

# Equal Power – Lasting Peace

Obstacles for women's  
participation in  
peace processes



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5	Foreword
6	Introduction
18	Armenia and Azerbaijan: Stuck in conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh
36	The Democratic Republic of Congo: No peace for women
52	Iraq: Between war and peace
68	Liberia: The custodians of peace
84	Bosnia and Herzegovina: Preparing for the next step
102	Comparisons and Conclusions: Challenges ahead
114	Things to bear in mind
116	References
122	Abbreviations
124	Footnotes

Peace matters to everyone living in conflict regions. It concerns those who have seen their relatives killed, their houses demolished and the economy crash – those with memories and wounds that will stay with them forever. The chances of lasting peace increase dramatically if not only the warring parties but also representatives from different groups in civil society, including women, sit at the negotiation table. This is not the case today and according to the World Bank report from 2011, most peace agreements fail and conflicts erupt anew after a few years. This comes as no surprise to women activists who have advocated for decades that peace processes need to be inclusive in order to be sustainable.

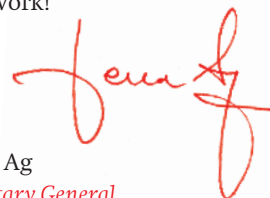
In 2000, the UN Security Council finally listened to the women's movement. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted. It acknowledges that women must participate on an equal footing with men in peacebuilding processes, and that gender equality is essential to building a democratic society. However, more than a decade later and despite all efforts, the statistics show quite a different reality. A study by UN Women (2010) reveals that of 24 major peace processes taking place since 1992 only 2.5 percent of signatories, 3.2 percent of mediators and 7.6 percent of negotiators have been women. The UN has never appointed a female chief mediator. On top of this, peace agreements often lack a gender perspective. Consequently, women's human rights are not effectively protected and the peace is not sustained. Men's violence against women continues after ceasefires and the prevalence of small arms makes this violence even more damaging and deadly. This violence brutalises society as a whole and destabilises communities. As Balkan activists expressed it, the war is far from over with the last bullet fired. Women are often left in financial ruin with no right to inheritance or legal protection. This discrimination hinders both economic and democratic development.

In the years leading up to the millennium shift, there were positive signs of a change in the concept of peace, towards a more inclusive one, built on trust instead of military means. The concept of human security was established. With the 9/11 terror attacks, the international political climate changed instantly. The last ten years have been a decade lost for human rights, including women's rights. We have seen military spending sky-rocket and women's rights being used to legitimise armed interventions. In addition, women's rights are used

as currency at the negotiating tables in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq. After the upheavals of the Arab spring, there are signs of a backlash against women's human rights in the Middle East and North Africa. Twin trends of nationalism and extremism, coupled with economic crisis, threaten women's rights around the world.

However, at the same time more women are gaining political and economic power. The Economist calls women's economic empowerment in the West "a quiet revolution". The number of female parliamentarians continues to rise, albeit at a very slow pace, and the world average is almost 20 percent. Strong female leaders such as US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton, pro-democracy opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma and the presidents of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and of Brazil Dilma Rousseff have put women's rights back on the political agenda. Women activists in regions affected by conflict continue to defy the obstacles to participation in peace building. But this comes at a price, as *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* reveals. Women who speak out are often harassed, intimidated and beaten. Women who sat at the negotiation table in Northern Ireland were warned by women from South Africa that they would be the object of slander and that they should warn their families that terrible things would be said about them. Slander is effective. A woman's reputation is often her most valuable asset: if it is destroyed, her family, friends and community might turn their back on her. She is then alone, which makes her even more vulnerable. *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* sets out to find the answers to why there are still so few women participating in peace-building processes. We seek solutions and acknowledge that there are many different actors in conflict areas, all with different roles and responsibilities. History tells us that old peace strategies are not working. We urgently need new ones. We hope *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* will inspire and inform peace builders for the future.

Finally, I would like to thank all the women who have been interviewed in this report and inspired our work!



Lena Ag  
Secretary General,  
*The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation*

# intro duc tion

“We have to achieve gender equality in society. We will then acquire power, which will give us the means to achieve sustainable peace.”

How are transitions from war to peace made? Who has the power to make peace? Who decides the content of that peace? *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* is about women’s participation in peace processes and the particular challenges of building a gender-equal peace after violent conflict. As the quote above from a Bosnian woman peace activist illustrates, gender, power and peace are intimately connected. It is the aim of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* to explore these interconnections and contribute to a better understanding of the power gaps that are preventing women from participating in peace processes.

The last decade has brought with it a growing recognition of gender equality as a central element in building lasting peace. At least at the international policy level, it has been recognised that women’s inclusive participation in peace processes is not just a matter of equal rights and democratic participation, but also of making peace long-term and sustainable for all. The gendered dynamics of war and peace are increasingly understood as a problem of security and a contributing factor to relapse into conflict. Nonetheless, more than a decade after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security<sup>1</sup>, women remain severely under-represented in peacebuilding. While nowadays there are general calls being made for the inclusion of women, women are still routinely excluded. There is clearly a need to critically examine gender power relations that uphold the status quo, and investigate the process by which certain issues are put on the peace agenda and others not. Knowledge remains only anecdotal concerning the multifaceted reasons as to why women are marginalised in peace processes, how they can gain entry to these processes, and ultimately what changes the increased participation of women brings.

*Equal Power – Lasting Peace* addresses these gaps by gathering together the experiences and knowledge of 79 women peacebuilders active in five different contexts of conflict. They have a wealth of concrete experience of how exclusion works in practice and what windows of opportunity may open. They come from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>2</sup>, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)<sup>3</sup>, Iraq and Liberia. Being at different ‘stages’ of the peace process, these countries provide widely differing

contexts. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Liberia have moved on from the concerns of the immediate post-conflict period, Iraq and DRC have an official but precarious peace that is repeatedly challenged by insecurity and outbursts of violence, and Armenia’s and Azerbaijan’s conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh is unsolved with peace negotiations still ongoing. At the same time, the challenges identified by the participants in the study show striking similarities. *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* therefore provides a situated reading of women’s experiences of participation in the peace process in each case, identifies the complex power mechanisms that exclude them from participation, and gathers strategies for how to close the gaps from their own experience.

The issue of power is placed centre-stage. The study’s point of departure is that ongoing power relations shape and define political processes, that power is gendered, and that men and women are differently affected by war – and peace. Through a conceptual framework designed for a multi-layered power analysis, mechanisms that perpetuate gender inequality in peacebuilding – intended or unintended – are unveiled.<sup>4</sup> While there is a tendency to limit studies of women’s participation to the counting of numbers – of female peace delegates, members of parliament and so on – *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* aims to investigate the overlapping and interdynamic aspects of exclusions, and how underlying issues of insecurity, poverty and norm systems act in conjunction with narrowly designed strategies for peacebuilding to exclude women.

### Peace, gender and power

The traditional dichotomy of war and peace is no longer valid for many people in conflict zones. As the experiences of the participants in this study so tellingly show, a blurring of time has occurred: when war ends officially, it is not at all certain that peace (as in the absence of violence) takes its place. Often violence against civilians continues sporadically, and it is estimated that nearly half of all conflicts relapse into violence again.<sup>5</sup> Peace is also patchy: some disputed territories may form pockets of violence, which means that peacebuilding may take place amidst ongoing violence. The space has shifted as global and local dynamics interact: while war feeds on globalised networks of weapons and other assets, its violence is often acted out in streets, village squares, private homes and other micro-local settings.<sup>6</sup>

The complexities of contemporary conflict have led to a growing recognition of the enormous chal-

lenges that face the peacebuilding phase. In 1992, the UN document ‘Agenda for Peace’ formulated a new understanding of peace, and advocated a more inclusive approach of ‘conflict transformation’ in order to build sustainable peace after conflicts that run a high risk of relapsing into violence.<sup>7</sup> Since then, peace agreements have come to include more than just ceasefires and disarmament arrangements, and instead aim to be more of ‘roadmaps’ that set up far-reaching goals for the building of a sustainable peace, including the legal and political order of post-conflict governance.<sup>8</sup> Peacebuilding has evolved into a multifaceted process, involving national, local and international actors who exert power in different ways and engage in a wide array of tasks, from peace negotiations, security sector reform and DDRR (disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration), through post-conflict governance and institution-building, as well as transitional justice, inter-group cooperation and reconciliation. The post-conflict phase is hence a time when decisions are made with far-reaching consequences for war-torn societies – a time when possibilities open up to change the power structures driving the conflict.<sup>9</sup> Part of the shift in peacebuilding concerns a growing understanding of the gendered nature of war and of the post-conflict order. It has been recognised that women and men are differently affected by war and by peace, and that gender, meaning those “socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women” affects all aspects of society.<sup>10</sup> Gendered hierarchies are of crucial importance for how armed conflict and the peace that follows are played out. At the same time, experiences are diverse and it is important to “go beyond the universalistic narrative of women’s experience of war”.<sup>11</sup> Ethnic identity, socioeconomic situation, rural or urban settings are examples of circumstances that affect individual women’s lives. But importantly, these frameworks are at the same time always gendered.<sup>12</sup> A gender-sensitive reading of contemporary conflicts has unveiled how continuities of violence cross many borders – not only geographically but also between the public and the private.<sup>13</sup> Violence is enacted in domestic or very local spaces in which women are targeted for violence, including sexual violence. Women’s bodies may therefore be understood as the “finest geopolitical space” for contemporary warfare.<sup>14</sup>

In many ways, peace brings more security, but at the same time there are other risks involved in the peacebuilding phase. Legacies of the conflict can be

brutally direct. Rape, forced pregnancies and/or the transmission of HIV/AIDS have consequences far beyond the signing of a peace agreement. The presence of peacekeepers and other international actors has proven to represent a heightened risk for many women as trafficking and prostitution increase and associated violence may turn protector into perpetrator.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, after mass atrocities many war crime perpetrators go unpunished and victims may be forced to confront them in the everyday life, creating ongoing insecurities. In addition, indirect, ‘structural violence’<sup>16</sup> caused by the conflict continues after the end of direct violence and affects women in many ways. Post-war poverty and lack of economic independence are serious obstacles to women’s participation and reduce women’s access to education and empowerment. The participants in the study testified to how a ‘feminisation of poverty’<sup>17</sup> limits women’s space for agency. Corruption was pointed out as a particular aspect of economic and political exclusion.

**W**hile gender roles in times of war may become less fixed and women sometimes manage to gain more influence, this space often decreases once the war is officially over. As soldiers return home, gender relations are adjusted, sometimes violently. Violence against women in private spaces may continue and even increase in the post-conflict period.<sup>18</sup> Several linkages between domestic violence and war were discussed in the focus groups of this study, and the need to further study them were stressed. As one of the Liberian peace activists put it, issues concerning security and domestic violence are “the weakest link” in the peacebuilding chain.

### Victims, mothers and other stereotypes

The cultural and social norms in the contexts this study is concerned with differ vastly, but a common thread is that the women informants all experienced that, while their freedom in many ways had increased during the peacebuilding phase, at the same time at crucial points it had been circumscribed. Their testimonies strongly underline the arguments of gender researcher T. Väyrinen for example, that in order to understand the gendered dynamics of peace processes, we need to pay more attention to cultural and social norms.<sup>19</sup> Normative systems that narrowly define men’s and women’s roles in society tend to become even narrower in times of conflict and post-conflict processes. While





The fight for women's rights in Croatia goes on. Bojana Genov, a member of Women's Network Croatia, gives the officers something to think about. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

the actual space for women and men to take on new tasks in times of conflict may widen, it is at the same time true that war produces a discourse of masculinization and feminization that defines men as soldiers and women as victims and/or nurturing mothers of families, as well as, symbolically, of the whole nation.<sup>20</sup> As with all stereotypes, they may be used to oppress as well as to claim power. The image of women as victims has been reinforced by the international efforts to recognise the violence perpetrated against women. The part of UNSCR 1325 that concerns violence against women has received attention and some progress has been made, especially following UNSCR 1820 (2008), which deals specifically with gender-based violence. These frameworks were further developed in UNSCR 1888 (2009) and 1960 (2010).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, their singular focus on women as victims, a discourse that, for example, has made rape victims in the DRC into an emblematic, global image, may effectively limit the space for agency for women in the peacebuilding stages and force them into passivity.<sup>22</sup> It is a precarious balance, as policymakers in the peacebuilding arena also often fail to recognise the ongoing continuity of violence against women and the excluding insecurities across public and private realms that affect women's participation deeply.

(Ethno)nationalism, as one of the core tools for the drivers of war and conflict, thrives on highly hierarchical and closed positions for men and women, and is put to use in order to strengthen the ongoing work of maintaining borders between 'us' and 'them'. Women are commonly made into the bearers of tradition(s) and men into protectors

of the community and its members.<sup>23</sup> Religion, as a highly normative framework with fixed gender roles, often functions in conjunction with ethnonationalism, as the case study in Bosnia clearly illustrates. Sometimes these norms are directly translated into concrete laws that hinder women, such as the constitutions of Iraq and the DRC, which give different rights to men and women in family law or traditional law. In other countries, while women's rights have been consolidated legally, informal sanctions against women's political agency still "wait for you in the bushes", as one of the participants from Bosnia put it. The slandering of women that step into politics and other public positions as 'dirty' has been a common technique serving to maintain informal exclusions.

Another potent stereotype, but with positive connotations, is the popular image of women as 'mothers'. In all the post-conflict settings studied in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, women embraced the role as mothers, because it gave them a position from which they could make some claims. As will be discussed, this position also holds many pitfalls and an analysis of how such stereotypes are put to work give insights into the way women develop strategies for their limited space for agency.

As researchers C. Bell and C. O'Rourke point out, a tension exists between the presentation and representation of women "as women", or as political actors motivated by other forms of political identity, or by a complex combination".<sup>24</sup> One consequence is that women are treated as representatives of a

sectarian interest. Another consequence is that the presence of women in decision-making bodies is often taken as a guarantee that issues of gender inequalities will be addressed. In fact, as the findings in this study show, women in elected positions are often used by powerbrokers within political parties as ‘window-dressing’. Researcher A. Cornwall argues: “The mere presence of women in the decision making committees without a voice can be counter-productive in the sense that it can be used to legitimise a decision taken by male members”.<sup>25</sup> This process is repeatedly illustrated by the case studies of Armenia, Bosnia and Iraq, where on the one hand gender quotas have opened the way for women’s participation, but on the other hand to a large extent are controlled by male gatekeepers who keep women with political know-how and influence off the lists and instead choose women who will ‘listen and obey’.

### Recognition without action

The sobering overview above of the circumventions to women’s participation stands in striking contrast to the multifaceted and pluralistic forms of engagement for peace that women actually initiate and take part in. The participants in the focus groups provided many examples. Some have managed to enter formal spaces of peace negotiations, or set up parallel forums that have changed the course of war and peace. Some have contributed to groundbreaking judicial reform that challenged customary law, others advocate for issues concerning political representation. For example, they may be working with the possibilities for female politicians to enter parliament and government, or the writing of budgets that take into consideration women’s socio-economic needs and responsibilities. Others work with local issues and change the lives of thousands of individual women who are given a chance to deal with their traumas from exposure to gender-based war crimes, as well as ongoing domestic violence. Their work goes on at all levels: from international lobbying and global cooperation with other actors; to peacebuilding and providing security and safe



Demonstration to remember the genocide in Srebrenica, Belgrade, September 2009. Participants in the demonstration are from The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Kosovo, Israel and Palestine that took part in an exchange program. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Anna Levin.

spaces in local settings. In contrast to the ongoing framing of women into certain fixed roles in war and peace, it is very clear that women take on many identities and claim a variety of spaces and that their agency opens and closes in diverse ways depending on the context.<sup>26</sup>

There is a growing understanding of the gendered aspects of peacebuilding. The democratic and human rights standpoint that gender should not be a reason for exclusion is frequently bolstered by the argument that if women do not participate, peace will not be sustainable. While the relationship between gender equality and peace is highly complex and needs to be explored further, a number of studies point to a positive correlation between gender equality within a state and the state’s peaceful relations with other states, as well as links between higher levels of gender equality and lower levels of intrastate armed conflict.<sup>27</sup> The importance of women’s participation in peace processes has been recognised formally in a plethora of forums, not least by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 to three women peacemakers.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, despite global recognition of women as peacebuilders and insights that a sustainable peace cannot exclude half the population, not much has changed on the ground. A glaring gap exists between the auspicious words in international resolutions, reports and strategies, and how they are used on

## Only 36 countries worldwide have so far adopted national action plans (NAPs) implementing UNSCR 1325, and resources are often scant for the implementation of these plans.

the ground and put into practice. For example, the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 was a watershed for security policy. The resolution calls for states to not only work for the protection of women in war and conflict, but importantly also for the participation of women in peace processes. More than a decade after its adoption however, the concrete results are discouraging. A case in point is peace negotiations – of particular importance as formative moments for gender-equal participation in peace processes. Women have made up only eight percent of peace negotiation delegations since the mid-1990s; a number that seems to actually have decreased since the adoption of UNSCR 1325.<sup>29</sup> Not only is gender-equal participation a distant goal, it is also clear that provisions for gender equality in the texts of peace agreements are scant. Not even a third of all peace agreements made after the resolution include any reference at all to gender.<sup>30</sup>

According to an examination by UNIFEM of 300 peace agreements (dealing with roughly 45 conflicts since 1989), only 18 mention sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Even fewer make any provisions for holding the perpetrators of SGBV accountable or for organising redress for survivors. In many peace accord texts, women are sweepingly referred to as a group in need of assistance – alongside the elderly, children or the disabled – but the kind of assistance is hardly ever specified. Women's ownership of, or access to, land, crucial in many agricultural societies or other wealth-sharing mechanisms, are

hardly ever mentioned. UNIFEM's statistics show that there is only a slight improvement in the peace agreements brokered since 2003.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, reading UNSCR 1970 and 1973, which sanctioned the international intervention in Libya, gender is completely ignored. No reference at all is made to UNSCR 1325, women or sexual violence.<sup>32</sup> Hence, the Libyan operation, said to herald a new era of interventions driven by the notion of "responsibility to protect", failed to implement the principal's clear texts on the gendered nature of war and peace.<sup>33</sup>

In line with the above discussion on stereotypes and limiting social and cultural norms, actors beyond the war-makers often have their legitimacy questioned in peacebuilding processes. Since women seldom take on positions in which they are responsible for waging war (and if they do, seldom in the kind of senior position that would give them a ticket to the negotiations), what follows is a general exclusion of women from peace talks and other processes. The question is asked whom they represent, and women's organisations are then categorised as representing sectarian interests. Women who have been highly visible when conducting peace work and bridge-building during or before war become marginalised in the peace accord stage – a process that all participants in this study had experienced. It is thus a pertinent observation by the leading women's rights advocate S. Naraghi Anderlini that peace negotiations may often be a continuation of war. She observes that the focus is on getting the war makers to the table, however they "...rarely have the requisite experience and expertise in peacemaking or coexistence. Yet they are charged with the responsibility and power to bring peace."<sup>34</sup> As women in all contexts in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* state: women are not recognised as relevant actors, and the multi-faceted peace work that they perform is not noticed neither recognised.

Putting all the power over the negotiations in the hands of persons and groups without any peacebuilding experience is a dangerous practice, as the participants from the South Caucasus context gave interesting examples of. Since nearly half of all wars relapse into further wars, it is a practice that needs to be seriously questioned: apparently, it is difficult to turn warlords into peacelords overnight.

