict. In the absence of men, women performed many tasks that previously had been done only by men. Women worked on their own family farms, on others' land as sharecroppers, and as landless laborers. In some countries, including Rwanda, the government made surplus land available to women for cultivation. In Guatemala and El Salvador, women found work in the growing nontraditional agricultural export sector. Women's employment in labor-intensive agricultural exports increased their family incomes and provided a modicum of economic security and social freedom.

Because of the shortage of labor during conflicts, women could work in many industries and occupations previously unavailable to them. These openings provided them with experience and confi-

dence to help them during postconflict transition.* In Cambodia, women worked in textile factories, construction, and salt and rubber production during the conflict and have been working in them ever since. Women workers in textile factories gained experience as well as good reputations, which facilitated their employment in the garment industry after the war. Women currently make up more than 80 percent of the workers in Cambodia's garment industry. In El Salvador and Guatemala, most of the employees in assembly plants that process exports are women. The increased presence of the international community during and immediately after conflict also created significant employment opportunities for women. International organizations recruited women in large numbers as secretaries, translators, office managers, and professional staff. However, employment by the international community declined over time.

As economies shrank during the early phases of the postconflict transition, female workers in the organized sector suffered. Often women were the first to be laid off during retrenchment and were replaced by returning combatants. This was particularly true if a woman was associated

*In examining increased participation in the labor market, it is important to note the difference between rural and urban women. Rural women who had taken over male roles were often simply more tired; urban women, by contrast, tended to gain status in society. It also is important to point out that the results depend on the stage of the postconflict period: as the economic situation changes, so does the availability of jobs for women.

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 reinstatement of former employees or the closing of the enterprises themselves. Even when they continued working in privatized firms, women often lost medical and other benefits.

Women often faced job discrimination in both the public and private sectors. Women frequently received lower wages than men for the same work, and they were less likely than their male counterparts to advance. Women were likely to be employed in menial jobs in which men had little interest.[†] Although many countries passed legislation or formulated rules prohibiting discrimination against women, such measures were not enforced rigorously. Indifference, bureaucratic inertia, political confusion, and the low social and economic status of women all contributed to weak enforcement of the laws.

Most women in the case-study societies worked in the informal sector, earning their living by selling cooked foods, vegetables, fruits, clothes, or other house-

[†]The researchers were unable to obtain quantitative data on job discrimination, wages, and advancement. But anecdotal data confirm these widely held beliefs.

hold items. Although women were a significant part of the informal sector before the conflicts, their numbers increased during the postconflict 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, a “feminization” of the informal sector took place in all the case-study countries.

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

—Mark F. Chingano

The international community supported microcredit programs targeting women. Loans were advanced to small groups ranging from 5 to 11 borrowers. They required no collateral, or only minimal group collateral. The international community was imaginative in using microcredit in postconflict settings. For example, in Cambodia and Rwanda international donors supported “cow banks,” a successful program that provided cows to women who used them to produce milk and cheese for income. The program stipulated that each woman turn over her cow’s first calf to the project. Once those calves were returned, the women were free to keep or sell any additional calves.

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

Political Impacts

Expansion of Public Roles

All case-study countries saw 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.*

*Although women’s participation in the political process increased during conflict, there were instances when conflict undermined participation. 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.

Many women became active at the community level during conflict. They organized formal and informal local groups to provide relief to vulnerable populations. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina managed day care facilities and voluntary health services in seized communities. Women participated in the distribution of food aid in Rwanda, and 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 in urban and rural areas.

In the absence of men, women often took charge of local political institutions. During 1985–88 in El Salvador, 33 out of 262 mayors elected (13 percent) were women. Because they had organized politically before the peace accords and the formation of political parties, women also won seats in the legislature. After the fall of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, women's representation in village councils increased dramatically. Other countries, including Lebanon and Mozambique, witnessed a similar phenomenon.

Women also entered the public arena to support war efforts. They raised funds, organized public meetings and marches, and mobilized public opinion for war in the name of ideology, ethnicity, and nationalism. Women joined militias in Cambo-

dia and El Salvador. They played supporting roles in military operations in other countries by managing auxiliary services such as health and intelligence operations. Some women rejected military solutions and founded organizations to end warfare, becoming powerful voices in the peace process.

In many cases, the expansion of women's public roles enhanced their social and political positions in their countries. Women activists represented a new vision of gender equality. They redefined traditional roles, and they projected a new self-confidence. The number of committed and politically perceptive women leaders increased, and many assumed leadership roles in the postwar era.

Other women became disillusioned with mainstream political parties and broke ranks. For example, women leaders who had worked hard for the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador felt that the FMLN's leadership was not committed to gender equality. The women founded Women for Dignity and Life (Dignas) to promote a feminist agenda outside the FMLN. The organization established close working relationships with a variety 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 grass-

roots advocacy organizations. In Rwanda, women's leadership in the microcredit activities of rural women's associations led directly to the elections of women to both reserved and open seats in local government councils.

Postwar Retrenchment And Political Participation

Once hostilities ceased, most case-study countries witnessed a retreat of women from public life. This was most visible in postconflict elections held to establish democratic governments. Although women made up at least half of the electorate, they were represented only marginally in national legislatures. For example, five women were elected to the National Assembly in Cambodia, representing only 6 percent of elected representatives. The situation was similar in Guatemala, where women held only 7.5 percent of the seats in Parliament. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the House of Representatives seated only 1 woman in the 42-member chamber. Women's representation was better in El Salvador and Mozambique, where women occupied 11 percent and 25 percent of the seats, respectively.

Three factors seemed to have contributed to this postwar retrenchment. First was the psychological stress of war, which generated nostalgia for the traditional social and political order in which women enjoyed only marginal roles in public life. After the peace accord in Cambodia, for example, some of the Cambodian elite

clamored for the old order, which was seen as free from social and cultural strife. A few social and religious leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Guatemala demanded a return to traditional values and norms. The most vivid contemporary example of the return to tradition is Afghanistan, where women are deprived of all political and social rights.

Second, war fatigue gripped some women leaders and workers and contributed to their decisions to leave public life. Women who had shouldered heavy public burdens in addition to their familial responsibilities were physically and emotionally exhausted by the end of the conflict and relieved to give up public activism.

The third — and perhaps the most significant — factor in women's retreat from public life was that men sought to reassert their authority once they were freed from preoccupation with war. Although they regarded women's participation in politics as a necessity during conflict, many men considered such activism inappropriate in the postconflict era.

However, other factors contributed to increasing women's political participation. First, the establishment of democratic systems opened new political space for women. As a part of the peace accords, many war-torn societies (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Guatemala) 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 and new constitutions was the explicit recognition of gender equality. All constitutions provided equal political rights to women, and a few tried to estab-

"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 woman leader from Somalia
(Lewis 1997)

lish quotas for them in local and national legislative bodies. Thus, new opportunities for women were codified as part of the postconflict societies, and women responded with enthusiasm.