Actors involved in the period following the peace negotiations often display the same ignorance of the importance of women's participation. In most national contexts, although women's organisations

use the international resolutions to strengthen their demands for participation, many doors remain firmly closed. Only 36 countries worldwide have so far adopted national action plans (NAPs) implementing UNSCR 1325, and resources are often scant for the implementation of these plans.<sup>35</sup>

Among EU Member States, 13 out of 27 have adopted national action plans for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. At a regional level, the EU is working to develop consistent policies. In 2008 the Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security<sup>36</sup> was adopted. It was followed by a set of indicators two years later. A first monitoring report shows that some important actions have been taken (e.g. the establishment of the EU Task Force on Women, Peace, and Security) but also that more systematic work is needed in order to turn policy into impact on the ground.<sup>37</sup>

### Reaching out beyond formal actors

Despite ongoing exclusions, women have managed to claim civil society as a space of their own from which they engage actively with other aspects of society. At the same time, there are forces at work that are marginalising civil society. Informal actors are in general afforded limited attention. In addition, they are sometimes usurped when newly consolidated state actors in the post-conflict phase move in to take control over the issues. In other cases, organisations run by private entrepreneurs crowd the space of civil society. All such developments tend to create double exclusions of women: not only are women in general marginalised but also the informal networks in which they are often active.

One stands to lose much by excluding civil society in peace processes. In a study of several peace processes researchers, A. Wanis-St. John and D. Kew found a clear link between sustainable peace and the involvement of civil society organisations. All cases where civil society had been directly involved in peace negotiations, resulted in sustained peace. Examples include Guatemala (1996), Sierra Leone (2000) and Mozambique (1992). Another clear link was found between cases where civil society representatives did not participate themselves at the table, but still exercised a strong influence over the negotiators. When these were democratically oriented, the resulting peace was also sustainable. By contrast, most cases with little or no involvement of civil society actors in the peace process relapsed into

conflict at a later stage. Without the involvement of a broader spectrum of society, there is a risk getting what former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger called “back channel” negotiations, characterized by secrecy and with the great majority of those concerned left out.<sup>38</sup> While there are no guarantees that civil society is inherently peaceful, there is clearly a lot to be gained from including civil society actors to a higher degree.<sup>39</sup> Not only, as argued above, does it increase the chances of sustainable peace, it can change the paradigm of the routine exclusion of women because ‘no women can be found’. Creating Track-II mediation processes, which opens the way for a variety of actors, is one way of trying to feed the voices of civil society and other relevant key actors into the peace negotiation process. Such parallel processes are widely advocated today, and may have an impact on the official negotiation process if there are established channels for communication.<sup>40</sup>

As peacebuilding is no longer solely concerned with ending violence, but involves a long-term commitment to end war, and as global interconnections and commitments grow, there is no doubt that the actions of international actors are of paramount importance and have deep impacts on local and national processes. Many of the women activists in this study gave due credit to the presence of the international community in the post-conflict period. Civil society organisations had been given crucial support, UNSCR 1325 had been introduced onto the national agenda, and attention was given to key processes such as DDDR to which a gender perspective had been added. Developments were often driven by a number of key individuals who also fought hard for a gender perspective within their own international organisations. Nevertheless, in all contexts it was clear that there were many instances where international actors had been co-opted by local norms, and where international actors ignored women as peacebuilders and hence failed to recognise them as allies crucial in any peacebuilding undertaking. “Why have they ignored our experience and our role?” This direct question was raised by most informants in this study and must be posed again and again to international actors themselves, in order to bring to the fore processes of exclusions. “It just happens that way”, said one of the people involved in the so-called Butmir negotiations on the constitutional impasse in Bosnia to which no Bosnian women had been invited, illustrating the inertia that is so prevalent. The reasons for this

lack of action are certainly manifold: for example, disinterest in the topic; deafness to local, gendered micropractices at the household level; ongoing prejudiced stereotyping of women which strips them of agency; and a general bluntness in the mechanisms of large peacebuilding operations, which fail to pick up on the complex and multifaceted ways that gender hierarchies are maintained and reinforced.

One might also observe that while international organisations, donors and other actors take care to mainstream gender issues, there are signs that in fragile peace processes, there is instead a tendency to step back from contentious issues concerning gender equality, and make ill-informed decisions based on the belief that gender can be added as an afterthought, according to the infamous excuse that “we had a war to stop”. The way that the war is stopped has direct implications for the quality of the subsequent peace. For decades it has been debated whether a “justice vs. peace” dilemma exists in post-conflict phases, and whether injustices and crimes sometimes should go unaddressed in order not to upset fragile peace processes. It seems that in a similar way, gender equality is sometimes ignored to establish and then keep the peace: a “gender justice vs. peace” dilemma that, as Bell and O’Rourke assert, “needs to be specifically named and addressed”.<sup>41</sup>

### Understandings of power

As this introduction has shown, post-conflict contexts are sites for power struggles. If women are to gain access and be able to fully participate in peace processes, we need to more deeply understand the power dynamics that fuel ongoing exclusions and learn to recognise the way power travels through formal and informal settings, and how exclusions are established and upheld through multifaceted obstacles — some brutally direct, others more subtle.

Gaining access to power may mean different things. Fundamentally, it has to do with being able to determine what the important issues about which decisions will be made are: setting the agenda. Power is often studied as the open struggle around formal decision-making.<sup>42</sup> As shown in the discussion above, underlying norms also need to be taken into account. Discourses can present limited and hegemonic understandings of a certain subject, and often produce stereotypes. Stereotypes are powerful, and make it difficult to think critically about changing the norm; to challenge that which is con-

sidered normal. Power is distributed and negotiated according to these stereotypes, which determine who is considered suitable for certain positions within formal decision-making arenas.<sup>43</sup> As the social theorist M. Foucault argued, power is disciplinary, as it shapes and normalizes ideas and the framework for understanding the world. To deviate from the norm may be impossible, even dangerous.<sup>44</sup>

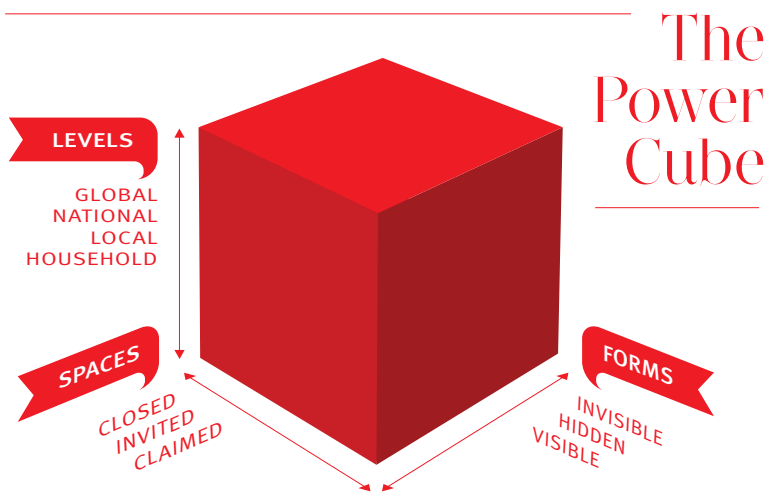
Another prominent social and political theorist, S. Lukes, made the important observation that the use of power always means that some issues are automatically excluded from being decided about at all. An analysis of power must therefore investigate the power used to prevent issues, individuals or groups of people from being considered relevant in the first place. Lukes also pointed out the internalised dimensions of power, concerned with the fact that people may be unconscious of the subtle workings of power, and that some may even embrace positions of inferiority.<sup>45</sup> Hierarchies are maintained because the powerless are incapable of even recognising the exclusion and acting upon it.<sup>46</sup>

It is also important to understand how power is enacted at different levels and arenas. Power and powerlessness are experienced in public realms as well as private realms that involve relationships and roles within families, friendships and marriage for example, and intimate realms of power that have to do with personal confidence, emotions and one’s relationship to one’s body and health. Importantly, an individual may be quite powerful in one aspect of her life, and less powerful in another.<sup>47</sup> As noted above in the discussion on the continuities of violence, for many women in post-conflict societies, the way rights are negotiated as part of the micropolitics of the family, village or neighbourhood are not separate but part of a wider political realm. In private or local spaces, “power is flexed subtly or brutally, authority is exercised and challenged and the game of politics is played out”.<sup>48</sup>

Foucault’s analysis has made an important contribution, since he changed the understanding of power as a finite quantity that is divided up between various stakeholders, between those who ‘have’ power and those that want power. Instead, he understood power to be produced in an ongoing relationship between various actors. To exemplify, the empowering of women is sometimes interpreted as implicating that power must be taken away from men. The standpoint here is rather the contrary: that the transformation of societies towards sustainable peace, which also includes gender equality, results in an overall societal gain.

### Methodology: A power analysis

To analyse the multifaceted aspects of obstacles to women's participation in peace processes *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* employs a model of power called the Power Cube, which has been developed by J. Gaventa, J. Pettit and L. Cornish of the Participation, Power and Social Change team at IDS, Sussex University, U.K.<sup>49</sup> The cube's three dimensions provide the structure of the methodology for power analysis in our five case studies and access the different dimensions of power outlined above.



made, to which women in post-conflict countries as a rule have had very limited access. Decisions in these spheres may have a lot of influence on people's lives, but are still not open. Demands for accountability and participation have led to the creation of invited spaces, where powerholders invite other representatives who may participate and be consulted. Inviting women's groups to have consultative functions in peace negotiations is an example of an invited space. Claimed spaces may be created by those seeking power. In *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*,

we understand them to be the spaces created by social movements and various associations – from global social media campaigns to local neighbourhood forums. They are spaces in society where claims can be asserted and issues raised that otherwise are not put on the agenda. Sometimes the actors in these spaces mobilise to enter closed, formal spaces; sometimes they prefer to stay separate and use their claimed space as a space for monitoring formal decision-making spaces such as governments, international bodies, etc. Women's organisations have been suc-

In the figure, three dimensions of how power is distributed and exercised are outlined:

- Spaces outline various arenas for participation and action. These spaces are defined as closed, invited and claimed spaces.
- Forms engage with how power manifests itself: in visible, hidden and invisible forms.
- Levels refer to the different layers of authority and power held by decision-makers, including global, national, local and household levels.

### Spaces of power

We use the concept of space not only to depict physical spaces. Spaces are also “opportunities, moments and channels” for discourses, policies, etc. – realms of action where decisions are made.<sup>50</sup> Spaces can be divided into closed, invited and claimed, according to the Power Cube framework. Closed spaces include realms of decision-making that are open only to a defined set of actors who may act as representatives of others. Parliament is one example of such a closed space where formal decisions are

successful in making demands and influencing formal bodies, such as the lobbying for the coming into being of UNCSR 1325.

### Levels of power

As discussed above, in contemporary peacebuilding, a multitude of actors take part and we can see how power travels through different levels. Global governance has developed an intricate interaction of actors at different levels. The international level has been discussed in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* in terms of the work of formal institutions, the adoption of international resolutions and their impact as they travel ‘down’ to the local level. We have also pointed out how the national level is important in the post-conflict writing of new constitutions and budgets, but that the level of the state is often contested and that power and security reside with other actors.

We can see how civil society is a level that is instrumental in establishing a gender-equal peace, but also its limitations in making an impact in decision-making at national and international levels. There is also a need to acknowledge power rela-

tions at domestic levels. For many women, gendered “micropractices of power” at the household level and in their close relationships deeply affect their access to power at other levels.<sup>51</sup>

### Forms of power

The exercise of forms of power may be visible (legislation, political bodies and consultative fora, as well as within social movements and organisations); hidden (the creation of barriers for participation, what is put on the agenda, for example, the discursive framing of what is important or not); and invisible (what may be defined as “the internalisation of powerlessness”).<sup>52</sup> As Gaventa points out, visible power is based on the assumption that “decision-making arenas are neutral playing-fields, in which any players who have issues to raise may engage freely”.<sup>53</sup> As the examples above concerning hidden forms of power exemplify, this is certainly not the case. As we have seen in the discussion above, the examples of how women’s organisations struggle in order to get some issues on the agenda are examples of challenges to hidden forms of power. The concept of hidden power points to unequal structures that powerless people or groups are aware of and may address through various forms of action. The concept of invisible power deepens the analysis even further. It is concerned with the internalisation of norms and ideas that limit agency. The work of Lukes and Foucault unveils the strength in these discourses as they are adopted by the very people oppressed by

them. At the same time, Foucault and others argue that there is “always resistance” and point to the ongoing confrontation and transformation of oppressive norms and social practices.

### Central objectives and selection of informants

*Equal Power – Lasting Peace* is concerned with peace-builders in civil society. While peace processes deeply impact both men and women, *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* focuses on women’s participation. It attempts to access the considerable body of knowledge and experiences built up among women’s organizations that has not yet been empirically collected and systematically analysed.<sup>54</sup> As women are active mostly in civil society organisations, used as a platform for their interactions based on varying strategies with other levels and spaces in society, we decided to focus the study on civil society actors.

The main site for data collection was the focus group, which was organised in each context. These focus groups were followed by a number of interviews with key individuals from civil society as well as national and international institutions. Organisations and participants were found by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

In each case study, we trace the work of women’s organisations in their efforts to gain power and influence and bridge the gap between informal and formal networks. Furthermore, in order to under-

A letter was sent out to the focus group participants a few weeks before the focus group session in which the aims of the groups were stated as follows:

Our main interest is to hear about your experiences of participation in peace processes and in peace-building. We will reflect together upon the power relationships between different actors, and try to understand the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that affect your possibilities as women’s organisations to contribute and work for a gender-equal peace. Hence, we will focus on the much neglected aspects of agency and power – how to obtain it, how to use it and how to maintain it. We are interested in your personal experiences of challenging norms and claiming access to spaces where women have not been included.

#### Discussion questions:

→ What do you think are/may be vital contributions of women’s groups to central issues of peace and security?

→ What difficulties have you encountered in trying to bring issues that concern women, peace and security onto the agenda? What have you achieved, and how?

→ Regarding the relationship between civil society and national, formal actors as well as international actors – how does it work and how can it be improved? How are you as civil society representatives perceived by these actors?

→ How can issues of gender equality be put on the formal agenda? What tools have been most effective? How does political representation of women in formal institutions affect the possibilities of working for a gender-equal peace?

→ How do social and economic circumstances (such as poverty, lack of information) impact on women’s participation in peace processes?

→ How do (ethno)political, social and cultural norms affect the possibilities of working for a gender-equal peace?

stand the mechanisms of peacebuilding in which a multitude of informal and formal actors are active, we have also included (national and international) representatives of formal institutions and positions, in order to access their points of view regarding what hinders women's participation in peacebuilding processes.

A question guide based on this overarching theme and designed based on the various aspects of the Power Cube was prepared and used as a blueprint for all focus groups. It served as a checklist and support for the focus group facilitator (the researcher). The questions were treated as a wide framework for the purposes of structuring and comparing the results of the different case studies. A lot of time was given to input from the participants that was not covered by the initial questions.

### Comparative aspects

While to a certain extent the cases were chosen because of their heterogeneity, the design of the case studies along similar lines opens the way for a comparative discussion, which is found in the concluding chapter. There, we return to the Power Cube and draw out comparisons and observations in the cases that relate to the different aspects of the cube. However it should already be pointed out that the analysis is not a static exercise of trying to 'tick all the boxes' of the Power Cube. Rather, the cube should be understood as a conceptual tool that helps and inspires us and the reader to untangle the intricate power relationships that emerge from the case studies.

### Focus groups and individual interviews

The focus groups (ranging in number from 7 to 13 participants) gathered for nearly a full day's discussion (9 am to 3 pm). They were held in Baku, Yerevan, Kinshasa, Bukavu, Erbil, Monrovia and Sarajevo. The participants were all members of women's peace organisations. The discussions were filmed/recorded. Interpreters were used in all cases except Liberia where the focus group was conducted in English.

Focus groups are a special form of research method, since they create a site for knowledge production for the participants as well as the researcher/facilitator. The facilitator hands over a certain amount of control to the group participants. The dynamics that are thereby set in motion may reveal new ideas and new themes that are well grounded in the participants' own experience. Instead of a predictable question-and-answer interview with single respondents, this setting allows for a more free-flow-

ing discussion on why people feel a certain way. For example, when an individual listens to other participants' views, she may pick up the thread and get help to reflect upon her own experiences, possibly in a new way. Furthermore, in standard interviews, respondents are seldom challenged on the views they put forward, whereas in a focus group, this is often the case. Participants may need to argue for their point of view, instead of just saying the easy thing, which might in fact be a timesaving and strategic choice for many a hard-pressed activist.

**T**he focus group was designed not only to draw out data, but also to get information about how the members of the group interact and how they build upon each other's views: they are not just individuals, but also members of the group. "Focus groups reflect the processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life".<sup>55</sup> The researcher acts as a facilitator and tries to keep her role as unobtrusive as possible.

After each focus group, interviews were conducted with some participants, as well as other women peacebuilders who did not participate in the focus group. The themes that had emerged in the focus group could be further explored and probed into here. These were complemented with some 15 (in total) interviews with several key individuals who were, or had been, instrumental in decision-making, negotiations and post-conflict decision-making. These interviews gave insights into the formal understanding and reasoning behind the obstacles to women's participation and gendered peacebuilding. Respondents were drawn from both national and international authorities in order to access central actors in each post-conflict process.

### The research process – a site of power relations

Focus groups have been pointed out as a feminist research method that takes the issue of power in interview situations seriously. This method avoids decontextualising and allows for marginal voices to be heard and taken seriously in a supportive context. However, the method generates its own potential power relations, which need to be acknowledged. Group effects may silence views that stick out. What you may say in a one-to-one interview may not surface in a focus group, where this particular view might not be socially acceptable. As in all groups, there may be certain things that you simply do not speak about. This might be especially the case in groups of individuals from mixed backgrounds, for





Now there is peace in the streets of Monrovia. Much thanks to the Liberian women who stood up for their rights. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

example coming from different sides of the conflict. These groups have often worked out finely tuned strategies for what one may talk about and what one may not talk about publicly. Breaches of this unwritten code may put cooperation in peril.

In addition, in this research process the fact that many participants knew each other and shared similar concerns was certainly a strength, since this made it easy to create an environment of trust. But it may also have been a weakness, since it must be taken into account that participants may be stuck in certain patterns and in power relationships with each other, used to ensure that certain individuals have a greater say. These weaknesses were partly remedied in the complementary interviews.

### Ethical considerations

The participants in the focus groups and interviews were granted anonymity. Considering issues of security as well as personal integrity, this was deemed the most ethical design.

### Research as empowerment

The use of the Power Cube as a point of departure was empowering in itself, since it helped to open up connections and new issues during the discussions in the focus groups. In addition, a method of respondent validation was used. The participants in the focus groups were given the opportunity to read the accounts and analysis and provide input and comments. Not only did this strengthen the validity of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* and provided

an opportunity to clarify misunderstandings and fill in gaps, it also opened the way for an empowering process in which the relationship between the researchers and respondents continued to be treated as a site for the ongoing building of knowledge. However, it should be noted that the last stage of the analysis process rested in the hands of the researchers.

Hence, the overall research process for *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* shares some points of departure with action research in its normative

grounding, since action research has been defined as “its commitment to involving people in the diagnosis of and solutions to problems rather than imposing on them solutions to pre-defined problems”.<sup>56</sup>

### Photos

The women activists who are in focus in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, that is the participants in the focus groups – are not presented with their names. The photos used in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* are not to be connected with the focus groups or interviewed. The pictures presented are mainly from activities arranged by The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation’s partner organisations in conflict-affected regions. Some of the photos have been taken by Kvinna till Kvinna personnel, some by professional photographers and some by the partner organisations themselves.

In the following chapters, we further explore the five different conflicts that are the focus for *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*.

3.1

Population of Armenia in millions  
(The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

# Armenian Apostolic

Main religion in Armenia  
([www.infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com))

99.6%

Literacy rate in Armenia  
(Ages 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)

29

Maternity mortality  
per 100.000 live births in Armenia

9.3

Population of Azerbaijan in millions  
(The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

# Islam

Main religion in Azerbaijan  
([www.infoplease.com](http://www.infoplease.com))

99.8%

Literacy rate in Azerbaijan  
(Ages 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)

38

Maternity mortality  
per 100.000 live births in Azerbaijan



In Armenia women are granted equal rights under the law, but the implementation of the law is poor and the mechanisms for monitoring are very limited.

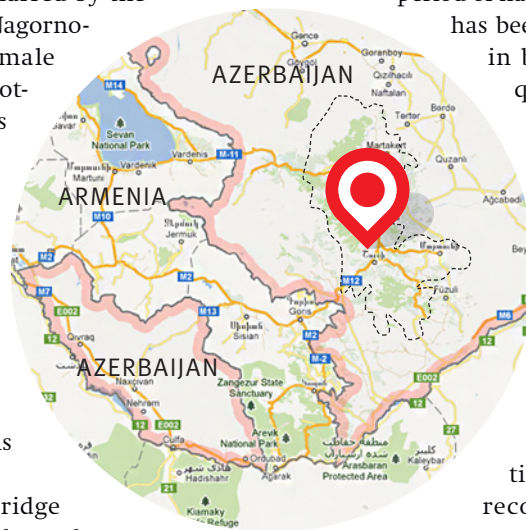
# Armenia and Azerbaijan. Stuck in conflict over Nagorno- Karabakh.

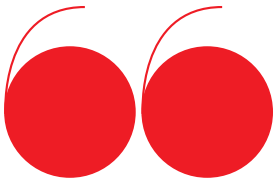
In the South Caucasus,<sup>57</sup> dialogue programmes with Armenian and Azerbaijani women have been initiated and conducted by women's organisations. The 'enemy' image is strong in a region that is marred by the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. Traditional female roles as care-oriented mothers and non-political actors provide a limited window for women to meet with the 'enemy' and explore paths of reconciliation. When women from the different groups affected by the conflict first meet the tension is high, but over time an understanding of shared problems emerges.<sup>58</sup>

In their capacity as bridge builders at grassroots level, gendered norms of honour and hierarchies of power do not hinder women. However, traditional ideas in these societies of what a woman 'should be' severely limit women's agency and freedom of movement. Women cannot participate in society and political life on the same terms as men. As politics in general is regarded as a dirty and corrupt business,

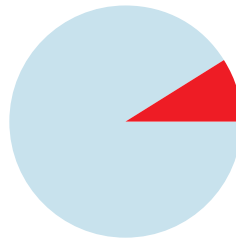
women risk a great deal merely by being associated with it, such as the options for marriage and family life. In civil society, although women have a strong position after taking a pioneering role during the period of national liberation, civil society has been curtailed in various ways in both countries. As a consequence, women face double exclusion: they are kept out of formal politics, while at the same time civil society, where women have claimed space, has been marginalised.

In the Caucasus region, gender roles not only deeply shape society but are also impacting the potential for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Important reconciliation initiatives by women are not taken seriously in national politics, where a low level of participation by women limits democracy and decreases the legitimacy of the power of formal political institutions. Furthermore, the involvement of the international community is not sufficiently gender-aware. In the formal peace negotiations, women and gender awareness are absent.





Much thanks to persistent lobbying from women's groups a law on domestic violence was adopted in Azerbaijan in 2010. However, domestic violence is still a widespread problem in the region.



9%

Share of women in parliament in Armenia.

In summary:

- The on-going formal peace negotiation process has not included civil society in general or women's organisations in particular.
- Widespread corruption in the region severely limits women's access to influential networks and elected positions.
- Cultural norms deprive women of space for agency in society.
- Independent civil society, the political space in which women have a strong position, is marginalised by official political structures.
- International community institutions are not fulfilling their potential to strengthen the legitimacy of civil society in general and women's organisations in particular.

## 1. Background

Azerbaijan and Armenia are still formally at war over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Competing claims regarding territorial integrity and self-determination of the region are at heart of the conflict. On the one hand, the borders of Azerbaijan (which include the region of Nagorno-Karabakh) were internationally recognised at the time of the country being recognised as an independent state in 1991. On the other hand, the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh claim the right to self-determination.

Nagorno-Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, and no state (including Armenia) has recognized its declaration of independence. The conflict is officially considered to be 'frozen'<sup>59</sup>, but there is still on-going sporadic gunfire along the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan and along the 'line-of-contact'.<sup>60</sup>

### The conflict

During the Soviet era, Armenians and Azerbaijanis lived together in the area and there was a large

minority of the other ethnic group in both republics. Different ethnic groups were also represented in the population of Nagorno-Karabakh, but the largest group was Armenian. In 1988, the Armenian delegates of the local soviet (decision-making body during the Soviet Union times) in Nagorno-Karabakh voted to unite the region with the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Tension grew between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and violence between the groups erupted in both republics.

In December 1991, when the Soviet Union was formally dissolved, both Azerbaijan and Armenia declared themselves independent. Soon after, a referendum on independence was held in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, which then proclaimed itself an independent new state, separate from Azerbaijan. Local Azerbaijanis boycotted the referendum. An overwhelming majority of those who voted supported the proposal for an independent state. Shortly thereafter, an armed conflict broke out over Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In May 1994, a ceasefire came into force through Russian mediation, but without reaching a deal that secured a lasting peace. Today, Armenia controls both Nagorno-Karabakh and several adjacent Azerbaijani regions. Armenia has soldiers stationed in the Nagorno-Karabakh region and adjacent districts, and the Armenian government pours considerable budgetary resources into the area.

Over one million people lost their homes as a result of the conflict. The large population movements that took place led to the dissolution of the multi-ethnic societies that had once characterised Armenia and Azerbaijan. Neither population group has been able to return 'home' since the end of the war. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)<sup>61</sup> lived under harsh conditions after the war, and to a large extent have been forced to survive on humanitarian aid and state subsidies. Today, some of the affected groups enjoy relatively better living con-



Armenia and Azerbaijan are both source countries for trafficking, with girls ending up mainly in Turkey or the United Arab Emirates.<sup>82</sup>



Armenia: A new Electoral Code was adopted in June 2011, with provisions for some of the most progressive quotas in the region. The Code stipulates that 20 percent on a party list must be women, and that at least every tenth position in the list must be reserved for a woman.



The people in Nagorno-Karabakh struggle with their everyday life, poverty is widespread due to the conflict. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

ditions but in general refugees and IDPs suffer from higher rates of unemployment and have less income compared to the rest of the population. The issue of permanent housing for the groups affected has not been solved. Many refugees and IDPs still live in temporarily shelters. Some refugees and IDPs do not want to lose the identity or the benefits that come with that status.<sup>62</sup> It is uncertain how many refugees and IDPs really would like to return to their pre-war home location if given the chance. The issues of lost property and options for repatriation are still controversial and much debated in the region.

**T**he war over Nagorno-Karabakh was contemporary with the Bosnian war, but unlike the latter, there were no reports of systematic sexual violence against women in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Rapes of women occurred in connection with other acts of war, but according to local women's organisations, the incidence was relatively low. Incidents with local aid workers who demanded

sex for food (packages) were also reported. In the aftermath of war, the level of domestic violence is likely to have risen, according to observations made by local women's organisations, but there are no official statistics available to confirm this trend. However today, domestic violence as a

consequence of post-traumatic stress caused by the war persists and as such is sometimes even excused by the victims (the women themselves).

### Peace negotiations

Following the ceasefire in 1994, an international mediated peace process was established under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>63</sup> The process is known as the Minsk Group and is currently run by three Co-Chairs, representing the United States, Russia and France. The format of the negotiations has changed over the years, with a slightly broader representation during some periods.<sup>64</sup> Today, the negotiations take place only at top level, with talks between the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, followed by meetings at which the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and representatives of the Minsk Group are informed of developments.<sup>65</sup> The Minsk Group has been criticised for lacking in transparency and communication with the populations of both republics. Also, the set of countries represented in



1. The Women's Resource Center arranged a march in Yerevan on March 25, 2011, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. The march was lead by a feminist band playing drums Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. 2. Sevan, Armenia, 2007. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Stina Magnusson Buur. 3. Nagorno-Karabakh, 2008. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation. 4. Demonstration against domestic violence arranged by Women's Resource Center, in Yerevan, 2007. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

the Group has been questioned. Voices have been raised advocating for the inclusion of the EU in the formal negotiation process.<sup>66</sup>

Over the years, the Minsk Group has produced a number of proposals to solve the conflict. The most recent proposal is the Madrid Principle. The most pressing issue is to get the parties to agree on how the referendum on the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh is to take place. Prior to a top-level meeting in Kazan in June 2011, there was hope of a breakthrough. But the meeting ended in deadlock, and since then the process has been stalled and the rhetoric used by the two governments has become increasingly aggressive.

During the war and the years just after it, some women contributed to and participated in peace

negotiations. Women refer to this period as 'the golden years for women's participation'. There were women in parliament from both sides who participated in the peace negotiations. Also a de facto woman Foreign Minister was appointed in Nagorno-Karabakh in 1995. She participated in negotiations and had meetings with women's groups, bringing the information they provided to the negotiating table.<sup>67</sup> But during all this time, no women were included in the Minsk Group, either as Co-Chair or Special Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on the conflict.<sup>68</sup>

### Civil society

During the time of Soviet rule, civil society was severely crippled in the South Caucasus. In connection with the emergence of national liberation

movements in the region in the late 1980s, civil society initiatives arose and when international support entered the scene after the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a virtual explosion of NGOs. During the war, civil society organisations actively took part in trying to stop the armed conflict and they contributed ideas in respect of ‘permanent status’ and ‘road maps’, that were later placed at the negotiation table.<sup>69</sup>

Today, civil society organisations in the region are well developed in quantity, but still live with shortcomings in quality. The overall lack of democratic culture in the region also characterizes civil society, where the organisations tend to be hierarchal. Women’s organisations are no exception: many are run top-down and the survival of the organisation is often dependent on one or two people. Suppression by the authorities is common, especially in Azerbaijan, where the state is cracking down hard on CSOs with a political agenda.

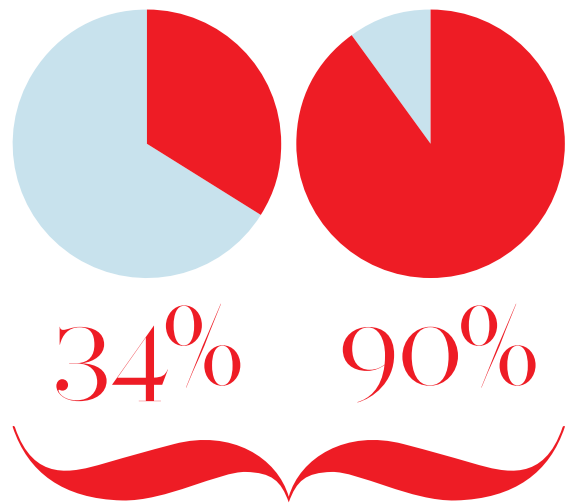
### Legal rights

In both countries, women are granted equal rights under the law, but the implementation of the law is poor and the mechanisms for monitoring compliance are very limited. Armenian and Azerbaijani laws support the principle of financial independence for women. Under this law, women and men have the same access to land. In practice, the percentage of female property owners is low, because women who work tend to earn much less than men, and many women are not employed at all. Land ownership is primarily in the hands of men, which means that women can access land only in the absence of a male head of the family.<sup>70</sup>

Since the war ended, women’s organisations have successfully lobbied for changes in legislation and legal provisions concerning women’s rights. In Armenia, women’s groups have been a strong force behind new legislation on domestic violence and an amendment to the criminal code concerning sexual violence. Thanks in large part to persistent lobbying from women’s groups, a law on domestic violence was passed in Azerbaijan in 2010. In Azerbaijan, gender focal points are mandatory in all central government ministries and committees, as well as at the regional government level.

### Political participation

Before the fall of the Soviet Union, women held around 40 percent of the seats in the local parliaments<sup>71</sup> in the region. This figure dropped drastically in the post-Soviet period (in Azerbaijan, from 39



In Armenia, harsh economic conditions have resulted in an unemployment rate of 34 percent, and 90 percent of the population live below the poverty line.<sup>77</sup>

to 11 percent). Only in the last election did the number of female parliamentarians increase notably in Azerbaijan, from 11 to 16 percent.<sup>72</sup> In the current government, none of the cabinet ministers is a woman. All mayors or political party leaders are men. Women are also under-represented in political parties.

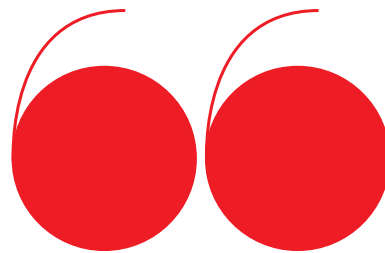
In Armenia, 9<sup>73</sup> of the members of the National Assembly are women, at the time of writing. With such a small proportion of women, Armenia ranks at 108 out of 131 countries when comparing the number of seats held by women in the parliament.<sup>74</sup> Among 18 ministers in the government, one is a woman, the Minister for Cultural Affairs. A new Electoral Code was adopted in June 2011, with provisions for some of the most progressive quotas in the region.<sup>75</sup> The Code stipulates that 20 percent on a party list must be women, and that at least every tenth position in the list must be reserved for a woman. In the new Electoral Act, the fee to run for a single member seat<sup>76</sup> has been reduced by more than half. This provision is expected to encourage less established candidates with fewer resources, which women often are, to participate in the parliamentary elections in 2012.

### Socio-economic issues and security

In both Armenia and Azerbaijan, women suffered a backlash in economic and social life after the fall of the Soviet Union. When the market economy and multiparty system were introduced, women lost ground in society, while men consolidated their decision-making positions and acquired property during the privatization process. In Armenia, harsh economic conditions have resulted in an unemployment rate of 34 percent, and 90 percent of the population live below the poverty line.<sup>77</sup> Armenian women are particularly affected by unemployment and other burdens connected to running single female-headed households, which has become increasingly common due to the high rate of emigration among men.

The hard times since independence and subsequent conflicts, have affected women's rights, especially when it comes to their health, safety and economic opportunities. Medical assistance, and specific women's health care, is virtually non-existent in many places in the region. The high cost of contraception, ignorance of family planning, many abortions, high infant mortality, women dying in childbirth and sexually transmitted diseases, shows a lack of sexual and reproductive rights. Domestic violence is a widespread problem in the region, but there is no official national statistic available, that shows the breadth of the problem. But according to a study by Amnesty International, more than a quarter of the women in Armenia have faced physical violence at the hands of their husbands or other family members.<sup>78</sup> In Azerbaijan, studies indicate that almost half of the female population suffers from different forms of violence, with 59 percent of the violence occurring in the home.<sup>79</sup> Many of these women have little choice but to remain in abusive situations, since reporting violence is strongly stigmatized in Azerbaijani society. The marriage of young girls, sometimes as young as 11–12 years, is another serious problem in the region. Despite a newly adopted law on the age for marriage in Azerbaijan, the habit of early marriages continues.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, bride-napping<sup>81</sup> is a harmful tradition, which is believed to have increased in several places within the region. In some cases, there may be a link between early marriages (it happens that parents are paid), and problems with trafficking for the sex trade in the region. Armenia and Azerbaijan are both source countries for trafficking, with women ending up mainly in Russia, Turkey or the United Arab Emirates.<sup>82</sup> Often, these young women have no valid papers and no family to miss them, and it is difficult to track down and help them.

In Azerbaijan, studies indicate that almost half of the female population suffers from different forms of violence, with 59 percent of the violence occurring in the home.<sup>79</sup>



## II. Experiences of power and participation

This part of the report presents the findings from field research in Armenia and Azerbaijan that took place in November and December 2011. The material was gathered in focus group interviews in Yerevan and Baku, with 8 and 10 participants, respectively, from women's organisations, as well as individual interviews with informants from civil society and some key actors at the national and international formal levels.

### Closed doors. Lack of legitimacy for the peace negotiations.

“In the 1990s, women were participating openly in the peace negotiations. Today, women do not even get close to the process. The (representatives of the) Minsk Group meets only with high-level



governmental officials. It is a very dangerous way of running a process in this region where the presidents are not legitimate.”

The lack of gender awareness in the ongoing peace-negotiation process, and how it might affect the outcome of the process, was a central theme for the focus group discussions in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Despite their active participation in the movement for independence in the late 1980s, and during the war in the beginning of the 1990s, women in this region later found themselves sidestepped and moved to the margins of official political life, and subsequently also of the peace negotiations, as described above by an Armenian informant. The fact that women in the region generally had more influence in traditionally gendered arenas (such as peace negotiations) in the beginning of the 1990s, was explained by the participants as a result of the urgency at that time to solve practical matters, and that women were ‘generally regarded to be more qualified to solve them’. The nationalist sentiment that flourished, also affected the power balance between the sexes.

“The feeling of national identity was so high and strong that people did not focus on if a man or a woman said something. What was on the agenda then was the ceasing of the war – not the distribution of power.”

The participants pointed out that the longer the conflict has dragged on, the more exclusive the peace negotiations have become. What was originally regarded as an inclusive format, the OSCE Minsk Process facilitated by the Minsk Group, was described as having gradually become more closed.

“Little by little there was a process when they (the Minsk Group) alienated themselves from civil society. When they do have meetings, they still choose to meet with official structures, instead of inviting women’s groups, or other civil society actors, and sit and talk to them.”

After the war, in the early years of independence, there was an established exchange between civil society and formal actors in the peace process. During this period, referred to as the ‘golden years’ for women’s participation, women were strong in civil society and prominent women, such as the heads of the Armenian and the Azerbaijani Helsinki Assemblies, used to meet with representatives from the Minsk Group. By the end of the 1990s,

the involvement of civil society in the negotiation process had been significantly reduced due to a growing polarization and increasingly authoritarian regimes in the region. Furthermore, the emergence of ‘GONGOs’ (NGOs initiated by the state or other official power structures) affected the position of civil society. In both focus groups, these so-called GONGOs were highlighted as a significant problem that had contributed to a division of the sector itself.<sup>83</sup> Participants explained that GONGOs, unlike other NGOs, enjoy official protection and are invited to meetings with authorities and visiting international officials. GONGOs also compete with traditional NGOs in attracting funding from international donors.

“At a very early stage of our independence, NGOs were very active and they managed to establish international networks, recognised by many international organisations. They were considered to be a threat to the government. That’s when the ruling party decided to counteract, and encouraged governmentally initiated NGOs, so-called GONGOs. For these organisations, it was very easy to get registered.”

According to the informants, women are more prevalent in NGOs than in GONGOs. Also the scope of their activities differs:

“If you have a look at all the statutes of the NGOs, they all actually have provisions for protection of human rights. In our society, this is a kind of opposition to the existing government. GONGOs are not involved in peace making activities at all. Unfortunately NGOs are currently in the shadow of the GONGOs.”

Deteriorating conditions for civil society have been accompanied by changes in the format of the peace negotiations. At present, only meetings at top level remain, with the troika of the Presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, and the subsequent meetings with the Minsk Group Co-Chairs<sup>84</sup>. In addition, the Co-Chairs visit the two countries for individual talks with the presidents.

Despite the fact that the mandate for the Minsk Group does not include a provision for consultations with civil society organisations, the informants believed that the Minsk Group limited its scope of action because of political considerations, and emphasized that the Minsk Group should instead try to expand and anchor the process. The general image of the Minsk Group, among the informants, was that it formed an elitist men’s club.

“When the Minsk Group was just set up during the early years we really had high hope. But today we’re inclined to the opinion that either the composition of the group needs to be changed, or there should be another format or structure to replace the Minsk Group.”

According to the participants, there have been very little contact between the Minsk Group and civil society organisations during the past decade. An exception was a meeting in Vienna, in 2009, between civil society organisations and representatives from the Minsk Group, which became a reality thanks to an initiative from an international NGO.<sup>85</sup> For this meeting, a number of Armenian and Azerbaijani organisations were invited to meet with the Co-Chairs<sup>86</sup>. The meeting was appreciated by the organisations that got the chance to participate, but was in general regarded to be too much of an ad hoc event to make any real difference.

“This meeting was arranged on request from civil society. We wanted to get to know what the Minsk Group was doing. The meeting was good and we got a lot of information. Unfortunately, this was the first and (so far) only meeting. This was 18 months ago. After that meeting several Co-Chairs have been replaced.”