Second, as discussed in the next chapter, the growth of women's organizations further expanded women's public roles during the postconflict 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 powerful forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and

Rwanda, but their influence has been much more limited in Cambodia and Georgia.

Finally, the international community influenced the political aspirations and behavior of women in the case-study countries by advocating their social, economic, and political empowerment. Many multilateral and bilateral donors funded visits by women leaders to international meetings and conferences on gender issues. International women's NGOs established branches in postconflict societies or affiliated themselves with indigenous groups. The activities funded by international donor agencies to promote democracy, although not concentrating exclusively on

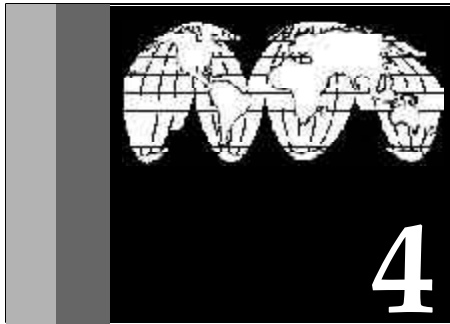
"Noting the fact that Eritrean women's heroic participation in the struggle for independence and solidarity based on equality and mutual respect generated by such struggle will serve as an unshakable foundation for our commitment and struggle to create a society in which women and men will interact on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

—From the preamble to the
Eritrean constitution

women's political participation, also helped struggling women's groups and organizations assume new political roles and responsibilities.

Despite a brief era of disfranchisement, women in postconflict societies have made headway in the political arena. For example, the percentage of women members in national legislatures increased after the first postconflict elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Georgia. The representation of women in ministries of national gov-

ernments also improved over time in case-study countries, and women gained seats in elections to local government bodies. For example, the percentage of women city councilors in El Salvador increased from only 3 percent during the conflict to 14 percent in the 1993 elections. By the 1999 elections, the percentage of women had almost doubled from the 1993 percentage.



The Emergence And Contributions Of Women's Organizations

CHAPTER 3 EXAMINED the impact of intrastate conflicts on women and gender relations. This chapter concentrates on the emergence—and in many cases reemergence—of women's organizations that addressed women's problems and promoted gender equality in the case-study countries. The chapter discusses the organizations' activities, their contributions to the empowerment of women, and the problems they face. Finally, it examines the factors affecting organization performance and the vexing issue of sustainability.

Growth of Women's Organizations During Postconflict 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 organizations, ranging from grass-roots 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 organizations registered with the government or a regulatory agency. At the same time, many registered organizations existed only on paper. To complicate the problem, many grass-roots women's organizations were classified simply as welfare or economic organizations. Despite these difficulties, there is a consensus among experts that there were hundreds of women's organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda, but numbers were much smaller in Cambodia and Georgia. Most of the organizations emerged at the end of conflict.

Four overarching factors contributed to the growth of women's organizations. The first was *the social, economic, and political transformations that took place during the conflicts*. As discussed in the previous chapter, conflicts 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, by the end of the conflicts, women were able to take the lead in forming organizations to pursue their interests and agendas.

Many women's organizations emerged in El Salvador and (to a lesser extent) in Guatemala during the civil wars. These groups drew support from leftist political parties, churches, other religious organizations, and trade unions. The organizations worked on the problems associated with political repression. El Salvador's Fenestra, Comadres, and Dignas and Guatemala's National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala (Conavigua) illustrate this category. International humanitarian agencies formed partnerships with existing or newly created groups to deliver assistance to targeted populations. For example, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees 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, reinventing themselves as full-fledged women's organizations.

The experience women gained in refugee camps often prepared them for leadership roles and indirectly contributed to the formation of some women's organizations. Women often received education and training there and participated in camp activities. They also formed groups to promote their welfare as refugees. For example, women refugees from Guatemala established several organizations in Mexico in the 1990s (Loughna

1999). When they returned home, they transplanted them to their communities. Mamá Maquin, an organization of Maya women established in 1990 in Mexico, provides a good example. Its members transferred Mamá Maquin to Guatemala after their repatriation, expanded the organization's objectives, and redefined its mandate. In El Salvador, returning women refugees resurrected some of the organizations they had formed in camps. In Cambodia, many leaders of postconflict women's organizations emerged from the ranks of refugees living in camps on the Thai border. Internally displaced women in Georgia also successfully established nonpartisan organizations to address women's problems.

The second factor contributing to the growth of women's organizations was the *disillusionment of women leaders* with leftist political parties who initially professed commitment to gender equality but later reneged on the 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 Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, and started an organization to address women's problems. In Nicaragua, however, disillusioned women leaders did not abandon the Sandinistas, nor did they form independent organizations. By contrast, many

women leaders of the ruling parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Georgia founded nonpartisan women's organizations.

The third factor was *the reforms initiated by transition governments as a part of the peace process*, which created political space to establish new women's organizations. Before the advent of peace, the avenues for forming such organizations were extremely limited. Only El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda provided some freedom during the conflicts to form voluntary organizations. But even in those countries the governments carefully monitored organizations and repressed those suspected of disloyalty. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Georgia, totalitarian communist regimes permitted no independent organizations. The concept of voluntary civil society organizations was anathema to them. Those conditions changed during and after the peace process. The establishment of democracy, the codification of the right to organize, and the emergence of relatively unfettered media gave women unprecedented freedom to form organizations independent from the government.

The fourth factor was *the assistance for relief and reconstruction* that the international community provided case-study countries. That this assistance was channeled largely through NGOs contributed tremendously to the growth of women's organizations. The international community worked to build up civil society institutions in these countries as a counterweight

to the state. Moreover, in most of the case-study countries public bureaucratic structures were brittle—and unable to deliver goods and services to needy populations. Therefore, the international community had no alternative other than to channel assistance through women's organizations.

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 at reaching out to women.* Women's organizations have a comparative advantage over mixed or male-dominated organizations because they are better able to empathize with women. Further, 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 the case-study countries. In addition to channeling assistance through existing women's groups, many international private voluntary organizations—such as Care, Oxfam, and Catholic Relief Services—encouraged women to form new organizations to avail themselves of humanitarian and developmental assistance.

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

Factors specific to each country determined the nature of international efforts. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the international community mobilized 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 educated middle class. Therefore, international donors to Cambodia 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 these nascent groups and used them to channel assistance during postconflict transition. In Rwanda, genocide and massive migration undermined practically all women's organizations. International donors helped revive some women's organizations and led to the creation of many others. In Georgia, international donors targeted the development of women's organizations to help internally displaced families and to promote women's political participation.

Two additional factors contributed to the emergence of women leaders and organizations in the case-study countries. The first was the influence of feminist scholars and organizations based in Europe and the United States. Their ideas broadened the intellectual horizons of many women leaders, providing new ways of analyzing gender issues. The sec-

ond factor was the homecoming of educated women who had migrated to Western countries during the conflict. These women had imbibed ideas of freedom and gender equality and sought to pass them on. The role of former expatriates was especially significant in Cambodia.

Nature of Women's Organizations

Most women's organizations in the case-study countries fall into three overlapping categories: grass-roots organizations, regional and national organizations, and national umbrella organizations.

The first category consists of small grass-roots women's organizations formed to help women victims of the conflict. These organizations emphasized helping the most vulnerable: the displaced, traumatized, sexually abused, destitute, and widowed. Examples include Medica Zenica, which provided medical and psychological assistance to sexually abused women in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Koka, a Georgian cooperative farming society founded on the principles of mutual help. Microenterprise groups supported by the international community also fall into this category. For example, thousands of women's groups have been working in Rwanda, mobilizing women for both economic and social development (Newbury and Baldwin 2000b).

Often, these grass-roots women's organizations were not known outside their

communities. Many were not registered and not included in official statistics. Their leaders, though they generally came from the intelligentsia, were not always well known or well connected. These grass-roots 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 Putnam calls "social capital." The international community directly funded many of these organizations.

The second category of organizations consists of regional and national women's organizations. These organizations were patterned on Western NGOs. They had written constitutions, a management structure, and boards of directors with varying levels of involvement and oversight. They employed paid, full-time professional and technical staff. Their leadership came from the middle and upper middle classes. Some of these organizations had close ties to the bureaucratic, political, and economic elite. These organizations operated in specific sectors: agriculture, microenterprise, education, health, and family planning. Many organizations also advocated reform related to gender issues. This category of women's organizations generally received funds from more than one international donor organization.

The last category consists of the national umbrella organizations that supported grass-roots organizations. These organizations were located in capital cit-

ies. International donor agencies often established partnerships with national associations to facilitate assistance to grass-roots groups. In addition to channeling national and international assistance, the umbrella organizations' activities included training and technical assistance

The National Coordinating Committee of Widows of Guatemala (known as 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 filed lawsuits in behalf of women who had suffered from rape, kidnapping, illegal detention, and destruction of property. Its activities have helped thousands of Maya 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.

and lobbying on behalf of their members. These organizations were similar in leadership, structure, and goals to those in the second category, but they were not engaged in managing their own projects.

Activities of Women's Organizations

Women's organizations were active in almost every important sector in case-study countries. The breadth of their interventions is impressive. The following discussion highlights some activities

they undertook in health, income generation, social problems, democracy and human rights, and advocacy for gender equality during the postconflict era.

Health

Because health services were in a shambles following conflict, women's organizations entered the health sector early. They established health clinics, provided reproductive health care, and organized mass vaccination programs. Many orga-

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 but work in towns and cities nationwide. Pro-Femmes contributed to dialog among the government, women's organizations, and donor agencies about the need to target development assistance to women and also influenced national policies and programs.

nizations also developed modest programs in psychosocial healing for traumatized women. These programs sponsored support groups, provided psychological counseling, and in some cases arranged for psychotherapy. As the awareness and incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases grew, women's organizations also started targeting these diseases. Few organizations with substantial grants from international donors were able to afford the expensive treatment of

HIV/AIDS. Most, including the Indradevi Association in Cambodia and the Cambodian Women's Development Agency, engaged in research and prevention.

Income Generation

Women's organizations organized vocational training and other programs to generate income and employment for women and woman-headed households. With the influx of the expatriate population in the early 1990s, Cambodia, for example, faced an acute shortage of secretaries, receptionists, cooks, and waitresses. Women's organizations sponsored training programs to prepare young women for these occupations. In El Salvador and Guatemala, organizations provided women training in carpentry, masonry, auto repair, and poultry and cattle raising. Women's organizations were heavily involved in microcredit programs, enabling women to start their own microenterprises in all case-study countries. A few women's organizations were active in the agricultural sector. In Cambodia, grass-roots women's groups provided agricultural extension services to struggling women farmers. In El Salvador and Guatemala, women's organizations supported women farmers producing nontraditional agricultural exports.

Social Problems

Women's organizations addressed a wide variety of social problems that plagued postconflict societies. For example, they launched programs against

domestic violence in Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Rwanda, providing legal, medical, and emotional support to victims. Organizations such as the Cambodian Women's Crisis Center and El Salvador's Conamus and Mélida Anaya Montes ran shelters for abused women. Women's organizations coordinated media events to educate people about this problem. In Cambodia, women's organizations concentrated on the plight of commercial sex workers, offering them legal assistance, screenings for sexually transmitted diseases, and shelter for those who wanted to leave their professions. In El Salvador, women's groups tackled the problems of child abuse and child support. Other women's organizations in El Salvador, Cambodia, and Guatemala held literacy or language classes, often combining training with maternal and child care to reach a wider audience.

Democracy and Human Rights

Women's organizations have been active in promoting democracy and human rights. In El Salvador, Comadres 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. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, El Salvador, and Guatemala, women's organizations provided many services to help organize postconflict elections. They participated in voter registration drives, held voter education programs, and as-

sisted in election monitoring. In addition, they promoted social reconciliation among former enemies. Women's organizations 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 for Gender Equality

Women's organizations also undertook activities to fight sexual discrimination and to promote gender equality. Several organizations worked to increase women's participation in political affairs by providing assistance to women candidates, irrespective of their political affiliations. Other organizations developed women's platforms and sought the endorsement of their issues by political parties, while yet others publicly demanded that mainstream parties field more women candidates. Women's organizations also lobbied legislatures and governments for specific reforms regarding gender equality. In Guatemala, Mamá Maquin and other groups successfully lobbied for legislation granting land rights to women, and Conavigua lobbied on gender and human rights issues. Women's organizations in El Salvador, Cambodia, and Rwanda also worked to advance property rights for women. Many women's groups developed public education programs on gender issues. The Women's Media Center of Cambodia, for example, used television to increase awareness of gender issues.

Obstacles and Limitations To Women's Organizations

In carrying out the activities mentioned in the previous section, women's organizations faced numerous obstacles and suffered from internal weaknesses that undermined their performance and achievements. A few common obstacles and limitations most women's organizations faced are identified here to indicate the challenges that lie ahead.