As a result of the meeting in Vienna, the participants decided to issue a common statement, but the initiative stopped with the conclusions from the first meeting.

In the focus groups, a strong desire was expressed to have formalized contacts with representatives from the Minsk Group. At present, in failing to consult civil society in general, and women specifically, they are missing out on an option that would be ‘quite effective when it comes to calming down the opposite sides’.

“We know that the Minsk Group Co-Chairs visit this region at least once a quarter. It would be very useful if they could spend some of their time, at least half an hour, to meet with representatives from civil society institutions and their monitoring functions. As civil society organisations, we could communicate the public’s opinion to the Minsk Group Co-Chairs.”

### Women claiming space.

A general complaint, shared by all participants, was that the current peace negotiation process dealt only with ‘technical’ aspects of the conflict. They pointed

out how the present exclusive focus on territorial borders, and the status of the disputed area Nagorno-Karabakh, overshadowed all human dimensions of the conflict. The importance of preparing people for a peace agreement was absent from the official process.<sup>87</sup> Therefore, women saw it as their role to work with these kinds of aspects in particular, such as raising questions about the situation for vulnerable groups such as refugees and/or IDPs, about women’s rights, etc. They did not accept the ‘misused’ excuse that the time had not come for these issues, but were striving to find channels for communicating them and getting them integrated into the official peace process. In this work, they stressed the importance of international organisations acting as mediators and helping to bridge the gaps between the formal peace negotiations and informal structures.

“We rely on support from international organisations, because they are able to make arrangements for such meetings to happen. If the government doesn’t do anything, they can do it! Then, if international organisations are able to arrange those meetings on a regular basis, tomorrow hopefully the Minsk Group will request from the government to arrange such meetings.”

In general, informants expressed frustration over the lack of support from international institutions for the variety of activities they perceived as necessary for an inclusive peace process, and by extension a gender-just peace. In their contacts with representatives of the international community, they experienced a limited understanding of the broader context of how women’s rights and empowerment can contribute to peaceful conflict resolution. Armenian participants described expectations from donors for them to be engaged in explicit peacebuilding activities, while experiencing difficulties in getting funding to work on the underlying causes of women’s exclusion.

“Donors expect us to start talking about peacebuilding, but we can’t do that if we do not talk about gender issues first. These women need to know about women’s rights and what civil society is first.”

Azerbaijani participants on the other hand, talked about how international actors avoided supporting explicit peacemaking activities, in order not to annoy the Azerbaijani government.

“In chasing instant and tangible results, donors prefer to support short-term projects, focusing more

on selling and colourful reports. Although we all know that peacemaking - it's a long process consisting of daily work with the public. Such projects might not be as easy to measure, because they aim at changing people's minds, to get rid of the harmful image of the enemy.”

The women described a reality of ‘artificial’ gender awareness, both within national authorities – which have adopted gender equality measures to please international organisations – and from stakeholders in the international community. At the national, official level, a discrepancy between statements adopted and subsequent action plans and monitoring functions was identified. In addition, many informants shared a feeling of lack of sincerity in engagement on gender issues by local branches of international institutions.

“They invite us (women’s organisations) when they have guests from overseas who are interested in women’s issues and they want to make a good impression, in order to show that they are very open. Then they can invite us after years of silence.”

Instead of waiting to get invited, some of the organisations created their own spaces for exchange with formal actors. An activist from an Armenian organisation shared how they had trained women from the regions in human rights, refugee issues and conflict theory, in order to meet with national politicians and representatives from the international community. When they finally met with political officers from the Minsk Group’s three Co-Chair countries (the United States, Russia and France) they got their message through.

“These were rural women, who know what would happen if the war starts, they know the suffering. We talked about why women are not let in to the process, of the fear of foreign troops coming. Would they have a code of conduct? We also discussed the return of refugees. It was a very interesting discussion. The officials understood that decisions that are taken up on a high level are not tailored for women’s needs. They were amazed and said that these women raise questions that have not been discussed on higher levels. One embassy representative said: I could never imagine that women had so much to contribute!”

The aim of the meetings was to make the official representatives see and hear that there were ‘women ready to participate in the peace negotiations’. The

next step in the process will be to try to arrange a meeting between these women and the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group.<sup>88</sup>

Women in both focus groups also spoke about a joint initiative, which was taken two years ago by women’s organisations in the region, to create a parallel to the official peace process (The Network for Caucasian Women: Peace starts at home), uniting women from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia.<sup>89</sup> Within this project, women from all three countries have been trained in women’s rights and UNSCR 1325, and have been given the opportunity to discuss what the peace process means to them, and how women can participate.

“We discuss what women can bring to the peace process, on every level. Now we have a plan of action and we want to broaden the process. Each country will be represented by four or five women. We have divided ourselves into groups, and one of the groups will be working on contacts with the Minsk Group. We raise the issue: if the conflict should be solved, where are the women? Once the peace agreement is signed, are there any programs for reconstruction? Where are the women in this reconstruction? No one has thought about it. We want to lay the ground for a gender-just peace.”

Until recently there was a mutual agreement between the partners not to make information about their peacemaking activities public, because of the sensitivity of the issues.

“At that time our communities were not well prepared for it. We would certainly receive very mixed reactions from our communities to what we were involved in. But now it is high time. Last time we met with the network, we agreed that we will make public those pieces of information that are agreed between us. It is important that the information which is provided to the public is the same on both sides.”

However, such concrete peacebuilding activities represented a minor part of the organisation’s work, since most of their activities were instead focused on the influence of the underlying obstacles to women’s participation.

“It is very important to achieve economic independence for women – it can certainly contribute to higher involvement of women in society and in the peace process – that is what we try to promote. We also educate our female population on the issues of

democracy and participation. Only with an increased involvement of women in these areas will we achieve peace in the end.”

### Political participation.

#### The dirty culture of politics.

“Women can’t play that game. It is impossible. Many national assembly deputies are very corrupt and come from a criminal background. To sit with them and explain to them the role of women is not easy... It is like you would try to explain what it is like living on the moon. It is a very tough environment for women. These men can listen, but in their political agenda they do not accept women at all. They think that politics is a men’s issue, it is about money and corruption. They can go with a gun to somebody’s house, they can shoot – it is power. Like my friend, she’s a former deputy; they came to her house with guns. To be in parliament with such people it is extremely tough. It’s getting more and more dangerous.”

During the focus group meetings, much attention was paid to undemocratic and corrupt power structures and how it prolonged the frozen conflict. The story above, from an Armenian participant, points at difficulties faced by women who defy gendered hierarchies and enter into formal political institutions, marred by venality and brutality. A picture of deeply corrupt and sometimes violent political systems in the region, emerged from the informants’ stories. Such systems obviously affect both women and men and their access to space for political agency, but have a more significant effect on female participation. In the European context, Armenia, with a total of 9 percent women in the parliament, lies with Ukraine and Georgia at the absolute bottom of the league in terms of women’s representation in national parliaments. The informants from Azerbaijan (with currently 16 percent women in the national parliament) described a political system built on authoritarian power distribution. In a system established on ‘appointed’ power, rather than ‘elected’ power, women, who traditionally have less money and contacts, stand much less chance of advancing in political structures. The Azeri informants reported on a reality where most women politicians live ‘invisible political lives’ with limited influence and media coverage. As long as they stand on the right side, do not challenge the power hierarchy and keep to issues that are considered to be women’s domain, such as culture and health care, they are more or less accepted into the system.

“We have one active woman MP, who is at least talking about women’s issues and stands on our side. She’s very competent and was lucky to have contacts. She has a non-confrontational stance, and doesn’t pose any threat to the government. She never touches upon sensitive issues. She tries to work with what is acceptable.”

Whereas women engaged in oppositional politics face another reality, and risk being discredited:

“If she is an independent candidate from a simpler background, she will definitely be accused of something bad. She could easily be blackmailed. But it is not primarily about being men or women; it is more about having connections, and which side you’re on. The most important factor is that we do not have an independent civil society, no independent political atmosphere, everything is controlled.”

International commitments in combination with effective lobbying from local women’s organisations were given as the reasons behind the fact that 20 seats out of 125 in the Azerbaijani parliament today are occupied by women.

“We have used UNSCR 1325 as a tool in campaigns both at national and local levels. The 1325 campaign that we did in connection with the last election, definitely had an impact on the results. We talked to women about the problems they have, what they were concerned about and the problems with not living in a democratic society.”

But women’s potential is still circumscribed by norms prevailing in traditional, extended families.

“There are many more women out there who would be prepared to take a role in decision-making. But there is the factor of male relatives. It is not her decision!”

Another issue that emerged in both groups was that the participants as activists perceived women in elected political positions to be alienated, having little contact with either issues of importance for women or with the women’s movement itself: “None of them are connected to the women’s movement. They do not even understand that they should. They are representing a political party and do whatever they are told to.” The general opinion among the participants was that women politicians, or rather the disabled political system, were to blame for the rift, where women were used as ‘window-dressing’.

But some participants also pointed to the role of women's organisations:

"It is not only their fault; women's organisations are also to blame for this. They themselves have created this distance as well, when they say, "these women are bad - you should not address them". On the contrary, women's organisations should be proactive, they should call these women, invite them in, make them work for them, and monitor what has been done. You elected them, why don't you demand accountability from them?"

Many women oppose getting involved in the party systems, according to participants, as it is perceived as a legacy from the former Soviet Union with a centralised model of management, no transparency and a given limit for women not to pass: "joining a party means dealing with a bunch of men who would not like her to go further up than to a certain level".

None of the women participating in the focus group in Armenia had personal experience of being in political positions: "Women do not want to be in a centralised system of power. They get involved in the NGO sector because they want to be independent". But in a personal interview, another activist told of her experiences of holding a political post as deputy mayor, and being the only woman of 13 members of the city council:

"It was a men's club. But, there was a competition for positions rather than of sexes. I was sometimes put into a hard situation, but not because I was a woman, but because people wanted that position".

The informant stated that she did not feel discriminated against as a woman in this situation, but the continuation of her story points at underlying/hidden forms of power that can be exerted to uphold or manifest a distorted balance of power.

"Of course it was very hard for me among 13 men. Even in certain discussions and in jokes, everybody would weigh what they were saying when I was around. Sometimes decisions were made separately. You had to ask over and over again. There were situations when I did not vote. But I did not feel it was because I was a woman. As a woman you have to be much more prepared in order to get respect. If you would make a mistake as a woman it would be like "what is she saying?", it is not like that for men. That was why I was preparing so much for everything."

Another important aspect of political participation, with a decisive bearing on women's participation

that was discussed in both groups, was gendered financial conditions. Women, with less income and less influential contacts, stand less chance of actually advancing to political positions with leverage: election campaigns are becoming more and more expensive and women have little chance of covering these expenses. In general, women own less, and get paid less than men. Also a general feminisation of poverty in the region has occurred after the break-up of the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup>

The informants also pointed at a 'commercialisation' of the political system, a process described by the experience of one Armenian women's organisation, which previously ran a project to get women elected as mayors:

"We were extremely successful. Every village gave us three or four names, we trained them and managed to get 15 women elected to local assemblies. But that was in 2000, now we can't even dream about it, because these positions are now worth money".

"Political parties started to understand that they (mayors) are in charge of big electorates. Let us appoint our person (man) who can attract, threaten and use their leverage to get people to vote for them. Political, budgetary, they can give a piece of land. Women wouldn't do that, as they are not corrupt in the same way. They consider it not to be women's game to threaten people. At that time, villages were not looked at like places where they could get votes, now it is all politicised, even border villages. Corruption gets in every process. That's why they can't see women in it."

### Hindrances and opportunity in gender roles. The paradox of 'being a woman'.

"There's a risk that you end up being alone. A risk that few people want to take. I can't help thinking of how people perceive me, as feminist and a founder of a women's organisation. It is a part of the devaluation, pointing out that you are not married because you are working on issues that men do not like. It is like a punishment system. You always have to be self-confident. It is very energy-consuming. Once in a while I collapse. Because I'm constantly monitoring myself. After 10 years in the field - maybe it is some kind of burn-out. Who is going to protect me? No one."

Being a woman activist in the South Caucasus region involves some tangible risks, especially if you work with sensitive issues like peacebuilding or sexual

and reproductive rights. Most of the women in the focus groups had experience of discrimination or harassment due to their work. Apart from overt harassment, these women also have to face prejudice and negative attitudes on a daily basis, that make them constantly self-conscious. Some of the women shared stories about how they are worn out mentally by constantly having to defend themselves and the work they do. An Azerbaijani informant, working for a feminist organisation, described in a poignant way the constant surveillance system that women face.

“You have to be strong and self-confident doing this kind of work. Sometimes I feel that I’m broken, when I face prejudice, but of course I never show that to the girls that I work with. I always try to empower them, to provide good examples. But you feel it all the time. Almost in every small thing you have to show that you do not see it or care. But for many young girls, they do care, there is a big social pressure in this country.”

This specific Azerbaijani organisation serves as a good example of the resistance that similar organisations face in a society with the gender-related control mechanisms that characterise the region. In offering courses in sexual and reproductive health to young women, the organisation is used to dealing with male relatives who want to supervise their daughters. It often happened that fathers came to the premises of the organisation to check out what their daughters were doing there. As a precaution, sensitive courses on sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example, are not advertised openly. Within the organisation, young women are trained to become trainers themselves and to work in the regions to empower other young women. Some of them leave the organisations for practical reasons, others for family reasons, such as engagements, when the fiancés (or their families) do not approve of their activism.

Depending on the focus of their activism, the women in focus groups faced different challenges. Women engaged in organisations dealing primarily with social issues and women’s participation in general, seemed to be less troubled by social control and harassment. The informants from such organisations reported more acceptance from the community at large. The informants also expressed different views on how to deal with the ‘biological identification’ in their activism and in the women’s movement in general; for example, how to best argue for women’s participation in the peace process and in society in general. Should one stress the idea that

women (as mothers), have an inborn aptitude for conflict resolution and are ‘naturally’ less corrupt?

“Certainly, we want peace as mothers, and certainly a mother has a higher level of influence over her children. No mother would like war.”

“Women are more responsible than men. They are, by nature, better at building, in general, rather than destroying as men do. Women are more of pacifists.”

“You can’t ignore nature. Females have a different mentality. In many cases, war has been waged because men want self-esteem and to promote their ideas. Women are taught to be more creative.”

Some other informants pointed to more pragmatic reasons for women’s participation:

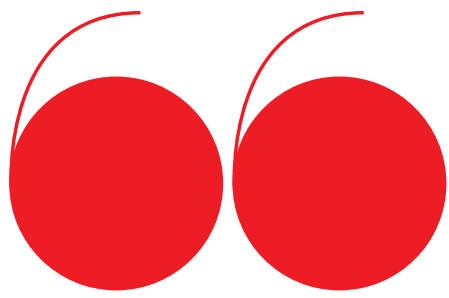
“Women in NGOs are primarily engaged at community level, therefore we know what the needs of the communities are.”

“In our country the man is considered to be the head of the family. But it is the women who manage family affairs. So the management function allows them to influence male family members, their sons and their husbands. If a woman does not want war, she can certainly persuade her husband and her son to be against the war.”

The peaceful woman and mother figure has a long tradition in the region and has been successfully used by the women’s movement. It has been easier to argue for women’s participation from an essentialist standpoint, than from a human rights based approach. When women took a leading role during the war, and years afterwards, the traditional role of women as caretakers, engaged in humanitarian aid was combined with a more prominent role as mediators. An Azerbaijani informant underlined some specific experiences of women, which were emphasised in connection with conflict mediation:

“In the context of our conflict, women are actually regarded as catalysts, because women are primarily involved in teaching, in schools they are surrounded by large audiences that they communicate with.”

Today, because the trend has changed, the traditional division of virtues between men and women has partly developed into a trap. Women are supposed to deal with issues concerning family, culture and health. In Armenia, there is currently one woman minister, the Minister for Culture, and in the Azer-



On the surface, we are very democratic and liberal. If you look at the surface there is development. But it is all superficial.”

baijani government, all the ministers are men.<sup>91</sup> For women’s organisations, it is a balancing act: they can use essentialist rhetoric to gain influence, but at the same time the woman-mother identification can contribute to excluding them from other aspirations, such as gaining influence in traditional male domains, like security and foreign policy.

The fact that women are associated with peace and mediation is an asset that can be used. But the flip side of this coin is that women are expected to be spotless and unimpeachable, and come from a ‘good background’, to be taken seriously. ‘Notorious’ women are not listened to.

“A woman who has a good reputation in society and is perceived positively and free of negative PR, can be engaged in peace-making activities. If a woman is highly regarded in the community, then of course she will be subject to less pressure compared to those who have some regrettable episodes in their life, someone notorious. We need to have good backgrounds.”

Such societal standards, where women’s morals are judged, put women in a vulnerable position. In their

stories, the informants described a catch 22: If they want influence in the peace process (and in society in general), they have to get into politics and risk having their morals questioned; and at the same time they risk being discredited as individuals by participating in politics, and thereby being judged negatively by society (due to the decline of legitimacy in politics). As a consequence, most women keep out of politics, or become involved only at the local level. In both groups, the informants agreed that the prevailing macho-culture is a serious problem for development in the region. An Azerbaijani informant shared her view on the contradictory development in her country:

“On the surface, we are very democratic and liberal. If you look at the surface there is development. But it is all superficial. It is true that the government does not push for women to be veiled or something. Our problem is related to cultural things, that we live in a macho culture. There are all these stereotype things that people (both women and men) still do not want to get rid of.”



1. Preparing for demonstration on men's violence against women, Yerevan, 2010. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Emma Söderström. 2. Baku in Azerbaijan. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Stina Magnusson. 3. Young women activists from Armenia and Azerbaijan taking part in The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation project The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (EPNK), 2011. This picture was taken when they visited Israel and Palestine as part of the project. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

### III. Analysis

#### Exclusions

In Armenia and Azerbaijan, the war over Nagorno-Karabakh and the dissolution of the Soviet Union opened the way for a reshuffle of gendered hierarchies. An emancipation process started during the years of struggle for independence, and continued during the years of escalating conflict and all-out war. The urgency of the situation made gender roles less important and individual women and women's organisations experienced some 'golden years'<sup>92</sup>, during which some women actually participated in the peace negotiations (as mentioned earlier). After the ceasefire agreement was reached, in the early years of democratic rule, the momentum lingered on for some years, spurred by the introduction of the concept of gender by international organisations.

Such a scenario, where gender roles change but only temporarily, is well known from other conflicts.<sup>93</sup> In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the window of opportunity for women's participation was gradually shut. It did not help that women were active in dealing with the consequences of war and also participated in negotiating the peace during,

and just after, the war. This supports findings that women's mere participation (in low numbers) in a patriarchal context is not enough for sustainable change.<sup>94</sup> In this region, as well as in many other places in the world, patriarchal male networks form barriers that do not allow women to reach a critical mass within formal power structures, and/or attain influential positions. Such an exclusion process is rarely about overt discrimination (today, laws regulating gender equality are in place in both countries), but rather about hidden forms of power. Due to prescribed gender roles, women who are active in politics are assigned to 'soft' affairs, have less influence, do not attain positions of power and influence, are neglected and risk their reputations. Furthermore, women are restricted by internal invisible forms of power, like the informant (the former deputy mayor) who had to work twice as hard as her male colleagues, in order not to be judged negatively by them, but still could not see that conditions were tougher for her because she was a woman.





The conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region goes on. It affects thousands of people, some have been forced to leave their homes and live elsewhere – as refugees. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Stina Magnusson.

Another important observation from this region is how corruption interacts with cultural norms and deprives women of space for agency, in the community in general and in politics, and hence also in the peace process. A frozen conflict, like the one over Nagorno-Karabakh, is a virtual hothouse for growing corruption which, in combination with gender norms, plays well into the process of excluding women. Women are generally not part of corrupt networks, and thereby have fewer connections and less access to funding. But even if they have the opportunity to venture into politics (or commercial business), many are held back by a personal reluctance to get into this 'dirty corrupt business', or they are influenced by relatives who disapprove of women in politics. In our study, the informants described a reality where both women and men are steered by gendered expectations that allow men to act in what are generally considered to be corrupt official power structures, whereas supposedly 'uncorrupt' and care-oriented women, are relegated to dealing with traditional women's issues relating to cultural and family affairs.

Unfortunately, despite presumably good will, the actions of the international community also play into the exclusion of women. Most obvious is the total male dominance in the group of internationals who are actually involved in the peace negotiations. During the 17 years of peace negotiations, since the ceasefire in 1994, not a single woman has been part of the Minsk Group (in the capacity of Co-Chair or Special Representative).<sup>95</sup> Even on a platform like

Facebook, where the Minsk Group has its own profile, it is an entirely single-sex platform. Not a single woman is featured in the pictures in the photo album – only men in helmets, or men shaking hands. The approach of the Minsk Group is well in line with the prevailing gendered division of politics in the region (and elsewhere), with men 'naturally' in charge of issues concerning security policy.

Also, among the Special Representatives appointed by the OSCE or the EU in respect of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, no women have been appointed. Local EU delegations have gender focal points assigned, but they have little time or resources for this specific task. The EU delegation in Armenia has limited contact with women's organisations<sup>96</sup> and was perceived by the participants as mostly working with GONGOs. In Azerbaijan, the local EU delegation was updated on women's organisations activities in general, but did not know much about their ongoing peacebuilding activities.

### Achievements

Despite a general backlash against women in the South Caucasus in the last ten years, women's organisations have made considerable strides in some key areas. One important achievement is that today, some women's organisations are regularly invited by the state structures to conferences and to stakeholder groups, as experts and partners. After several years of work, their knowledge and experience are now recognised by the authorities. To a lesser extent, women's organisations have been able to improve the low levels of representation of women

in political assemblies and in higher administrative positions. But in Azerbaijan there was a change in this trend in the last parliamentary elections in 2010, when the number of female MPs increased from 11 to 16 percent. According to the Azerbaijani women's organisations, this progress was partly due to pressure from international institutions, but also a result of the support system that women's organisations offered to the women candidates. A women's league for election was set up that supported women candidates by helping them to write their electoral platforms, speeches, etc. As a side-effect, Azerbaijani women's organisations today have improved relationships with women parliamentarians.

In general, women's organisations in both countries today are focusing their efforts at the local level, since women need experience in order to deal with the conditions at higher political levels. This work is being done in parallel with activities to build capacity within local women's organisations. Thanks to such support, women have acquired skills and started their own groups, and as a result, the number of community-based women's groups has increased.

**W**omen's organisations have developed their capacity and have changed roles from being service providers, to working for women's rights at a structural level. They have been a decisive force in the adoption of laws on gender equality and domestic and sexual violence. Today, these laws are concrete tools in their work to strengthen women's position. One example of successful lobbying by women's organisations is how Azerbaijani women's organisations have managed to get the issue of early marriages onto the government's agenda. In addition, Armenian and Azerbaijani women have taken on a crucial role as bridge builders, by organising cross-border dialogue programmes. Getting all groups affected by the conflict involved in such programmes is a great challenge, but thanks to regional networks, women's groups have achieved considerable success in this area. The fact that representatives from women's organisations in Nagorno-Karabakh have participated in such exchanges is an achievement in itself, considering how complex the relations are between the affected groups.<sup>97</sup> Despite disparate views on key issues, like the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh, the participants have managed to communicate and seek a common language. A key strategy has been uniting on issues that have to do with women's

rights and how women and vulnerable groups are affected by the conflict.

Another important area, in which women's groups are the key actors, is raising awareness of discriminating gender norms. In Armenia, women's groups have managed to illustrate the absurdity of the tradition of 'the red apple', by which the family of the groom is supposed to control the bride's virginity.<sup>98</sup> And in Azerbaijan, women's groups have successfully lobbied for changes to discriminatory images of women and men in textbooks used in schools. Thanks to women's lobbying, domestic violence has also become an optional subject that is taught in secondary schools in Azerbaijan, and a number of higher education institutions, state-run as well as privately owned, have set up gender departments. According to women's organisations from both countries, the ground-breaking work they have done concerning issues related to sexual and reproductive health has contributed to the attitude of the public at large towards such activities becoming gradually more accepted.

## Challenges

At the time of writing, 17 years have passed since a ceasefire was brokered between the warring parties. During these years, the peace negotiation process has taken many turns. Today, as the agenda for negotiations remains stuck on the sensitive issue of the timing of a referendum on the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh<sup>99</sup>, it is possible that the conflicting parties are further apart than ever before. In dealing with such a deadlock, the issue of women's participation in the peace negotiations is deemed totally irrelevant by the negotiating parties. According to interviews with official actors, who are involved<sup>100</sup> in the negotiation process, the level of mistrust between the parties severely limits the scope of issues up for negotiation, and rules out any discussion of 'soft' issues like women's participation. Consequently, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security has never been mentioned during the peace negotiations, according to the officials interviewed.

The conviction that more pressing issues need to be resolved first, before gender equality can be dealt with, is common in situations where there are conflicting needs. Such a standpoint is constantly challenged by women's organisations in the region, but they need support. Getting the three presidents<sup>101</sup> currently running the negotiations to put women's participation on the agenda, is not

likely to succeed in view of the current deadlock. But even if the local parties in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh are ignoring these issues, does that imply that the international community should adapt to this national political agenda? International community actors involved must abide by the resolutions they have signed and consider what their responsibility is. The minimum they should do, is to consult women's organisations and try their best to put forward their perspectives. An urgent challenge for all international institutions involved is to change the gender balance (in their own missions) and consider appointing women to important posts to lead by example (especially important for the OSCE and the EU). Women's presence in international institutions is important for local women to be able to identify with, and to boost democratic values in general.

On the other hand, women's organisations need to take initiatives in order to make their peacemaking activities more visible. Judging from interviews with formal key actors, little is known about the multifaceted work that women's organisations do relating to peacebuilding. Also, women's organisations need to put their work into context and explain how gender equality activities relate to sustainable peace, how training for women's empowerment links to peacebuilding, and how women work with peacebuilding to construct societies that can maintain peace. It is also important not to lose momentum and wait for an invitation, but to create your own invited spaces.<sup>102</sup> The initiative taken by an Armenian organisation, that trained local women and arranged a meeting for them with local representatives from the Co-Chair countries' embassies<sup>103</sup>, is a strong example of how women's groups can bridge the gap between formal and informal actors in the peace process.

Much can also be gained from addressing the gap (the perceived alienation) between women politicians and women in civil society. Women politicians are often perceived as not representing women and 'becoming like men' or are used as 'window-dressing'. For women activists, it is a challenge to build relations, instead of alienating themselves from those women who have been elected to political office. In this area, there are successful projects/initiatives to build on as mentioned above. Furthermore, an issue of major importance for women's organisations in the region is to work strategically to change discriminating gender roles. In order to achieve sustainable change, men must be involved in this work and cooperation with mixed gender organisations must be promoted.

Finally, the informants' narratives show that the widespread corruption in the region is not only a major impediment for democratic development in general, but a specific obstacle to women's participation at all decision-making levels, and consequently also in the peace process. These gendered implications of corruption need to be further highlighted and addressed by all actors involved. Women's organisations in general are regarded as non-corrupt and thereby hold the moral high ground, allowing them to take the lead in such an initiative and build alliances against corruption – not by referring to essentiality, but to necessary changes in society (transparency and a representative political system), that would benefit all. It is important to make the fight against corruption inclusive and stress that women are not less corrupt by nature, but because they have not had the same access to power.<sup>104</sup> In acknowledging such a non-biological stance, new challenges lie ahead: How can women gain power without adapting to the corrupt 'male' context?

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# 67.8

Population of DR Congo in millions  
(The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

## French

Official language of DR Congo

# 50%

Percentage of Catholics in DR Congo

# 66.8%

Literacy rate in DR Congo  
(Age 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)

# 580

Maternity mortality  
per 100.000 live births in DR Congo

# 10%

Percentage of Muslims in DR Congo



There are more than 200 ethnic groups  
in DR Congo, and the major groups are:  
Mongo, Luba, Kongo and Mangbetu-Azande.

# The Democratic Republic of Congo.

## No peace for women.

**D**iscrimination against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is profound. At all levels of society and in all phases of life, women are subjected to exclusion and misogynist

practices, which are deeply anchored in tradition and customary laws. Even though the last decade has seen progress in some areas, especially in removing some of the most discriminatory laws and adding some new and more gender-sensitive ones, the space for women to participate in politics and other decision-making arenas is still extremely limited.

For the majority of women, the aftermath of war has not brought peace. Lack of security, a clear and present risk of being subjected to various forms of gender-based violence, economic hardship and high levels of illiteracy are all factors that hinder women's participation. The various legal frameworks that protect their rights are rarely implemented or applied.

Despite this pronounced aversion to women in social and political life, and their lack of recognition, the women's movement in DRC is getting stronger, especially at the local level. Civil society organisations

provide a space for women to meet and articulate their concerns. Due to the regional dimension of the conflict, women have also engaged

in establishing cooperation between women's groups in the region. Although, at the national level, they have been less successful; a fact which can be ascribed to a lack of funding and security, as well as mutual distrust between women from civil society and women parliamentarians in Kinshasa.

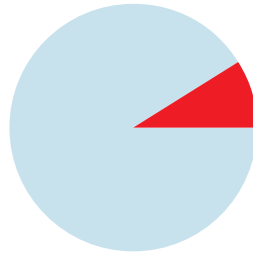


In summary:

- Formal peace has not brought true peace to women. Lack of security is a major obstacle to women's participation.
- The window of opportunity that was opened for women's participation during the peace process has been shut again.



Neither the Penal Code nor the Family Code of the Democratic Republic of Congo contains any reference to domestic violence (<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,IRBC,,COD,,45f147152d,o.html>).



9%

Share of women in parliament (Progress of the world's women 2011-2012).

- Together with women from the region, Congolese women have come up with strong messages on sexual violence. However, the subject is being made increasingly trivialised by the authorities as a 'women's issue'.
- The achievements of women in civil society, at the local and regional level, are not being translated into political action at the national level. Implementation remains a huge challenge.
- The weak state means that women activists must rely on the international community for support. Short-term engagement and a lack of capacity building are serious impediments.

constituted a very strong incentive for all parties involved, at the regional, national and local levels.<sup>107</sup>

After peace accords in 2002, the fighting proceeded in the east, where local rebel groups, including Rwandan and Ugandan proxies, continued to terrorise the population.

### Women in the conflict

During the conflict, sexual violence became endemic, particularly in the eastern parts of the country. Even today, rape and other forms of sexual violence constitute a serious threat to women's security and restrain them from participation in public life.<sup>108</sup> What originally was used as a weapon of war, later became part of the overall breakdown of societal norms, with devastating effects, on women due to the brutality of the act and the resulting social stigma. More often than not, a raped woman is not allowed to stay in her home and community. This exclusion also contributed to the increased poverty of women during the conflict as they were no longer able to cultivate their plots of land. In addition, fighting and insecurity hindered them from going to the fields and caused increased levels of malnutrition.<sup>109</sup> Women were also recruited, often by force, by the warring factions, to serve as fighters, sex slaves, domestic servants or war carriers.

## Part I. Background

The armed conflicts that raged in the DRC in 1997 and again in 1998–2002, caused the deaths of 4–5 million people, mostly due to war-related famine and disease, as well as the displacement of millions more.<sup>105</sup> Although the war officially came to an end in December 2002, there are ongoing tensions in the eastern part of the country, with armed conflict occasionally flaring up in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri.

In 1997, after 30 years of dictatorship, Mobutu Sese Seko was ousted by rebel leader Laurent Kabila, with support from neighbouring Rwanda. The triggering factor was that Hutu *génocidaires* had taken refuge in the DRC after the Rwandan genocide in 1994, and were now attacking the Tutsi minority in the DRC, as well as targets inside Rwanda.<sup>106</sup> When Kabila, now president, urged all foreign troops to leave the country in 1998, Uganda and Rwanda responded by occupying eastern parts of the DRC. Other neighbouring countries were soon to follow and eventually seven countries were involved in the conflict, which became known as the African world war. The regional involvement in the DRC was to some extent related to security and ethnic solidarity. However, gaining control of territory and natural resources

### Peace negotiations

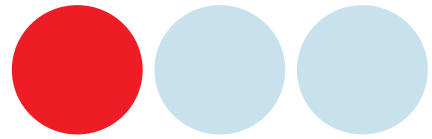
The first peace agreement was signed in 1999 in Lusaka, Zambia, and was followed by the creation of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), with a mandate to monitor the implementation of the peace agreement. However, severe flaws made this almost impossible. Combined with the unwillingness of the signatories to lay down their arms, fighting soon restarted.

As outlined in the Lusaka Agreement, all warring and political parties in DRC came together to draw up the borders of the future and prepare



# 2006

The year the law on sexual violence was added to the penal code. The conception of rape was given a broader definition and criminalised.



The demand of a 30 percent quota for women in parliament was rejected, but women managed to push through a guarantee of 30 percent women in various democratic institutions, such as the Electoral Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>112</sup>

for democratic elections. This process, called the Inter-Congolese Dialogue took place in Sun City, South Africa, and resulted in the All Inclusive Agreement, signed in December 2002. In June 2003, the transitional government, including Kabila and four vice-presidents representing different warring factions, took office.

However, despite official peace, the fighting in the east continued. In November 2007, an agreement was reached in Nairobi between the governments of the DRC and Rwanda, which focused on the presence of an armed group of Rwandans in the eastern Congo. At the Conference on Peace, Development and Secu-

rity, held in January 2008 in Goma, North Kivu, the government and 22 armed factions from the eastern provinces signed the Goma Acte d'Engagement, which stipulated an immediate ceasefire as well as demobilisation of the combatants.

### Women in peace negotiations

Due to tradition and cultural norms, for a long time women in the DRC were excluded from all formal peace negotiations. Although not officially recognised, at a local level, and especially within the family and neighbourhood, they have always been involved in peacemaking and conflict resolution.<sup>110</sup> During the conflict, women's organisations from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi came together, already at an early stage, to promote peace and women's participation in the process. Nevertheless, it was not until the preparatory meetings ahead of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, that Congolese women from different

**Demonstration about gender equality in the South Kivu province, DR Congo arranged by FADI (Femmes en Action pour le Développement Intégré) 2010. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Ida Udovič.**



parts of society, including representatives from civil society, government and the warring parties, came together and issued a joint declaration, in which they demanded an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign armed troops and the reunification of national territory.

Despite women's very low official representation at the conference in Sun City, they managed to be instrumental in the completion of the peace negotiations. The officially invited women were accompanied by a larger group of 'advisers' on gender issues who, although not allowed to enter the negotiations, continuously provided the 'official' women with data and information about women's rights.

Despite the accomplishments of Sun City, the unity among women began to crack soon afterwards. Women politicians were confronted by strong antagonism from male members of their parties, and thus found it difficult to continue to prioritise women's issues ahead of the official party line. At the grassroots level, women were faced with the constraints of everyday life, and in many cases ceased being involved in the process of sensitizing the community to women's rights and the importance of their participation in political life.<sup>111</sup>

At the Goma Peace Conference, hosted by the DRC government, only a handful of women participated in the peace negotiations, all of them representing armed groups. Consequently, the resulting document, Goma Acte d'Engagement, lacked any strong wording on women's rights issues.

### Ongoing international engagement

Created in 2000, the UN peace-keeping mission MONUC was the largest operation of its kind in the world. In 2010, it received its present stabilization mandate and changed name to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO). With a main focus on the protection of civilians in the eastern provinces, MONUSCO was also commissioned to support the government's fight against impunity for sexual and gender-based violence, as well as with the organisation of national elections.

There are many other international actors engaged in the DRC. The International Contact Group on the Great Lakes Region consists of the USA, UK, France, Belgium, the EU and the UN. The purpose of the group is to deal with political, security and development issues in the region, concerning illegal trade in natural resources for example.

The EU is a major actor in the DRC. Its support is

concentrated on rebuilding the country politically and physically, as well as carrying out activities within the fields of democracy, good governance, human rights, gender equality and HIV/AIDS.

Another actor is the International Criminal Court. The DRC is a signatory to the ICC and has referred the armed conflict to the Court, which has opened charges in four cases related to the conflict.

### Civil society

As so often happens in conflict, or post-conflict states, civil society in the DRC has played a crucial role in providing basic services to the population. Considering the vastness of the DRC, many areas located far away from the capital Kinshasa have basically been excluded from the provision of national services. In addition, since women traditionally have been excluded from formal decision-making arenas, women's grassroots organisations and other local initiatives have provided a possibility for women to get involved in matters outside the household.

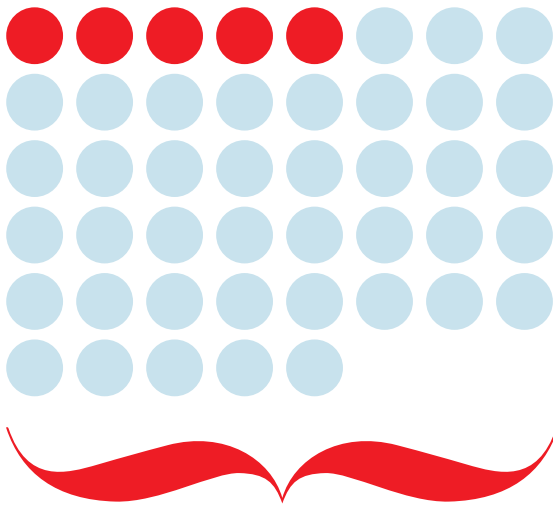
Particularly in the eastern provinces, insecurity and the hardships of everyday life have made it difficult for the population to engage in civil society activities. Lack of funds made it virtually impossible to travel to Kinshasa, or abroad, to participate in training or in important fora for discussion. Nevertheless, throughout the whole peace process in the DRC, from the late 1990s until now, civil society organisations in general and women's organisations in particular have taken an active role. However, the efforts of women's organisations to a great extent have gone unnoticed.

### Legal rights

Several legislative acts and provisions adopted during the last decade have strengthened women's legal rights. Already in 1987, the DRC ratified CEDAW and in 2010 the country adopted a national action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. Although the requirement of a 30 percent quota for women in government was not passed in 2002, women managed to push through a guarantee of 30 percent women in various democratic institutions, such as the Electoral Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.<sup>112</sup> In the Constitution from 2005, there are also several articles guaranteeing women's rights and equity, for instance, by providing for the principle of equality between men and women. In 2006, provisions on sexual violence were added to the Penal Code. Rape was given a broader definition and criminalised.

However, the Congolese legislation remains





Out of 45 members of government, there were **four female ministers and one deputy minister**. Among the governors and deputy governors, there were no women. After the elections in November 2011, the percentage of female members of parliament was 9.4 percent.<sup>114</sup>

contradictory, due to the existence of several laws that nullify the gender-sensitive paragraphs. An example is the provision on equality between men and women on political party lists, where there is a contradictory provision in the legislation that makes it possible for political parties to ignore the provision on equality, with no consequences.

Another area of concern, especially in rural areas, is the Family Code, which limits the autonomy of married women, who are obliged to obey their husbands in his function as head of the household. A married woman cannot sign any legal document without the authorisation of her husband, including applications for a job, a bank account or a bank loan. At the time of writing, the Family Code is being revised with the aim of removing all discriminatory texts relating to women. Women's organisations, as well as the Ministry for Gender, are involved in the revision process.

There are also several impediments to women exercising their legal rights, such as corruption and lack of competence and gender awareness among civil servants. The dysfunctional justice system, and high costs due to corruption, are major contributing factors as to why customary law is preferred by many Congolese — men as well as women.