In the case-study countries, cultural and social factors hampered women's organizations. One variable was women's low status. In practically all countries, women played a subservient role to men. Moreover, in the aftermath of conflict, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, and Rwanda experienced some cultural revivalism, a euphoria for cultural traditions that often glorified the role of women as mothers and housewives. Consequently, an influential segment of the political elite did not relish the prospect of women taking on leadership roles in public affairs.* At the same time, because of their low social status, many leaders of women's organizations were not in a position to interact as equals with their male counterparts. Women in grass-roots organizations often faced disapproval from male relatives who were concerned that if women became involved in outside activities, they would not devote adequate time to house-

hold chores. This was particularly significant in Cambodia and Rwanda, less so in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Communication also proved a major barrier for women. For example, because members of Maya women's organizations could not converse well in Spanish, they were disadvantaged when compared with ladino organizations. Grass-roots women's organizations in Cambodia, El Salvador, and Rwanda faced different communication problems. Their members and leaders generally came from low socioeconomic strata, so government officials and political leaders paid inadequate attention to their grievances and demands. Nor could these grass-roots groups communicate effectively with officials of international organizations. As a result, both the problems and achievements of many grass-roots women's organizations remained unappreciated by the international community.

Another hindrance to women's organizations was the disabling environment of postconflict societies. All the case-study countries were beset with social unrest and adverse economic conditions at the end of conflict. In ethnically divided societies, such as Rwanda and Bosnia and Herzegovina, resentment and anger toward members of opposing ethnic groups were rampant, undermining the effectiveness of public institutions. Adverse economic conditions, combined with a demoralized public bureaucracy, contributed to corruption and inefficiency. In a few cases the surviving police and

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

military officials from previous regimes remained openly resentful of organizations that had raised their voices against them in the past. Such has been the case in El Salvador and Guatemala. Genocide left Cambodia bereft of social capital and tech-

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

—*Unpublished case study of Conavigua in Guatemala*

“The leaders of women’s organizations treat their organizations as their own fiefdoms, because they 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*

nical expertise. All these conditions impeded women’s organizations and undermined their effectiveness. (They affected other groups as well.)

The inability of international donors to make long-term commitments was a persistent problem for women’s organizations. The maximum donor commitment was five years, but in most cases grants had to be renewed annually. Because of

shrinking levels of assistance, renewals were not automatic. Therefore, many organizations carried out activities in an environment of uncertainty and were unable to engage in long-term planning. Such uncertainty and the prospect of unemployment hurt staff morale and limited the possibilities for sectoral specialization among women’s organizations.

In addition to external impediments, women’s organizations suffered internal limitations. Many faced management and leadership problems. The charismatic leaders who founded some organizations inspired their constituents and impressed officials of governments and donor agencies — but they were not always good managers. Often these leaders had little patience for strategic planning and could not adhere to budgets or follow bureaucratic procedures essential for efficient management.* At the same time, some women with little commitment to any cause started women’s organizations to profit from the abundant donor resources initially available in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Cambodia. They ran their organizations as personal businesses.

The top leaders of many women’s organizations were reluctant to delegate power and to train junior staff for future

*Management has been a chronic problem. An unpublished paper by Gloria Zamora de García and María Rosenda Camey (“Gender in Guatemala; Case Studies of the Association of Mayan Ixil Women, Mama Maquin, and Kichin Konojel”) documents this for one Central American country. The authors’ studies note similar shortcomings in Cambodia and other countries.

leadership, because they were concerned that a professionally trained staff might challenge their authority. The leaders themselves monopolized participation in international training programs, meetings, and conferences.* Middle and junior staff members who found prospects for upward mobility within the organization blocked by the top brass were frustrated. This frustration affected not only the day-to-day operations of these organizations but also their long-term viability.

Finally, lack of communication and cooperation among women's organizations limited their effectiveness. All six case country studies identified this issue. These organizations often saw one another as competitors rather than partners working for the same cause. Personal rivalries and animosities between leaders, differences in ideological orientation, a lack of traditions for voluntary organizations, and above all, competition for diminishing resources contributed to this tension. As a result, efforts were often duplicated, the public image of women's organizations was undermined, and skills and expertise were not shared among organizations.

Women's Organizations And Empowerment

Did the aforementioned activities contribute to the empowerment of women? This is a legitimate question, though

*Donors occasionally contribute to the problem, as they prefer educated, articulate representatives and not ordinary females working in the field.

almost impossible to answer. The post-conflict transition has been a recent phenomenon, and most women's organizations are relatively new — from six to eight years old. This is too short a time to examine the long-term cumulative effects of these organizations. But 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, empowerment 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 activities they undertook seem to have contributed to women's empowerment in the following five 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-generating 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 re-

"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 everybody else. Women's organizations have helped a lot through microcredit and small loans programs targeted to women."

—A woman official of a leading private voluntary organization

lationship between economic independence and social empowerment. When women become earning members of the household, their bargaining position with male members tends to improve (Hashemi and others 1996). One can assume that this finding also applies to the case-study countries. The beneficiaries of income-generation programs often told stories of how their income not only saved them

from extreme poverty but also gave them a new sense of identity and enhanced social status.*

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, they contested elections, and they even held public office.[†] For example, the founder of Conavigua in Guatemala was elected to the legislature.[‡] 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.[§]

Fourth, women's organizations raised gender awareness among their members.

*The author has heard such stories firsthand in many postconflict societies, including Cambodia and Rwanda.

[†]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 sometimes bordering on contempt. They were convinced that dominant political parties paid only lip service to gender issues and believed that only nonpartisan women's organizations could represent women's true interests.

[‡]The director of the organization, Rosalina Tuyuc, was elected a member of the Congress of the Republic as a candidate for the New Guatemalan Democratic Front.

[§]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 feared alienating male voters.

They organized meetings, workshops, and discussions. Grass-roots organizations — such as Mamá Maquin, Kichin Konojel, and the Association of Mayan Ixil Women in Guatemala — routinely held workshops

“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 Mamá Maquin.”

—Two women members
of Mamá Maquin

on gender issues for their members. Similar workshops also were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in El Salvador. Many women’s organizations disseminated the findings of international meetings and conferences on women and gender issues. As a result, members became aware of their social and political rights, structural factors contributing to their low status, and the ways they could improve their predicament.

Fifth, in many case-study countries, women’s organizations succeeded in putting gender issues on the national agenda.

This was particularly true in El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, and Rwanda. As a result, national leaders, the intelligentsia, and public officials started discussing issues such as family planning, domestic violence, girls’ education, discrimination in employment, and women’s property rights. Women’s organizations were able to accomplish this for many reasons. Often, their leaders were members of powerful families within the political and bureaucratic elite and could communicate their organizations’ agendas directly to important policymakers. Moreover, because many grass-roots women’s organizations had acquired followings in their respective communities, local politicians concerned about their political base gravitated toward those grass-roots groups. In El Salvador and Guatemala, mayors of small towns and cities began consulting women’s organizations.* Finally, women lobbied their governments and legislatures on matters affecting women’s rights and problems.

Although women’s organizations contributed to women’s empowerment, their overall influence was modest, for two reasons. First, because of their small size, limited numbers, and spare resources, these organizations could make a difference in the lives of only a minority of women and could not effect major institutional

*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.

changes in the case-study societies. Second, most of the organizations lacked a strategic vision of gender relations. They tried to address specific women's problems, rather than advocating for a radical transformation of their societies.

Sustainability of Women's Organizations

The sustainability of women's organizations is of paramount concern to all who are interested in the growth of civil society and gender equality. If foreign assistance wanes, will these organizations survive, or will they languish and decay? There is no simple answer, because conditions vary from country to country and from organization to organization. Nevertheless, a few general observations about the requirements for sustainability follow.

Sustainability can be assessed with reference to three dimensions: financial sustainability, managerial sustainability, and outside linkages (Carr and others 1996). Financial sustainability indicates that an organization can survive without external funding. Managerial sustainability implies that an organization is managed and led by women, or by someone hired by them. Linkage sustainability means that an organization is able to work with various stakeholders to achieve its objectives.

As far as *financial sustainability* is concerned, the future of women's organizations remains questionable. Most organi-

zations reviewed in this assessment 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 the organizations were unable to charge fees for their services. There were, however, exceptions. Organizations that

"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."

—*A USAID official*

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

—*A civil society specialist*

lent money for microenterprises were able to keep a small percentage of the interest paid by borrowers for administrative expenses. A few organizations created businesses. These usually sold various handicrafts — produced by members, for sale to the international community — though one Rwandan NGO opened a paper and school-supply store to help support its work. In addition, a few organizations (such as the Association of Salvadoran Women) had

established partnerships with the government to run specific programs. But an overwhelming majority of women's organizations were not in a position to be self-sufficient and would not survive without outside funds.

There are several reasons for the lack of financial sustainability of women's organizations. Women's groups in post-conflict societies lacked expertise in fund-raising and faced other significant obstacles. Governments were (and probably will remain) under pressure to reduce public expenditures. Thus they would not be in a position to support women's organizations financially for years to come. Even if government funding were available, some organizations might not want it because such funding could undermine their autonomy. Private sector funding cannot fill the gap because private enterprise remains in a nascent stage in all case-study countries, with the possible exception of El Salvador. Many large private firms have not yet developed a tradition for philanthropy and public service. Consequently, it is unrealistic to expect women's organizations to raise enough money from local sources to fully fund their activities.

Smaller women's organizations are in the most precarious position. They are unlikely to have the resources and expertise to compete with large organizations, which have succeeded well in soliciting funds from the international community. Many small organizations also face stiff competition from mixed or men's volun-

tary organizations that have started developing projects specifically for women.

Managerial sustainability is not as significant a problem as financial sustainability. Women invariably led and managed all organizations examined in this study. Even though many organizations suffered from managerial problems, they were acquiring experience and expertise. Moreover, in all case-study countries, women were expanding their experience in managing public institutions, and their technical capabilities were growing. A new generation of professional leaders is taking charge of many organizations, and there is no reason to believe there will be a shortage of well-trained and committed women managing these organizations in the future.

Linkage sustainability is the capacity of an organization to develop and maintain linkages with its stakeholders. In the case of women's organizations, three stakeholders are important.

The first—and undoubtedly most important—stakeholders are the organization's women beneficiaries. Most of the women's organizations examined in the case-study countries have established a rapport with their beneficiaries through deep commitment and empathy. In this they have had (and will continue to have) a comparative advantage over male-dominated organizations.

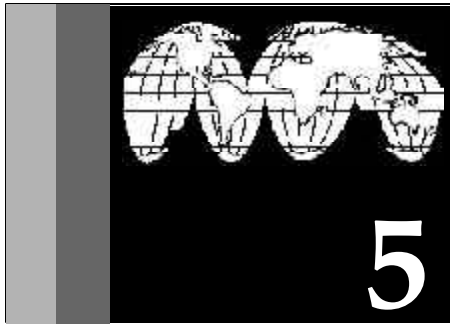
The second category of stakeholders includes government agencies and depart-

ments. A good working relationship with government is essential for women's organizations so they can obtain political and perhaps financial support. Most women's organizations in the case-study countries have begun paying attention to local and national government. Even the organizations that wanted at first to remain aloof from the government came to recognize the value of maintaining a good relationship. Cambodia is a case in point. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, when donor agencies were vying with one another to fund Cambodian women's organizations, the organizations adopted an attitude of benign neglect toward the government. With a decline in external funding and improvements in public bureaucracy, those organizations began reconsidering their earlier postures.

The last category of stakeholders is external funding agencies. Most of the women's organizations that received funds from international donors had acquired a good understanding of those funders. Whether those organizations will

be able to tap other philanthropic resources in their own countries remains to be seen.

The international development community recognizes that many women's organizations will not survive. The level of international funding and humanitarian assistance has declined over time in the case-study countries. Moreover, many of the problems that plagued these societies — including women refugees, demobilized women combatants, and separated children — have been resolved, at least partially, and are no longer acute. Consequently, the need for certain types of programs related to these problems has diminished, leading some women's organizations to reduce their activities, find different mandates, or close down. Even so, as these countries make economic, social, and political progress, new women's organizations will arise that concentrate on new problems and challenges. Those new organizations will, of course, build on the foundations laid by their elder sisters.



International Assistance To Women's Organizations

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER discussed the roles and activities of women's organizations in postconflict societies. This chapter examines 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 and identifies problem areas that deserve attention and action by the international donor community.

Nature of International Assistance

The international community provided extensive assistance to women's organizations in all case-study countries. Precise data are not available, but it is safe to assume that most, if not all, of the money for these organizations came from international sources. Funders included bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, private foundations, trade unions, international charitable organizations, religious and church organizations, professional organizations, and other NGOs in case-study countries.

International donors provided general grants for institutional development and for specific activities of women's organizations. Donors also contracted with these organizations to carry out specific projects and programs. Often foundations, religious organizations, NGOs, and small bilateral agencies (particularly from Scandinavian countries) gave grants for institutional development and activities. Such grants were flexible and did not involve any monitoring by the funding agency. However, USAID and major bilateral agencies preferred to tie assistance to specific projects and activities. Women's organizations were held accountable for the progress of these interventions.