### Participation

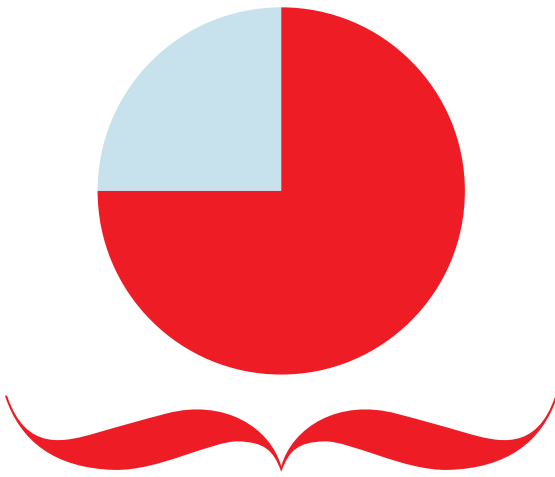
Article 14 of the Constitution guarantees the right of women to “significant representation in national,

provincial and local institutions”.<sup>113</sup> However, just as with many other laws on women's rights, gender equality is not yet implemented. There are also other laws with the purpose of strengthening the participation of women in the political process. Article 13.3 in the Electoral Act stipulates that political parties must have equal representation of women and men on their party lists (zebra lists). In reality, this progress is of limited value due to the contradictory wording of Article 13.4 on the lack of consequences if the political party fails to comply with the gender equality requirement.

The representation of women in parliament and government was 7.2 percent in the previous electoral period, starting with the elections in 2006. Out of 45 members of government, there were four female ministers and one deputy minister. Among the governors and deputy governors, there were no women. After the elections in November 2011, the percentage of female members of parliament was 9.4 percent.<sup>114</sup>

### Security and violence

The UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has dubbed the DRC the “rape capital” of the world. In the eastern provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Ituri, the rate of sexual violence committed against primarily women and girls, but also men and boys, is still very high, especially in rural areas in the mining districts.<sup>115</sup> The perpetrators are primarily men in uniform: either militias or members of the national security forces. However, peacekeepers, as well as civilian personnel within MONUSCO, have also been accused of rape.<sup>116</sup> There is also a tendency towards an increased number of perpetrators from the civilian population, although the majority of them most likely are demobilised military personnel.<sup>117</sup> Violence against women also takes place at home. Even though there are no reliable statistics, reports show a connection between high levels of domestic violence and low levels of power among women.<sup>118</sup> In certain provinces, female genital mutilation is widespread. Like other women in the DRC, women activists and political candidates run the risk of being physically or morally attacked, a fact that constitutes a serious constraint on their work. Many women's organisations are involved in the fight against sexual violence. One focus area is to assist women in the legal process, by assisting them to go to court or by bringing the court to the villages through what is termed mobile justice. At government level, efforts are also being made to curb this kind of violence. In the national programme for



More than 75 percent of the population live below the poverty threshold, and more women than men are on the absolute margin.<sup>120</sup>

the stabilisation of the east, STAREC,<sup>119</sup> there is a department focusing on the protection of civilians, although it does not have any specific gender component.

### Socioeconomic situation

Despite all its natural resources, the DRC is one of the world's poorest countries. Decades of malgovernance and armed conflict have led to an extremely precarious situation for the majority of the population. More than 75 percent of the population live below the poverty threshold, and more women than men are on the absolute margin.<sup>120</sup>

The economy is dominated by agriculture, and although women bear the main responsibility for tilling the fields, men control the income since, according to tradition, women cannot own land. Even though the law has changed in this respect, tradition still prevails in many areas. Another factor contributing to poverty among women is lack of security, making it difficult for them to leave home in order to work on the land.

Women's health is another pressing issue. Maternal mortality is one of the highest in the world, with an estimated 1 289 deaths per 100 000 live births.<sup>121</sup> The high rate of rape has also drastically worsened the HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially in the east. Estimates from UNAIDS show that the HIV prevalence among women who had been subjected to sexual violence in the eastern conflict-affected areas was over 25 percent, compared with 1.8 percent among women in general in the DRC.<sup>122</sup>

## Part II. Experiences of power and participation

This part presents the findings from field research in the DRC in January 2012. Two focus groups were conducted with eight participants in Bukavu and five in Kinshasa, from women's organisations, as well as interviews with key informants from civil society and some actors at the national and international formal levels.

### Participation and exclusion in theory and practice.

"Women's power... it is really invisible. And it is mostly due to tradition. According to tradition, the woman cannot say I am tired. It is her duty to work from early morning until late. Women don't even have power at the family level. The woman can be dealing with some farm activities... during the time of harvest the yield is for the husband and the woman goes empty-handed. And if she dares claim her rights, the husband can decide to leave her, saying you are no longer my wife."

This description, given by one of the participants in the focus group in Bukavu, the provincial capital of conflict-ridden South Kivu, captures the lack of power and the hardships of everyday life for women in Congolese society. For the majority, life is still a continuous struggle for survival: economically, socially or physically. In addition to the traditional subordination of women, the ongoing conflict in the eastern provinces has resulted in a further deterioration of living conditions, manifested in increased poverty and a lingering high risk of sexual or physical violence.

Like in many other post-conflict contexts, a window of opportunity was opened in the DRC during the turmoil of the immediate aftermath of war. This window helped make it possible for women's organisations to raise their voices at the national peace negotiations in Sun City in 2002, and demand not only an end to hostilities but also a greater say in the following transitional period.

As elaborated in the sections above, in the peace agreement, the Electoral Act and in the Constitution from 2005, women's organisations successfully managed to push through some important formal rights, including gender equality in all important

decision-making bodies and new rape legislation in 2006. This fact was also stressed by some participants in the focus groups, especially younger women and women from urban areas. “Not very long ago we had practically no legal rights. So especially the Constitution from 2005 is a big step forward”, as one of them said. The big challenge now, they argued, was implementation, so that these laws were something more than just “words on paper”.

“I would like to stress that Congolese women have all the power: political, social, economic. However, there are different categories: (there are) women who are informed, but they are a minority. They understand how things work and can make decisions. Then there is the category of grassroots women. They (also) have all the power, but they live in ignorance. They have no education, they are not informed, and they are dominated by tradition. If there was solidarity between women who are informed and those from the grassroots, I think the impact would be positive regarding women’s problems in the DRC.”

However, among other informants there was a strong sense that the window of opportunity had been shut again. The legal framework for strengthening women’s position in the political sphere was in place – but on a more concrete level very little had happened. “Why are we talking about women having all this power, when it is not so in reality?” as one participant expressed it.

A number of reasons for this diminished room for manoeuvre were identified. The most striking was the lack of political commitment at the governmental and parliamentary levels, to focusing on gender issues in general and pushing through gender-sensitive legislation in particular.

Furthermore, there was a sense within the focus groups that commitment among the Congolese women themselves had weakened since 2006; a fact that partly could be explained by disappointment in how the women with formal power had failed to get involved with women at the grassroots level, according to the participants.

“I feel that women are less and less engaged in this process... In the first part of the process, the women were very active. Now the process has become more formal, with structures and institutions like STAREC and the Amani programme.<sup>123</sup> Before it was more informal, more on a grassroots level. We don’t feel now the strength that women had before.”

Prior to the elections held that year (the first democratic elections ever in the DRC), women’s organisations – empowered by their contribution to making the warring parties sign the peace agreement – carried out awareness campaigns in many parts of the country. The aim of these campaigns was to use the spotlight that had been put on women’s position and women’s rights during the peace negotiations, and to make this progress more sustainable, by increasing the number of women candidates, as well as encouraging other women to vote for them. These efforts resulted in a majority of registered voters being women in the 2006 presidential and legislative elections. Only 42 women were elected to the 500 seats in the parliament, and another 6 appointed to government positions, but the mere fact that they had now entered all formal political spaces was considered a great success.

“What we are doing is not for us, probably not even for our children. Maybe the children of our children one day will taste the fruit of what we are doing.”

The rural-urban divide. The lack of communication and accountability.

In the last elections held in November 2011, the number of women candidates remained almost the same as before, 47 got seats in the new parliament out of a total of 490 seats. The reason for this still very low number of women was manifold, according to the informants, but apart from traditional patriarchal structures with their strong exclusive mechanisms, another factor was the mutual distrust between women at the provincial and local levels, and women in positions of power in Kinshasa. For the women’s organisations, many of which are involved in increasing women’s political participation, it was a great disappointment to realise how even female parliamentarians often prioritised party politics ahead of women’s rights issues. One of the most blatant examples occurred in 2011, after the women had tried to advocate for the passing of a proposed amendment to the Electoral Act, which would guarantee equal representation of women and men. During the subsequent parliamentary vote, many female parliamentarians were not even present.<sup>124</sup>

“The elite doesn’t come from the women’s movement. They don’t even speak the local language. They are there (in power positions) because their families are influential, because their husbands have a lot of money. Many women have never struggled for gender issues, or peace processes. So the women

at the grassroots level don't have any confidence in them. Also, some women in power don't recognise the contribution of local women's organisations to their promotion."

Overall, the disconnect between women at different levels in society was of great concern to the participants. The huge gap between the chosen few – both men and women – with power, and the overwhelming majority without power, was a hotbed for mutual distrust and lack of communication. In addition, the vastness of the country and the lack of infrastructure – roads, IT or even a functioning postal system – made it virtually impossible for civil society organisations in the eastern provinces to have regular contact with stakeholders in Kinshasa, in the far west. Or for that matter, for parliamentarians to be accountable to their constituencies by paying them regular visits.

"There should be communication between the different spaces where decisions on issues relating to gender are taken. We analyse things and make decisions... however there is a problem with connecting the decisions taken within our institutions and the decision-making spaces. The connection between those actors does not exist."

One conclusion that the participants came to, was that it is not sufficient to strive merely for an increased number of women in positions of formal power, not even if they are devoted to women's issues. In order to really improve the status of women, women who have entered formal politics also need to be given high-ranking positions within their political parties, as well as in parliamentary commissions and working groups.

But then again, many organisations emphasised that at this stage, the actual number of women is crucial, since very few men are prepared to join in the fight for women's rights.

"At the moment, women in parliament are a terrible minority. We have to look for secondary strategies. We have to have men as allies, which is not always so easy... But we also have men who are with us and who are beginning to understand. We call them feminists, but they don't like that."

Moreover, the traditional exclusion suffered by Congolese women in many cases has been internalised by the women themselves, according to the informants, in particular by the vast majority with little or no education living in rural areas. Their subordi-

nate status, in conjunction with the acute poverty, contributes to their absence from the struggle for women's political rights. The inherent notion of gendered societal roles may even lead women to consider female politicians as 'rebels' or 'prostitutes'.

"A lot of work needs to be done at village level – a lot of information, awareness, and it has to be done bottom-up. Women at the grassroots level, their problem is to find something to eat, some manioc. When we talk about gender parity, they say parity for what? What should I do with that parity?"

### Peace and security.

#### Striving for greater participation.

Even though many women's organisations already existed before the war, they had not been invited to participate at the various peace negotiations preceding Sun City in 2002. During the conflicts, there had also been a split between, and within, some organisations, as a result of the increasing ethnic and nationalist divisions in the country. One woman described the tensions and resentments experienced by the women in her own organisation, at the time of conflict:

"It was really difficult, because every single woman was affected. We didn't talk to each other anymore, we thought that the other was the enemy, and everybody in the room cried. So, I asked every woman to speak about what had happened to her, and everybody spoke and said that this is the community that is responsible for my misfortune. They all blamed each other. But afterwards, when all had talked and all had cried, we made a plan of action. Because we realised that as women, we had nothing to do with this matter of war, we have lived together, we have worked together, we have studied together, why can't we even look at each other today?"

"Yes, it has been better, since... The contact has restarted but it is not like before, we are still a bit afraid and have no confidence. We don't know what the other is thinking. And others we cannot meet at all. It is not like before the war."

The power of Congolese women lies at the family level. They are the ones who bring 'harmony' to the couple, separate fighting children or make peace between neighbours. However, this role as mother and wife, and as conflict-solver on a very small scale, did not provide them with a stronger position in matters concerning peace at the national or regional

level. The reason for this, according to the participants, was the strong tradition of leaving all matters concerning peace and security to the men.

“Well, this society thinks that when you speak of peace or security, this is a masculine matter. This is internalised, that when you see a woman dealing with peace, no, this is for men. Both men and a lot of women think so. And a consequence of this is that when a woman deals with peace questions, people don’t consider them. That is the reason why most peace agreements fail.”

However, ahead of Sun City, the women were better prepared and ready to fight for peace and security for themselves and their families. As the National Coordinator of the regional peace initiative the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) expressed it<sup>125</sup>: “They were an institution. And a very strong institution. There was no way of ignoring them, because they were so present.”<sup>126</sup>

In the ICGLR, women’s specific needs have been taken into account from the very beginning, according to the National Coordinator. As a result of their strong presence, they have been able to come up with very strong messages on sexual violence, covering the entire Great Lakes region and these messages are well anchored in the governments.

“The conference is inclusive, and it is participatory. The key stakeholders in the peace process must all be together, including women. Because women have been victims of the conflict in the region, and because women are more and more active and should take part in the discussions about solutions... And since the regional process came after the internal process, women were ready.”

In the peace process for the volatile eastern parts of the DRC, the Goma process, women had to struggle much more to get invited and be given a formal space to raise their voices and their concerns. They participated at the general conference, which was opened to civil society as well as to the warring parties and international observers, and functioned as a forum for a broader sector of society to ventilate their concerns and their grievances. However, during the more detailed negotiations between the armed groups, civil society did not participate. The few women that took part in this closed space were all representing various armed groups.<sup>127</sup>

The Goma process is monitored by the governmental programme STAREC. According to a person responsible for activities within the framework of

the STAREC activities in South Kivu, women have been involved in the entire process: from participating in peace talks, through the implementation of stabilisation activities to being the beneficiaries of measures taken to rebuild the society. Among STAREC’s priorities is reduction of sexual and gender-based violence, as well as the overall protection of civilians. However, the programme has not developed any particular protection system adapted to the specific needs of women. As an example of how this can be done, the women mentioned an initiative by MONUSCO to accompany women to and from the market, in order to protect them from sexual violence.<sup>128</sup>

Overall, there was discontent with STAREC, based on the fact that the women at the grassroots level have not been sufficiently involved in the framing of interventions.

Several of the organisations in the east were involved in concrete peace work, such as awareness-raising campaigns in the territories (rural areas) about the peace agreement and about UNSCR 1325, as well as assisting female former ex-combatants. At the same time, there was a pronounced sentiment that the conflict nowadays is entirely about gaining control of areas rich in natural resources, and thus there is little incentive to put an end to the conflict. This lack of interest among the combatants to actually cease the fighting has made it increasingly difficult for the women’s groups to have any fruitful contacts with them.

“In the east there are groups of women from civil society who have had contacts with these groups. But since their objective is not well known it is difficult. When they rape and kill women from their own village, steal cows from villagers and exploit the mines in their own communities, it is the community that is suffering and we don’t know why. There are some delegations from women’s associations that try to get in touch with the warriors, saying when you do this you are not making the government suffer, you are making the community suffer.”

### Poverty and corruption. The main hindrance to women’s participation

“Poverty is the big thing that blocks women from participating in decision-making spaces. It is because men have understood that in order to subordinate women they have to keep them poor. During the campaign period, the candidates come with gifts, they buy the votes, and all this is because of the extreme poverty.”

The DRC continues to be mired in poverty, despite all its natural resources. More than 61 percent of its women live under the poverty threshold.<sup>129</sup> Even though women traditionally are the ones who provide food for the family, they rarely have any influence over their earnings, which according to tradition belongs to their husbands.

For the women's organisations, it was obvious that poverty is one of the main underlying factors contributing to the subordination of women. Lack of financial means make them dependent on male relatives who may or may not allow them to work outside the household, or get a bank loan in order to start a small business. The majority of rural women are locked in a subsistence economy, with little chance of improving their situation. The participants also emphasised the obvious lack of political will to change the situation, as described in the quote above.

Closely linked to poverty is the issue of corruption. One of the women recalled how a politician openly bragged about how he had bought the votes that gave him power, and hence felt no responsibility towards the community that voted for him. Since the majority of the poor are women, they are the ones most prone to accept money or small gifts handed out during election campaigns. For the same reason, more men than women candidates have the resources to buy their votes, a practice which is widely accepted. Lack of financial means is a serious impediment for women with political ambitions, according to the women's organisations.

"When I went to a community to sensitise them to the need to vote for women candidates they said to me: you speak very well, but where is the money? If we don't get money we won't vote for them... That is a reason why many women don't even try to be candidates, because they have no money to spend. During this election, we even had some sort of deflation. There was such a need of banknotes to be distributed in the provinces that all the money went there, and very few banknotes were available here in Kinshasa... The women are very, very poor, that is a serious hindrance to their participation."

One of the main objectives for many women's organisations participating in the discussions, was to increase women's participation as both political candidates and as voters. According to their views, acute poverty constituted a serious problem, to which they had a pragmatic approach however, as illustrated by the following quote:

"When I went to the villages to sensitise women before the elections, I told them that the money being handed out actually belongs to the community. So I told them this is your money, take it, eat with it, but don't vote for them."

#### Lack of health and lack of security.

Health indicators in the DRC are among the worst in the world, with the majority of the population having little or no access to health care. One dire consequence of the conflicts and the sexual violence, is the increase in the number of women living with HIV in areas of armed conflict. According to witnesses in South Kivu and Maniema, cited in a UN report, some foreign armed groups had a deliberate strategy of infecting as many women as possible with the disease, in order for them to later spread the infection to the rest of the community.<sup>130</sup>

Putting an end to the shockingly high level of sexual violence, and the brutality with which it is carried out, is one of the most pressing issues in the DRC today according to several of the women's organisations. The consequences of rape often go beyond mere health matters, with devastating effects on the women, on potential children born as a result of the rape and on the entire community.

"The whole family is ashamed. The whole family has been raped and is destabilised. The victims are obliged to move, to go away."

A number of the women's organisations had programmes to assist women who had been subjected to sexual or other forms of gender-based violence. The main activities of these programmes focussed on increasing access to medical and legal aid. They had also managed to change attitudes towards victims of rape, through awareness-raising campaigns in severely affected communities. "Most women who have been raped are not accepted back into the community, no matter if they have children or not. But thanks to campaigns by us and other organisations, little by little, this attitude is changing."

There were also examples of how women activists had given assistance to victims of mass rapes on a very concrete level, for example, in Walikale in North Kivu.<sup>131</sup> Though the rate of sexual violence has gone down in urban areas like Bukavu and Goma, the rate is still very high in remote areas, especially close to the mining sites, according to the participants.

The most brutal forms of sexual violence entered the DRC with the foreign armed groups in the

1990s, the women said. However, there is a clear link as well that can be traced back to the traditional exclusion and low status of women. The informants talked about a ‘trivialisation’ of sexual violence in society, as it is primarily considered to be a women’s issue. One of the participants recalled how she and her organisation wanted to raise the issue of gender-based violence by arranging a meeting with different stakeholders.

“One time we wanted to bring together women from the media, organisations, and relevant authorities. The authorities had accepted the invitation. But of 15 invited, no one showed up on the day of the meeting. They didn’t even delegate to someone else. They had all confirmed one day before, but the day of the meeting, when I called to see what happened, they were all absent.”

According to the EU delegation in Kinshasa, the government has expressed fatigue and irritation with all the international actors wanting to report on sexual violence and donors pressing the government to increase the struggle against it.<sup>132</sup> Although agreeing to this statement, several participants emphasised the double standard of the international community. On the one hand, they urge the government to do something about the violence against women. On the other hand, the women were convinced that more could be done, had it not been for financial interests in the country’s natural resources.

“There is international business in the death and violence in the DRC. Everybody is getting their share of the profit. Panzi hospital has become a tourist place, people come to see how many women have been raped.<sup>133</sup> But today she is healed, tomorrow she will be raped again and come back to Panzi. We have to stop the cause of the violence. And the international community is not interested.”