The most common form of assistance was financial. Both donors and women's organizations preferred the flexibility of financial aid. International donors also gave in-kind assistance. For example, during conflict, USAID, the World Food Program, and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees provided food, medicines, and other essential commodities to women's organizations to distribute among targeted populations. Such programs usually

ended when peace was established. Many international organizations also donated typewriters, computers, copiers, audio-visual equipment, and even automobiles to aid women's organizations.

In addition, the international community provided considerable technical assistance. Such assistance was necessary because the staffs of women's organizations usually lacked managerial and technical expertise. The international community routinely supported short- and long-term training programs in accounting, management, and technical fields. Donors also arranged overseas trips for senior officials of women's organizations who visited technical and educational institutions or attended international meetings and conferences. Some donors funded short-term consultants and long-term expatriate experts who helped solve specific managerial and technical problems. The cost of expatriate experts is exceptionally high, so international donors have become more reluctant to provide them.

Contributions of International Assistance

The experience of case-study countries shows unequivocally that international assistance has contributed to the growth, activities, and survival of women's organizations. Officials from the international community, leaders of women's organizations, host government officials, and academic experts all agree on this general conclusion. They empha-

sized four vital contributions of international assistance:

First, many women's organizations in all case-study countries would not have emerged — or at least not survived — without international assistance. International organizations helped many women leaders establish new groups or revive old ones at the end of conflict. The presence and funding of the international community, combined with the return of women with an international experience and perspective, acted as a catalyst for the formation of these organizations.

Second, international assistance enabled most women's organizations to initiate projects and programs that benefited women and contributed to their empowerment. In none of the case-study countries could a majority of women's organizations raise necessary resources locally. Because of desperate economic situations, only a few local religious organizations, philanthropic groups, and political patrons could provide more than token help. Some women's organizations did receive local in-kind assistance, such as free office space and the services of professional staff, but those donations were hardly adequate to carry out effective programs. International assistance was essential in pursuing the ongoing activities of these organizations. Almost all the projects undertaken by women's organizations in vocational training, microenterprises, family planning, health services, social services, and electoral assistance have depended entirely on international assistance.

Third, foreign assistance contributed to legitimizing women's organizations. In many cases, international recognition also protected women's organizations from interference from the various arms of the government. For example, before the peace process began, many women's organizations fighting for the rights of victims of political oppression in El Salvador and Guatemala survived through the material and moral support of the international community.

And fourth, 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 in Cambodia, donors encouraged independent local organizations to assist women's organizations and other civil society organizations. In addition, to qualify for funding from international donors, women's organizations often had to learn appropriate managerial and budgetary procedures. Most women's organizations established during or after conflict did not have even rudimentary managerial structures. To get international assistance, they had to establish management procedures, keep necessary records, and follow appropriate budgetary practices for their programs. The cumulative effect was that, over time, their managerial and technical capacities improved.

From their association with the international community, women's organizations seem to have acquired three sets of

skills: a) expertise in preparing and submitting proposals to international agencies, b) accounting and budgeting skills, particularly in former communist countries where such skills were not common, and c) management practices, such as work plans, job descriptions, individual assignments, management systems and controls, and monitoring and evaluation systems.

International Assistance And the Autonomy Of Women's Organizations

Because of their economic dependence on international assistance, the question of the autonomy of women's organizations requires some discussion. There is a genuine concern among some donors and women leaders that the current economic dependence undermines the autonomy of these organizations and may prevent them from responding to the distinctive needs and aspirations of their targeted populations. The reasoning is simple. Given the organizations' overwhelming dependence on international assistance, their agendas, projects, and activities are likely to be determined not by their own assessments of their needs or organizational capabilities and strengths, but by the priorities and concerns of the international donor community.* Case studies provide some support for this hy-

*This issue is generally discussed in the context of international assistance to civil society organizations. For recent debate on this subject, see Carothers's *Aiding Democracy Abroad* and Hudock's *NGOs and Civil Society*.

pothesis. For example, after the Dayton Accords, many women's organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina closed their psychosocial healing projects against their own judgment, when international donors shifted their attention to economic growth and development. In the late 1990s in Cambodia, women's organizations found that

"Our main objective is to help suffering women. It is immaterial from what source we get resources. Let academicians debate the issue."

—A woman leader from Cambodia

"What autonomy? Most of the women's organizations are the extension arm of international donors."

—A scholar from El Salvador

funds were available for projects against domestic violence, so many began venturing into this field. Lacking alternative sources of funding, many considered it a prudent choice.

While there is substance in this reasoning, the relationship between funding and autonomy is more complex. Interviews with informants suggest wide variation among countries, organizations, and over time. For example, during the early stages of conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, when women's organizations were fewer and international assistance plentiful, women's groups enjoyed considerable autonomy in determining their activities. The international community

supported their programs without any reservation. But conditions changed as the volume of international assistance declined and the number of women's organizations grew. International agencies were in a position to influence the priorities and programs of organizations receiving assistance from them. The same phenomenon occurred in Cambodia. But in El Salvador, many established women's organizations could pursue their own priorities and received donors' funds to support those priorities.

Some critics have argued that the practice of subcontracting with women's organizations leaves them little choice but to become an extension of the international community.* The important point to emphasize is that even when they contracted projects for international donors, women's organizations enjoyed considerable freedom and flexibility in shaping these programs. In most cases, international donors identified priorities, and organizations developed their own programs and plans. There was much give-and-take between international donors and women's organizations during negotiations because each side needed the other. Although international donors had the financial leverage, women's organizations had bargaining power because of their local roots and capacity to deliver goods and services to the targeted women.

*For examples, see Hudoc, *NGOs and Civil Society*, and Morton, "Women's Organizations and Empowerment."

Finally and emphatically, many international donors (particularly those from Scandinavian countries) and private foundations continue to give grants to women's organizations to develop and put into effect their own programs reflecting their priorities and understanding of local conditions. Major donor agencies such as USAID are also helping postconflict societies develop an institutional infrastructure for the civil society that will indirectly help women's organizations in strengthening their institutional capacities and tapping local resources for their programs.

Important Issues In International Assistance

International assistance suffered from six significant problems in the case-study countries.

The first, as mentioned in chapter 4, was the inability of international donors to make long-term commitments. The maximum donor commitment was for five years. But in most cases the grant was renewed every year. Because of shrinking levels of assistance to postconflict societies, renewals were not necessarily automatic. Thus, many organizations carried out activities in an environment of uncertainty and were unable to engage in long-term planning.

A second problem was the cumbersome requirements for proposals, progress reports, and monitoring information

imposed by international donor agencies. These had high opportunity costs for women's organizations. USAID provides a good example. USAID in the recent past required voluntary organizations applying for Agency grants to register with USAID/Washington or meet the same requirements established for U.S.-based private voluntary organizations, or PVOs. (This requirement was dropped in 2000.) Thus only a small number 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.* Moreover, USAID and its development partners often required detailed progress reports and, in some cases, information on the effects of the funded programs. Most smaller women's organizations had to spend considerable resources and time in meeting such requirements.