Sexual violence and forced sexual relationships are not just linked to the conflict, explained the participants, but a very prominent problem for women and girls all over the country. A woman applying for a job as a civil servant, may have to offer sex in return for getting employed. And schoolgirls are sometimes forced to have sex with teachers or headmasters, in order to get good grades and hence be able to continue to a higher level of education. One of the organisations is specializing in assisting schoolgirls, by giving them legal assistance and sensitizing teachers and communities to the problem. Other forms of violence that render the work of

women’s organisations more difficult are the threats that they themselves, as well as their families, are subjected to.

“Women activists get a lot of death threats. Over the telephone, by SMS, e-mail, or they send someone to warn you. All of us have received such threats. I have been threatened by local politicians, governors and members of parliament.”

Another way of intimidating women’s rights activists and women politicians is through slander. This frequent tactic of questioning women’s morals may lead to women withdrawing from their political ambitions, and thus serving as an effective exclusion mechanism, since many women prefer to withdraw from politics rather than be exposed to slander. Another consequence is that many women work behind the scenes in order to maintain anonymity.

“We have a government that cannot provide security. This means that a lot of actions concerning peace are made by women, but this is not known to the public.”

#### Impunity. No justice for women.

“If a person is sent to justice today for having raped a woman, tomorrow you can see him walking down the street again as if nothing happened. And it is because of corruption.”

According to STAREC, the level of sexual violence has dropped due to increased awareness as well as more perpetrators being imprisoned.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, a high-ranking officer in Bukavu affirmed that among the 750 military staff that are in prison in South Kivu right now, the majority have been found guilty of sexual violence.<sup>135</sup> However, like in other post-conflict countries, the justice system does not function properly. Corruption, the lack of gender-aware staff and the still very prominent position of traditional justice are some of the key factors behind the shortcomings of the justice system, according to the women’s organisations. Being aware of the deficiencies of the official legal system, and the high costs of getting your case through, many families prefer to resort to customary law. One example mentioned by the women is cases of rape where the perpetrator is known. Under the auspices of a respected elder, the male members of the two affected families settle the matter financially between each other. Neither legal justice nor economic compensation is given to the woman.

In order to facilitate women's access to justice through the judicial system, one of the organisations was involved in the government-led initiative to include a gender component in the police and justice sector reforms. But due to the lack of true political will at the highest level, illustrated by a lack of funding for example, the informant said that her organisation had to explain to the government the importance of having a gender component within the security sector. "Frankly, there is a problem with the gender ministry. They should play an important role in the security sector reform, but they don't. So we are a bit frustrated."

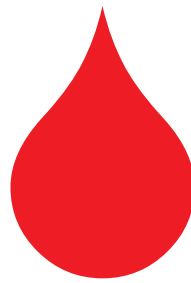
### The international community. Dependency and disappointment.

The participants willingly acknowledged the important role played by the international community ahead of the peace negotiations in 2002. Likewise, they have received a lot of support from the international community in highlighting the issue of sexual violence and bringing it to the fore of the world's attention. Still, the participants expressed a strong ambivalence regarding the actual interest of the international community in taking action in order to do something about the dire situation of women.

"Yes, we have collaboration with international partners on sexual violence, and also with the ICC.<sup>136</sup> But we have the impression that even when we make recommendations, nothing happens, there is no implementation. I have been to the US, to a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hillary Clinton, and I have been to the ICC. I have always brought with me the same very concrete recommendations. But still we have the feeling that nothing is being done."

Several women put forth the regional dimension of the conflict as a complicating factor, making the rest of the world unwilling to interfere in a more concrete way. It was after the arrival of millions of refugees from Rwanda, following the genocide in 1994, that the cycle of destabilisation began.

There are other reasons as well for the passivity of the outside world, according to the participants. The most prominent has to do with the fact that so many countries have interests in the mining industry themselves, and thus no real incentive to put pressure on the Congolese government. "We have come to the conclusion that the war in the DRC



# 1994

It was after the arrival of millions of refugees from Rwanda, following the genocide in 1994, that the cycle of destabilisation began.

will never stop. And why? Because there are mines. And as long as we have all this fortune, the war will continue", as one of the participants put it. At the same time, the DRC is extremely dependent on international donors, particularly the government. According to the EU delegation in Kinshasa, the main problem of the country can be summarised as "weak governance".<sup>137</sup> Underlying this description is a severe lack of financial and human resources, as well as a tendency to rely on international donors for investments in major infrastructure, like the health system.

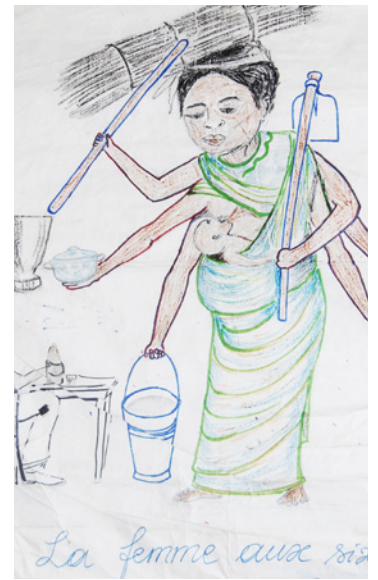
There are also negative aspects of the great influx of international NGOs, according to some participants. This is primarily due to the fact that they seem to be disinterested in transferring knowledge to their local counterparts in the DRC.

"Sometimes we are unhappy with the way the international solidarity works, the way international NGOs work when they come to the DRC. Instead of working in collaboration with the Congolese people, they sometimes do the work that the grassroots should do. So it becomes a competition with local organisations."

The UN stabilization mission MONUSCO, is another international actor with a heavy presence in the DRC. Since the onset of the mission in 2010, the main objective has been the protection of civilians in the conflict-affected provinces of South and North Kivu and Orientale. In partnership with its armed wing, and in close collaboration with local communities, MONUSCO strives to increase security in remote areas.

Among the women's organisations however, there was a pronounced mistrust of the capacity and willingness of MONUSCO to really have an impact, especially when it comes to the disarmament and repatriation of foreign armed groups. The regional dimension of the conflict, and the wealth of the DRC were all factors that made the women doubtful about the true reasons behind the international commitment.





1. Workshop at the young women's organisation Cedej in Taradja, Eastern DR Congo, 2010. Photo: Cedej. 2. Poster "The woman with six arms", DR Congo. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Anna Lithander. 3. Eastern DR Congo, 2010. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

## Part III. Analysis

### Exclusions

While peace is officially installed in the DRC, the aftermath of war has not brought true peace for the majority of women. Although several discriminatory laws have been removed, in practice women are still excluded from all levels and spaces of decision-making. In fact, in certain areas, the post-conflict period has brought worsening conditions for women. Lack of security, and increased poverty in the eastern provinces, prevent most women from taking part in activities that go beyond the struggle for mere survival. The few who are able to participate in public life, run the risk of being attacked, physically or morally. Overall, the daily routines of women in the east are dominated, to a large extent, by the prevailing insecurity and high risk of being raped or otherwise attacked.

Corruption works as another exclusion mechanism: the majority of the poor are women without

the financial means to fully benefit from their rights. The obvious lack of true political will to improve the socioeconomic situation of women, thus giving them the tools to move away from their subordinate position, was interpreted as an effective way of exercising hidden power.

While several laws on women's equality have been put in place, few of them have been implemented. In the DRC, there is a large gap between practice and theory: the weak state barely controls its own territory, and exerts even less influence on its civil servants based far away from Kinshasa. Hence, even though the parliament in Kinshasa may remove exclusionary paragraphs from the legislation, these measures often have little or no impact in the daily lives of women in South Kivu.

Another important observation is how the weakness of the state and its institutions turns civil society organisations into the main providers of social services to the population. Faced with the enormous needs among the population, these organisations often find it difficult to move on to



Workshop on gender equality in the South Kivu province, DR Congo arranged by FADI (Femmes en Action pour le Développement Intégré) 2010. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Ida Udovič.

the policy and advocacy level, since they are so preoccupied with the everyday realities of their communities.

Finally, a lack of competence within the organisations, as well as insufficient communication and dialogue with women who have achieved more formal positions of power, are other important mechanisms of exclusion.

### Achievements

Despite the extreme hardships endured by women in the DRC, they have continuously worked for peace and the survival of their families. In a very concrete manner, they have demonstrated great courage and approached armed groups to ask them to lay down their guns and stop violating women. At the local level, women's organisations have performed a crucial task in assisting women who have been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence. In many cases, the support of civil society is the only assistance there is for these women.

When financial means have been made available, women activists have also participated in international fora to show the suffering of Congolese women to the world, and they have also testified at the International Criminal Court. This is a clear illustration of the importance of enhanced collaboration between civil society organisations and the international community. The testimonies of the unpunished crimes committed against women in

the DRC and other conflict-ridden countries were the underlying motivation for the UN Security Council to adopt UNSCR 1960, which puts an emphasis on the naming and shaming of perpetrators of sexual violence as a way to reduce impunity.

As a result of women's activists persistent awareness-raising work in their communities, there are some important changes in values and attitudes taking place at the local level. One example of great importance is the reduction in the stigma surrounding rape victims, which has led to more men allowing their raped wives to stay in the household. Even if it is a very small step forward, it shows clearly that change is possible and that women's grassroots organisations, with close ties to their communities, play a crucial role.

At the national level, women in parliament and within the government administration are working hard to push through the revised Family Code, as well as the National Action Plan on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. One concrete result of this work is the participation of women within the stabilisation programme, STAREC.

Overall, progress may be slow, but the new more gender-just laws that actually exist, mainly due to the perseverance of women's organisations, give them the legal as well as the moral framework to carry on. In order to increase the number of gen-

der-sensitive women political candidates, they also provide training in women's rights.

Another achievement concerns the cross-border cooperation between women's organisations in the region. By defying the deep distrust that existed after the war, especially towards Rwanda, the women's organisations can serve as role models for rapprochement on a larger scale.

## Challenges

The challenges that lie ahead are enormous – for the DRC in general as well as for the women's movement. While the Congolese Constitution contains many far-reaching provisions on women's right to participation, the challenge of implementation remains. Considering the very low number of women in positions of formal political power, at provincial and national level, there is a great need to build alliances with men. Although men, just like women, are trapped in the distinctly gendered societal norms, an increasing number are beginning to acknowledge women's right to participation, and hence to facilitate the implementation of gender-just laws.

However, this is not enough to really have an impact in decision-making bodies. It is thus important to increase the number of women in parliament, as well as gender-awareness among the women already there. This poses a major challenge, since the majority of the elected women are more concerned with following the official party line, than advocating for women's issues. And if they do, they risk being marginalised within their party and losing whatever power they had. The history of gendered societal roles has made many women mistrust the capacity of other women when it comes to formal decision-making. In order for competent women political candidates to be willing to join a political party dominated by women instead of men, a lot of awareness-raising will be needed.<sup>138</sup>

There are also huge gaps between women in the DRC – both geographically and mentally – that have to be bridged, in order for women to be able to speak with one voice. The successful regional cooperation shows that it is possible to overcome deep-rooted distrust, and to counteract the ethnification of the country – a process that took off in conjunction with the war.

Another gap that needs to be dealt with is that between customary and modern law. To continue involving traditional leaders and sensitise them to women's right to participation, is a very important task for women's groups. On the whole, building

capacity at the local and provincial levels may prove more effective, since the obstacles at national level, including lack of competence and real commitment, are so huge.

There are also enormous socioeconomic challenges. As long as women are kept in poverty, there is little room for them to become actively involved in political life. During and after the war, however, women have more frequently become the sole breadwinner in the family, leaving them with more power, at least within the private sphere.<sup>139</sup> In many cases, this new role has triggered their ambition to take a more active part in public and political spheres.<sup>140</sup> The challenge now is to make this possible. Closely linked to poverty are education and the high level of illiteracy among women. Progress is taking place when it comes to the level of education among girls. With increased education and more awareness, it will be easier for women to claim the rights that actually are enshrined in the Constitution. Women must realise that political participation is not a favour being done to them, but their right. Education is also essential when it comes to security. To counteract the high level of impunity that still prevails, members of the police force and the military must be trained in the rape law, and the rights of women to have their cases put forward.

In order to overcome these challenges, collaboration with the international community is essential. As long as the Congolese state lacks the political will – or resources – to act for the participation and security of women, support from the international community is of vital importance. However, it is also necessary that this support does not solely focus on the fight against sexual violence. Even though the international community has been instrumental in drawing attention to the atrocities committed against women in the DRC, this one-sidedness contains an inherent risk that other areas of concern are forgotten. The women's organisations need support, both financially and with capacity building, in order to be able to focus on political participation and other issues that will form part of the future, rather than on the past. For a very long time, the women in the DRC have played a crucial role in the peacebuilding process, while traditional structures have hindered them from getting due recognition. It is time that all this experience and know-how is taken into account.

# 32.7

Population of Iraq in millions  
(The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

## Islam

Main religion in Iraq

# 78%

Percentage of Arabs in Iraq

# 75

Maternity mortality  
per 100.000 live births in Iraq

## Arabic & Kurdish

Official languages of Iraq

# 78.2%

Literacy rate in Iraq  
(Age 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)



Article 41 makes it possible to choose  
between secular or religious courts con-  
cerning issues relating to family law.

# Iraq. Between war and peace.

**T**he building of a gender-equal peace in Iraq faces great challenges. As the state of Iraq is rebuilt and reformulated after the end of the occupation, the struggle between secularism

and religion places women's rights as a central issue of contention. When sectarian political actors push for a traditionalisation of society, women's space for agency shrinks and women's rights activists are directly targeted for violence.

The occupation of Iraq by American forces did not bring an end to the violence, and today, when the U.S administration has withdrawn, violence is still ongoing and fear widespread that war will break out again. The lack of a clear dividing line between war and peace has gendered implications. Blurred lines between violence and insecurity in domestic and public spaces severely limit women's possibilities for participation in peace building as they are not able to move freely, and discriminatory laws and practices severely curtail women's lives in countless ways.

Despite these restraints, women's rights activists have contributed to some important accomplishments concerning, for example, legislation on domestic violence, gendered quotas in parliamentary elections, practical support to victims of violence, and support for a plural society. Women's organisations in Iraq use a mixture of formal and informal strategies to gain influence and have developed a number of skills to negotiate the politico-religious context.

In summary:

- Ongoing violence beyond the 'end' of war severely limits women's agency and participation.
- Political violence and domestic violence are interconnected and act as powerful exclusions mechanisms.
- The religious context calls for specific strategies to gain power.
- Missed opportunity for international actors to contribute to gender equality in the transition period.





There is yet no law against sexual/gender based violence in Iraq. There are some reports that rape has been used as a method for ethnic cleansing of mixed neighborhoods, and abducted girls and women are victims of trafficking.



Share of women in parliament (Progress of the world's women 2011-2012).



The war in Iraq has been a severe backlash for women's rights. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Anna Lithander.

northern Iraq, which has taken some important steps towards democracy and economic development. In 2003, Saddam Hussein was ousted and American forces began a military presence that would last nearly a decade. Some 115,050 civilian deaths have been registered between 2003 and

## Part I. Background

Iraq has been in a state of war and conflict for four decades. The war with Iran 1980–1988 killed half a million soldiers and civilians in both countries. Towards the end of the conflict Saddam Hussein attempted to obliterate the Kurdish fight for freedom in northern Iraq in the genocide campaign al-Anfal, which included mass deportations and chemical attacks that killed hundreds of thousands of civilians and destroyed thousands of villages. In 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait, which led to the Gulf War in 1991 when American and allied forces attacked Iraq. Following the war, UN sanctions were imposed for more than ten years, resulting in economic and social breakdown in most of Iraq, with dire consequences for the civilian population, despite the oil-for-food programme.<sup>141</sup> A positive development was the internationally agreed no-fly zone over northern Iraq in order to protect the Kurdish population. Peace has since then prevailed in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan in

2011.<sup>142</sup> The power of sectarian extremist leaders increased during the decade of occupation and when the American occupation ended in December 2011, violence rose sharply. Violence and political instability have escalated since the withdrawal of American forces, as political and sectarian factions have fought for power and influence in the post-conflict phase, bringing the country close to civil war. The Iraqi government has shown signs of weakening democratic instincts, for example, it has increased the powers of security forces, as well as intimidating the media. At the same time, violence by local and often transnationally backed insurgent groups such as Al-Qaeda and other more home-grown militias have increased.

### Women in the conflict

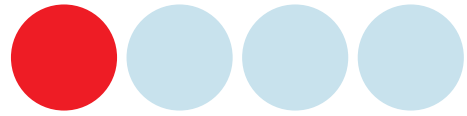
The decades of war have brought with them a severe backlash against women's rights. In the 1970s, significant steps had been taken towards a more gender-equal society. The secular Baathist state in the early years of Saddam Hussein's rule meant that legislative reform was possible and women's literacy



the practice of female genital mutilation, forced marriages, child marriages, sexual violence and honour killings.



A national law against domestic violence was drafted in 2012. Such a law was already passed in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2010, a law that also criminalises



A gender quota was put in place for the 2005 elections, which states that women shall occupy at least 25 percent of all seats in parliament and other elected bodies. However, as the political climate hardens, lack of security directly affects women's possibilities for participation.

and education improved, women won the right to vote and engage in employment outside the home. Up until 1991, the country had the highest literacy rate in the region among women. However, as Saddam Hussein began to lose his legitimacy during the years of war, he turned to fundamentalist religious leaders for support with decreased freedom for women as a direct consequence.<sup>143</sup>

**D**uring the occupation, expectations of greater freedom for women and strengthened legal protection failed to materialise to a large degree as religious tensions steadily rose and fundamentalist militia leaders increased their political influence in the transition period. Abductions and killings of women seem to have increased during the years of foreign rule. A report from the Iraqi women's organization OWFI indicates that so-called honour crimes have been on the rise since 2003. There are some reports that rape has been used as a method of ethnic cleansing of mixed neighbourhoods. The crimes are perpetrated by militias who rely on the logic of honour crimes, extending it beyond the family sphere.<sup>144</sup> Some of these abducted girls and women are fed into trafficking networks. Iraq, especially its southern parts, has become a hub in a trafficking network that extends across the Middle East. At the same time, prostitution is forbidden according to Iraqi law and there have been cases of public executions of prostitutes by militias as warning examples.<sup>145</sup> There have also been incidents of women raped by soldiers of the American occupation forces.<sup>146</sup>

Domestic violence is a widespread and growing problem according to women's rights organisations. In a survey conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2008, 83 percent of the interviewed married women said that their husbands had 'controlling behaviour' and 21 percent said that they had been subjected to physical violence.<sup>147</sup>

Today the foreign troops have withdrawn, vio-

lence continues and the threat of civil war is serious. Women's rights activists are at risk of attacks from politico-religious stakeholders, who also target female politicians, civil servants and journalists. Death threats are common occurrences according to testimonies from women's rights activists.<sup>148</sup>

### Occupation and state-building

Overall, the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq has been highly controversial, from the grounds for the invasion (the never-found weapons of mass destruction) to increased insecurities for Iraqi civilians and the failure to rebuild infrastructure during the occupation. On the positive side, democratic elections have been held and other institutional structures are in place. The most long-term negative effects may be the occupation administration's tactic of supporting sectarian forces — a strategy that aimed for inclusion but instead strengthened divisiveness. Hence, Saddam Hussein's system of divide and conquer, which had been the hallmark of the dictatorship, was allowed to continue under the auspices of the Western powers.