A third problem, related to the second, was that large, well-established women's organizations—usually led by well-connected women leaders—received the 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

*USAID has generally preferred to channel assistance through PVOs for other reasons as well. Direct assistance to local organizations is management intensive, and USAID's overseas missions lack manpower to manage it. Because of their long involvement with grass-roots organizations, PVOs are in a better position to deal with women's organizations.

of the problem, but they could do little about it. Because their staffs were accountable for results, they did not want to take risks with small, relatively unknown organizations. It made more sense to go with established ones. Moreover, reaching out to small organizations at the grass-roots level was difficult and 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.

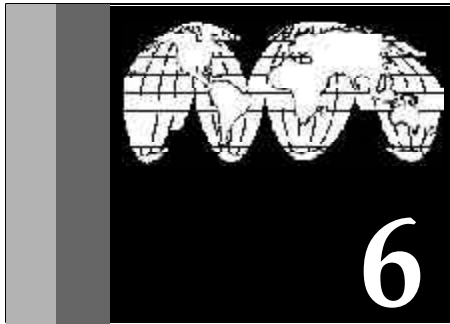
Fourth, there has been little or no donor coordination. Donor agencies tended to work independently without adequate information and understanding of one another's programs. During the early post-conflict phase, there was even competition among donors to fund suitable projects developed by women's organizations 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. 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. The situation

improved over time in almost all case-study countries. The decline in levels of international funding and corresponding reductions 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. Time constraints, limited information about women's organizations, and language and geographical barriers contributed to this problem. Organizations located in capital cities or those whose leaders were politically connected clearly enjoyed an advantage over smaller organizations based farther from metropolitan areas.*

Finally, 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 community has undertaken a wide range of programs, these have been established in an opportunistic manner without a carefully formulated policy framework.

*Alice Morton, a consultant for Development Alternatives Inc., has made this point and suggested that the donor community should be sensitive about the problem.



Lessons and Recommendations For USAID and The International Community

EARLIER CHAPTERS examined the social, economic, and political effects of intrastate conflict on women and gender relations. They discussed the growth, activities, and contributions of women's organizations that emerged or reemerged in the aftermath of war. They also examined the nature and forms of assistance provided by the international community to meet some of the challenges arising out of conflict. This chapter explores the policy implications of the findings presented in earlier chapters. The first two sections present lessons and recommendations, and the third outlines a strategic framework for international assistance for gender and women's issues in postconflict societies.

Lessons and Recommendations for USAID to Support Women And Gender Relations

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 closed to them previously. Women's political participation in community and local affairs increased. In many cases they assumed the leadership of grass-roots civic and political institutions.

Because the postconflict era provides an opening to build on the progress made by women during conflict, it makes sense for USAID to capitalize on this opportunity by designing and implementing programs to ameliorate the negative conditions women endure and to help promote gender equality.

2. Pay greater attention to civilian security. The decline of social control, the disintegration of community, the presence of demilitarized soldiers, and the ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies all tend to increase lawlessness and violence in postconflict societies. Poverty and unemployment are exacerbating factors. Though

all strata of society suffer, women and children are the most frequent victims. The international community has generally supported demobilization of ex-combatants, police reforms, and international monitoring of human rights to reform the security sector. But the primary target of its efforts has been political rights 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. The Agency can also encourage other organs of the U.S. government, bilateral and multilateral agencies, and international NGOs to devise and carry out 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, training of security staff on women's rights, 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 from many limitations. The programs tend to ignore the cultural and social contexts of trauma and propose solutions that may not be relevant to victims. Programs are often short-lived and spotty because of inadequate funding and their experimen-

tal nature. Finally, because they concentrate on women and children, and not on men, these programs are ineffective in reducing domestic violence. Women often become the victims of aggression by traumatized men.

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

4. Step up efforts to prevent sexual abuse of women. The international community has implemented many programs for helping sexually abused women in postconflict 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. But USAID's most important role for this subject is to support initiatives to educate people about these crimes and to prevent their recurrence.

International organizations and experts have put forward several proposals for consideration by the international community: protect witnesses; train international peacekeepers in gender issues; promote more women to international judicial posts; raise the awareness of and punishment for international trafficking in women; and treat sexual violence within

the definition of torture under the UN 1994 Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. USAID should carefully review these proposals and, when appropriate, endorse them.

5. *Promote microcredit.* The experience in many case-study countries indicates that microcredit programs have been quite effective. Though not exclusively targeted to women, the overwhelming majority of loans went to women. These programs appeared to achieve the dual objectives of relief and economic development. However, such programs are no cure 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. The Agency should advocate the removal of 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 postconflict 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. Thus they often suffer deprivation and abject poverty.

USAID has been a pioneer in pushing for property rights for women in postconflict societies and should continue these efforts. The Agency should press not only for constitutional and legislative reforms, but also for their effective implementation. USAID should 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, all case-study countries held postconflict elections at the national level.* Their main purposes were to form governments that enjoyed national and international legitimacy and to promote the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the society. USAID and other donors provided assistance in conducting postconflict elections. Although women constituted half or more of the electorate, only a small proportion were elected to national legislatures.

USAID should promote greater representation of women in postconflict elections by encouraging political parties to field women candidates and assisting women candidates on a nonpartisan basis.

*Rwanda did hold local elections.

8. *Promote political participation of women.* Postconflict societies offered openings for women's political participation. Often democratic constitutions were adopted that provided for equality between men and women. Such constitutions also provided a legal framework for women's participation in the political arena. During conflict some women not only acquired leadership skills and experience but also became aware of their political rights and responsibilities. The international community has provided assistance to encourage women to participate in political affairs. Despite all these developments, women's political participation has been limited.

USAID should support women's political participation with increased vigor. The Agency should consider providing long-term technical and material assistance to nonpartisan women's advocacy organizations that engage in promoting women's participation in local and national affairs.

Lessons and Recommendations For Strengthening 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 postconflict societies for several reasons. Women's organizations represent an essential element of civil society and there-

fore are critical to consolidating nascent democracies. Further, they promote women's leadership, 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 were fully justified. Despite obvious limitations, women's organizations have made contributions toward the achievement of all these objectives. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that the international community can foster women's organizations in postconflict conditions.

USAID should continue with greater vigor its policy of fostering women's organizations as an integral part of efforts to rehabilitate and reconstruct postconflict societies. The Agency 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 obtaining funds from USAID. First, the Agency's requirements to qualify for contracts were stringent. Although relaxed in early 2000, the requirements remain formidable to most women's organizations. Second, many organizations viewed reporting requirements for projects and program activities as onerous. Organizations 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 imposed their own requirements. Thus, some organizations had to meet dual reporting requirements—those of USAID and of its implementing partner.

USAID and its partners should 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 women's organizations faced in all case-study countries was the short duration of funding. Most projects funded under humanitarian assistance spanned only six to nine months. The life span of other projects was longer but was subject to annual reviews. Women's organizations were forced to spend considerable time and resources on proposal writing. Even after a project was funded, a cloud of uncertainty hung over it because funds for the subsequent years were not ensured.

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

4. *Promote sustainability of women's organizations.* International donors and women's organizations generally agreed that most women's organizations cannot survive without international assistance.

Most postconflict societies faced severe shortages of economic resources. They lacked a well-developed private sector that could fund such organizations. Moreover, women's organizations themselves 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 a) provide technical assistance, when necessary, to improve management, b) consider funding a portion of core costs, in addition to program costs, for a limited time, and c) help the organizations become self-reliant by improving skills in advocacy, fund-raising, coalition building, strengthening local political networks, and networking with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. In addition, USAID should consider facilitating training and assistance to help women's organizations create viable businesses that support their core activities over the long term.

5. *Integrate women's organizations in large-scale development initiatives.* The international community has tended to treat women's organizations—because of their gender emphasis and small size—as peripheral rather than mainstream. The development community generally entrusts them with initiatives that target women exclusively. It is important to move beyond this tendency for two reasons. First, a gender framework should inform all development projects—not merely those that help women. Second,

integration of women's organizations into large development initiatives can strengthen the organizations' institutional capabilities.

USAID and other donors should explore the possibility of integrating women's organizations into large-scale development initiatives in postconflict societies. Such integration could entail awarding them contracts for development initiatives and encouraging large development organizations to include women's organizations 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 host of interventions to help women and promote gender equality, no strategic framework exists to inform these assistance programs. A strategic framework not only can provide an overall rationale for policy and program coherence, but also can promote meaningful donor coordination.

It should be recognized at the outset 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 conflict and 2) contribute to women's social, economic, and political empowerment, thereby promoting more balanced gender relations. Although related, these are distinct objectives.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, the outline of a strategic framework is proposed here. The proposed framework has three elements: enhancing physical security, increasing access to resources, and promoting political empowerment (see figure 6.1).*

Enhancing Physical Security

Physical security includes protection from violence and protection from hunger, both critical to women's welfare.

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. Women are more often the victims of sexual abuse and exploitation both during and after the conflict. Moreover, domestic violence often increases in the aftermath of conflicts. The international community has thus far limited its involvement in protecting women from violence. It should do more in the future.

Hunger is a primary form of insecurity for women. Women are particularly susceptible to food insecurity in postcon-

*This framework is in many ways similar to that proposed by the World Bank in its *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*.

flict societies because of abject poverty, increased economic pressures as single heads of households, and the addition of separated children to families. The international community has undertaken a host of programs to prevent hunger and starvation both during and after conflicts. These include the bulk distribution of food, food-for-work programs to generate employment, nutritional support programs for children, and the provision of seed and tools for agriculture. The international community has also developed mechanisms to ensure that women get their reasonable share of such assistance.

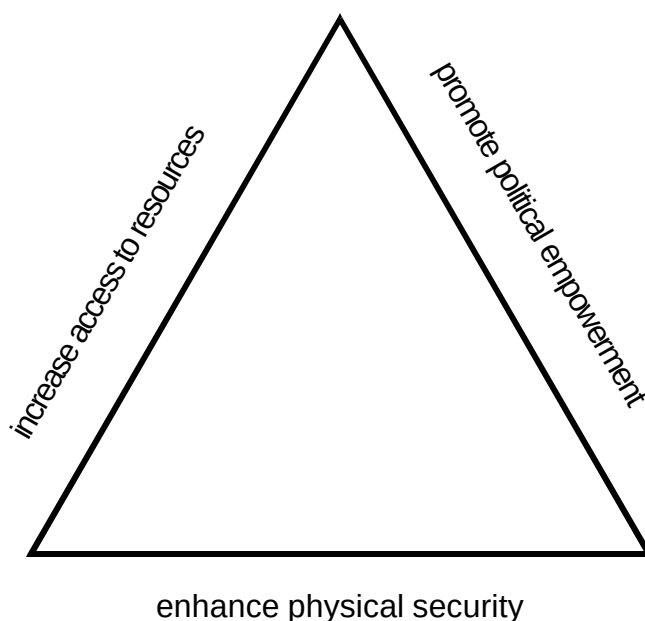
Increasing Access To Productive Assets

Productive assets include not only physical assets but also technical skills and

knowledge. Even in peaceful times, women do not receive equal access to productive assets. The situation tends to worsen in postconflict periods because of the destruction of physical and institutional infrastructure, economic recession, and general social disorganization. It is therefore essential that concerted efforts be made early during postconflict 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. Any economic 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, the community provides

Figure 6.1. Strategic Framework for International Assistance



seeds, pesticides, agricultural tools, and livestock so 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. The major beneficiaries of such credit programs have been women. Third, the international community supports training and educational programs. 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 postconflict societies in restoring communal assets and improving people's access to them. Examples of this sort of assistance are projects to remove mines, clean the environment, and repair and construct roads. Finally, international donors have supported legal reforms to enable women to inherit and own productive assets. All these efforts are valuable, but they should be pursued with greater vigor.

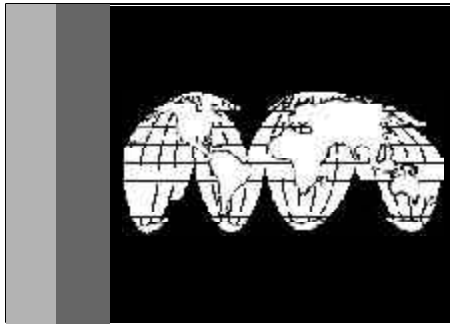
Promoting Political Empowerment

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 traditional structures of discrimination and subjugation be eradicated without women's political leadership. The international development community has often under-

estimated the importance of political participation and power sharing by women in postconflict societies. Thus, political empowerment of women should be an essential element of a strategic framework for international assistance.

The international community has already supported many activities that directly or indirectly increase women's participation in public affairs. For one, international donors have fostered the formation of women's organizations that not only provide an array of services to targeted women but also nurture self-confidence and activism. These programs can and often do prepare women to assume leadership roles in the polity. For another, 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 dialog on the subject. Nevertheless, its three elements are essential to advancing women's progress after major societal upheaval. Any framework incorporating these elements will help policymakers and program managers design and integrate coherent interventions that address women's most urgent problems and help establish gender equality and women's empowerment.



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