The era of foreign administration did not bring great improvements concerning gender equality. Although UNSCR 1325 was adopted before the start of the American occupation, the resolution was ignored by the architects of the military invasion.<sup>149</sup> Neither the UN used the resolution as a framework for action by the UN Mission in Iraq (UNAMI).<sup>150</sup>

Little was done by the occupation power to include women in efforts to develop an interim government and ultimately a sustainable future for Iraq. From the very beginning of the occupation, as alliances were made and power assigned, to a large degree women were ignored. In April 2003, the first US-appointed interim administrator of Iraq met with 250 Iraqis who represented various groups in order to discuss the setting up of an interim government. Of those, only six were women. When the first Iraqi Governing Council was set up by the US administration, three women were included in the 25-seat

council.<sup>151</sup> While several international donors have played a crucial role for many of the women's organisations, only 0.5 percent of international financial support to Iraq in 2008 was earmarked for women.<sup>152</sup>

### Legal rights

The constitutional process began after the first interim legislative elections in 2005. The constitutional debate in Iraq was a key process in the transitional period and a primary object for women's activism. At the centre stood the Personal Status Law, concerned with marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance and hence instrumental in defining women's space and to what extent power may be exerted over them — be it by male relatives, religious authorities or the state.<sup>153</sup> In 1959 the Act was revised, and again in 1978 after strong lobbying from women political activists. When the Coalition Provisional Authority (charged with overseeing Iraq's occupation) and the emergent new national leaders sat down to chisel out the new constitution, it was a key opportunity for bringing up gender equality. The first major struggle around women's rights occurred in 2004 when the Interim Governing Council introduced sharia law through the inclusion of Resolution 137 in the Personal Status Law — despite strong protests by the head of the Coalition Provisional Authority. The mass mobilisation around Resolution 137 led to a withdrawal of it from the constitution just a month later.<sup>154</sup>

The committee that began drafting a permanent constitution after the 2005 elections consisted of nine women and 44 men. The result was a contradictory document that guarantees women and men equal rights and forbids discrimination and domestic violence. At the same time it considers Islam to be the basic source of legislation. It was approved in 2006 by a nation-wide referendum. Once again the Personal Status Law was threatened, this time by the inclusion of Article 41, which stipulates that each religious group in Iraq is allowed to govern its own personal status matters. Iraqis may choose between secular or religious courts concerning issues relating to family law.<sup>155</sup> Article 41 continues to be a central issue of contention in the struggle between secular and religious forces.

In the new post-occupation era, women activists continue to lobby for reform and mobilise to take on the growing influence of ultra-conservative and sectarian forces. On a positive note, an important step forward is the national law against domestic violence that was being drafted at the time of writing. Such a law was already passed in 2011 in Iraqi

While several international donors have played a crucial role for many of the women's organisations, only 0.5 percent of international financial support to Iraq in 2008 was earmarked for women.<sup>152</sup>

Kurdistan. Widely considered to be one of the most far-reaching laws in the Middle East, it also criminalises the practise of female genital mutilation, forced marriages and child marriages and hence targets many honour crimes.<sup>156</sup>

### Political participation

The issue of the imposition of a gender quota system on political parties received a mixed international response. While the British government made a suggestion of such a system, the US was strongly against it. Nonetheless, as a result of women's activism a gender quota system was successfully put in place for the 2005 elections, which stipulates that women shall occupy at least 25 percent of all seats in parliament and other elected bodies. In the first free elections, women won 31 percent of the seats in parliament, that is, even more than the new law decreed. In the last elections held in 2010, the number of women elected dropped to less than 25 percent of the seats in parliament and a similar drop was noted in local council elections. As the political climate hardens, lack of security directly affects women's possibilities for participation. During the election campaign in 2010, ten women who were interviewed about their possibilities for participating in the campaign said that they had been threatened or knew other women parliamentary candidates who had been threatened.<sup>157</sup>

### Civil society

Iraqi civil society is growing with an increasing number of NGOs active in most areas and in general gaining more and more legitimacy. At the same time, the Iraqi government and the prime minister have been criticised for applying political pressure to these organisations. Several organisations have





There are an estimated 1–2 million war widows in Iraq, from the Iran-Iraq war and onwards. Female-headed households constitute 37 percent of all households, many of them are also internally displaced. Only about every fourth widow is paid the state's widow's pension to which they are entitled.<sup>160</sup>

received anonymous threats and activists have been arrested. Attempts by women's organisations to raise issues of gender equality are met with harsh attacks by the media or by politicians. Most activists share stories of being harassed and threatened on a regular basis. Some have received death threats. Shelters for victims of violence have been condemned for giving support to 'unfaithful women'.<sup>158</sup> The international support for women's organisations has been used by militia leaders, religious leaders and other powerful figures to further agitate against the organisations, arguing that they have been co-opted by foreign interests and that they are 'traitors'. In these campaigns, women's rights are branded as an idea imposed from the outside, further increasing women's vulnerability to verbal and physical attacks.<sup>159</sup>

### Socioeconomic challenges

There are an estimated 1–2 million war widows in Iraq, from the Iran-Iraq war and onwards. Female-headed households constitute 37 percent of all households, many of them are also internally displaced. Only about every fourth widow is paid the state's widow's pension to which they are entitled.<sup>160</sup>

After decades of dictatorship, wars and sanctions, the physical and social infrastructure of Iraq is in dire need of reconstruction. The inability of the American forces and the Iraqis to reconstruct basic services has been an issue of great concern.<sup>161</sup> It has meant sharply increased workloads as well as safety problems. The health situation for women in Iraq continues to be among the worst in the region and maternal and infant mortality rates are high. While in 1991 women's literacy in Iraq was the highest in the region, today about 20 percent of young women are illiterate.<sup>162</sup>

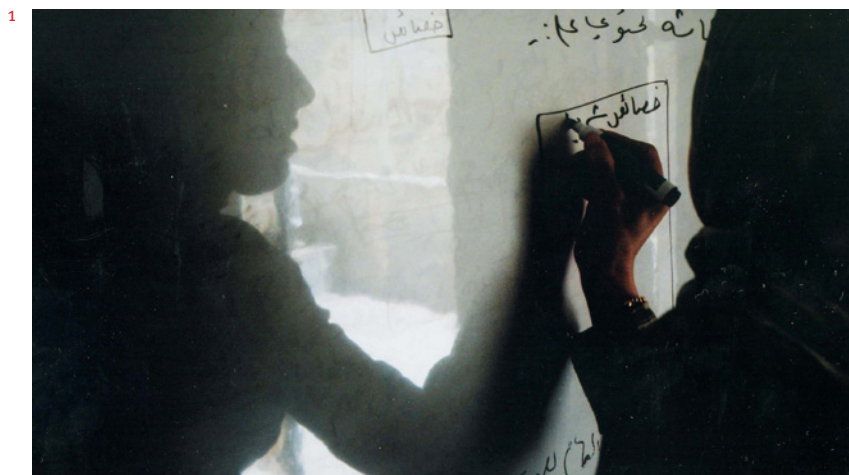
## Part II. Experiences of power and participation

This part presents the findings from field research in Iraq in January 2012. A focus group was held in the city of Erbil with 7 participants from key women's organisations coming from different parts of Iraq. Interviews were held with key informants from civil society and some key actors at the national and international formal levels.

### Negotiating danger. Insecurities that exclude.

"When I leave my house I have to cover myself, wear a headscarf and so on. Also the checkpoints are very dangerous places. They harass the girls and say bad things. I cannot walk anywhere. I can only drive with a driver and it limits my work, I work from home online and only go to the office once a week. When I was at college it took me two hours to get there. I had eight checkpoints to pass through where they searched my clothes and bags. My studies became very difficult. But the hardest part is that sometimes when I went to school I used to see dead bodies ... I will tell you a story. It is about my friend Moroud. She was only seventeen years old. We were sitting together and preparing for college entry exams. I went back home but she was staying at my other friend's house. A roadside bomb exploded and shrapnel got into her side. She stayed in the hospital for fifteen days and then she passed away. It happened four years ago and me and the other friend still celebrate her birthday every year. But that friend is Christian and she had to leave Iraq and go to America."

This is from one of the young participants living in Baghdad, sharing her everyday experiences in the focus group. Her brief story conveys the mix of daily harassment and life-threatening danger that she faced every time she left home. She spoke about losing friends to death and flight because of sectarian violence. She captured the geographical confinement that she and her friends endured, as well as how decisions on what to wear on their own bodies was controlled from outside. The overall lack of security that she dealt with in her everyday life was a central theme for the focus group. Violence in public and domestic spaces was identified as the



1. Education can be hard to access for women in the Middle East. Photo: Mia Gröndahl. 2. Women's rights activists in Sulaymaniyah demonstrate against increased violence and accusations from religious leaders in Iraq. Photo: ASUDA. 3. Men dominate the public areas in the Middle East. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/ Anna Lithander.



central and most direct obstacle to women's possibilities for participation.

While the overall decrease in violence in the public sphere had led to lower levels of civilians being killed in general, the increase in sectarianism and rise of religious fundamentalist groups has meant heightened levels of insecurity and violence against women. At the time of the focus group (January 2012), levels of sectarian violence were sharply on the rise as a consequence of the withdrawal of American troops. In the struggle over political and territorial control, the rights of women were a focal point. Participants testified that as soon as they were in public spaces, they were at risk, and had to take precautions concerning their bodies and their movements in order not to arouse anger and provoke danger: they feared abductions, rapes and killings. "Violence and insecurity is everywhere

for Iraqi women. It is limiting in so many ways" as one informant put it. The level of violence affected women's possibilities to engage in political activities and to meet regularly. Several participants testified that they had been specifically targeted as members of women's organisations. They had received abuse, death threats and their offices had been vandalised. Importantly, participants in the focus group stated that the public violence perpetrated against women was driven by the same logic as the widespread abuse of women in domestic and private spaces. The cultural norm system in which women are seen as the bearers of the family's honour has meant an acceptance of abuse or even killings of women who are understood to have broken the family's honour. Hence, controlling women is necessary in order to protect the honour of the family. It is a task that male relatives are to perform:

“All the other male members of her family control her, all the time supervising. There are many people in the family who control the woman.”

The logic of honour killings had been transplanted into the violent strategies of insurgent groups, with women becoming symbols and bearers of honour not only of the family, but of the group or the nation. According to this logic, a woman or girl who has been ‘taken’ by the enemy is ‘soiled’. The family would disconnect from her, punishing her by beatings or even killing her. As expressed by one of the participants:

“When the enemy took them, only God knows what happened to them. Something might have happened to her body. And the body of the woman contains the honour of the family. And consequently of the whole nation.”

Hence, for the participants in the focus group, the line between domestic violence and public violence was often blurred. Working with victims of violence – domestic and public – was a core aspect of the work of many women’s organisations in the focus group. Most of them ran shelters for women who were running away from violence at home. Participants from southern Iraq told stories of women who had come to their shelters physically injured from rape by members of a militia, but whose relatives refused to take them to hospital since to admit to the abuse publicly would destroy the family’s honour. In the shelters, they also provided the victims with the chance to talk about their experiences, and gave legal advice.

“We have established a hotline. After that the women started to come to our centres, although they were afraid to come. We provide the chance for women to talk about what they have suffered. For the first time. Even for me it was very difficult to break the silence about my experiences.”

It was one of the areas where it was possible to be active without too much obstruction from official actors – although some women activists had been accused of “spreading prostitution” by leading politicians. Working with these issues was a matter that strengthened both the protection of women and their participation. As one informant put it: “If we do not combat this violence, we will never be able to increase women’s participation.”

“To work against domestic violence is to work

for peace ... Raising awareness means raising confidence. People who are confident can be peace-builders.”

### International actors. Occupation and transition – without women.

Levels of violence were sharply on the rise at the time of the focus group and many participants expressed worry over the fact that the American troops had left only weeks before. While they were well aware of the violence perpetrated by many of the foreign troops and of the fact that the decade-long occupation had not created a secure peace, they felt it had been the wrong moment to leave. They feared the emergence of militias and lived with the threat of civil war. When the Iraqi dictatorship was toppled in 2003, many women hoped that the entry of the Americans would open up possibilities for women to claim their political rights. For women from Iraqi Kurdistan especially, the presence of the American administration had been positive, as Iraqi Kurdistan had been able to develop its autonomous rule in relative peace. The Kurdish women expressed worry that the sectarian violence that plagued the rest of Iraq would spread to Iraqi Kurdistan and have negative consequences on the relative freedom of women there.

At the same time, they all pointed out that the American administration had not done enough to work for the inclusion of women. All participants held international actors responsible for not bringing up gender issues more strongly in the sensitive transitional period. They argued that compromises on gender issues had repeatedly been made in order to accommodate conservative forces and get sectarian leaders on board in the negotiations.

There were several lost moments in the transitional period for targeting issues concerning gender equality and women’s participation. A leading women’s rights activist interviewed for this study, who has played an instrumental role in the transitional period, stated that the American administration had failed to support women’s groups on two crucial issues: the fatal inclusion of Article 41 (described in the background above) in the Iraqi constitution, and the lack of support for gender quotas. She spoke of the initial willingness of the Americans to meet with women’s groups, for example, when Iraqi-American women employed in the American administration worked actively to make contacts with the Iraqi women’s movement. But when negotiations started with those who were deemed to be the ‘real’ stakeholders, their demands were put aside:

“We held public demonstrations as well as inside the parliament in order to try to get Article 41 withdrawn from the constitution. We met with the American Ambassador. We had a really hard time and he tried to avoid any intervention on the Constitution. I was furious. They talk about transforming Iraq into a symbol for human rights and democracy, but they do not listen when we argue that the new Constitution breaches international conventions on human rights.”

The American administration had also taken a step back when women started demanding a gender quota and refused to stand behind this demand. Still, women’s organisations successfully lobbied and a majority in parliament voted for the proposed gender quota system.

According to this activist, the Americans were in “a great hurry” and did not prioritise issues concerning gender, since they thought it would slow down the process. The policy to leave these issues aside was a short-term decision with very long-term consequences for the Iraqis, she argued.

Today the occupation has ended, but the international presence in Iraq is still great. The UN mission in Iraq UNAMI has not been willing to raise a high profile on issues concerning gender equality, since they understand their mandate to be limited to financial and technical issues according to the activists in the focus group. “I tell them that your mandate must also be, for your own sake as well, to make sure that the UN documents and conventions on fundamental human rights are abided by”. It is possible for outside actors to engage in such issues. This is proven by the fact that other UN organisations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and UNIFEM stand behind the demands to erase Article 41 from the Constitution.<sup>163</sup>

At a general level, all women in the focus groups acknowledged the importance of the international community’s interest in them and of public support:

“International presence is very good. Now they know we have this cooperation, we are travelling to international conferences, we have meetings with high figures within international organisations”.

Without the presence of international actors in Iraq, they thought that it would be much harder to bring up gender issues at all. External funding from international civil society actors, UN bodies and governments had given crucial support to networking and capacity building.

Although women’s organisations have a long tradition in Iraq going back to the beginning of the 20th century, civil society is now developing to a large extent within the parameters drawn up by the UN administration, the World Bank and the IMF, and various other donors and policymakers play a key role for the women’s movement. The EU delegation in Baghdad stressed the importance of women’s participation in the reconstruction process. Gender issues are mainstreamed in all of the EU’s projects, but several EU representatives in different positions testified to the difficulties of trying to advance issues of gender equality as they are often described as external ideas with little validity in Iraqi society.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, several participants expressed concern that many donors were changing their funding patterns, from direct funding to civil society organisations to a preference for funding state actors, who are then given the responsibility to fund organisations. The participants did not trust the newly formed state institutions to make informed and sound decisions on funding. They saw the new developments as a threat to their independence and watchdog position: “now we need to get approved by government. This is bad news for civil society”.

#### Norms and laws. Lobbying for reform within a religious framework.

“There are no laws to criminalise violence against women ... We have women who have been victimised and trafficked but there are no laws that criminalise this. The instability and lack of security have a bad influence on women’s possibilities to live and take part in society.”

A central focus for women’s organisations has been on lobbying for legal reform. At the centre stands the tug-of-war between secular and religious law. Different strategies emerging in the discussions on how to best ensure women’s rights to participate were not hindered by legal restraints. Many of the organisations had been involved in lobbying to influence the writing of the new Constitution. The successful mass mobilisation against Resolution 137 as described in the background above was deemed a great success, although the accepted constitution has an overall religious framework that stipulates that Islam is a fundamental source of legislation. Hence the new constitution was described to be “full of loopholes and gaps” when it came to gender equality. Its Article 41, described above in the background, was seen as “a bomb implanted within the constitution.”

Iraqi Kurdistan provides an interesting example

of how major victories for women's legal rights have been achieved. Over the last ten years of relative peace, Kurdish women's organisations have been able to develop sophisticated and multiple skills for participating in the public space. One achievement is the Marriage Law in which the legal age for girls in 2007 was changed from 14 to 16 years, after extensive lobbying from women's organisations. Another success story is the campaign that in June 2011 resulted in the first law against domestic violence – a major accomplishment in a region deeply characterised by traditional mechanisms of 'honour' control. One activist gave the following blueprint for the successful campaign, which included a multitude of approaches such as selective lobbying, identifying 'change agents' and creating alliances with them, networking within civil society, direct action such as street theatre, and finally, providing legal expertise in writing drafts of the law:

"You always find new ways of fighting. We established a joint committee (in which) everyone from civil society was represented. We worked in three arenas: the political, the media and civil society organisations. On March 8 we started with a role-play and a march into the centre of town ... We were two groups of women. In the first group everyone was wearing white clothes with blood on them. In the second they were chained and a man was dragging them. We presented a petition to the prime minister and requested shelters to be created for women. A resolution was issued and that was a start. We knew how to lobby the government and we could then continue with governmental officials, lawyers and prosecutors. We wrote a draft of the article on domestic violence and it was ratified in the (regional) parliament. At this time, in 2005, it was refused but we continued our struggle and in 2011 virtually all members of parliament agreed, there was only one vote against it. Even the Islamic party members agreed. This is how the law (against domestic violence) was created, and that is how, in cooperation with other civil society actors, we were successful. It was the achievement of 20 years of struggle."

#### Political participation. Strategies for decision-making.

A major victory for women's organisations in the transitional period was the provision in the Electoral Act that 25 percent of candidates to elected positions have to be women. The women's movement had worked intensely on this issue, collecting signatures

and lobbying. Furthermore, women's organisations campaigned and raised awareness among women to vote in the elections, and took part in training women candidates in campaign running. The voter turnout among women was great in the 2005 elections and more than a third of the elected parliamentarians were women. Although these positive results were not as good in the last election, it still means that women today are present in parliament and also to some extent as members of councils and committees that work on specific issues. While the quota system has meant that women are physically present, their space for agency is still severely curtailed, as one of the participants testified. She had been part of one of the interim councils and gave insights into a political culture of exclusion:

"In the beginning, many men refused to sit next to me because of me being a woman. They would leave a space between myself and themselves and say they could not be near me. But (the situation improved) when we had met several times and talked about women's rights. I tried to change their thinking about women. Women can share with you the resources and the political space, I told them; I am an educated person, I am an engineer."

The quota system was supported by all as a crucial step towards breaking these heavy barriers. However, it had brought with it some unexpected problems, participants said. The party committees control who gets put on the list, and most of the women who had been elected had very little political experience. They were certainly not in politics in order to fight for women's rights. Some participants had felt let down when women politicians turned against them. The fact that the majority of women politicians voted for the inclusion of Article 41 into the Constitution, despite intense lobbying, was an example of this gap:

"The positive thing is that you will have the presence of women in parliament even if it is just their physical presence. The negative aspect is that a group of women go to parliament without having gotten any personal votes. These women may not be qualified to defend the interests of women."

To some extent, the gender quota has been hijacked by the party steering committees who were not interested in putting strong and politically active women in positions of power. Participants contended that the committees, consisting almost entirely of men, actively disregarded women with some influence in their communities, especially women with an

interest in gender issues. This has resulted in a situation where women without a power base are present in parliament, who are just used and told to “vote and obey”.

“This problem is not the fault of women. It is the fault of the political parties that have brought this system into practice. Because if you have worked in order to be an active figure in the community then you should be able to go to parliament on the strength of these activities, but the party leaders ... will actually block your way and limit your freedom to work.”

### Poverty and marginalisation.

#### Socioeconomic aspects of participation.

As a consequence of the ongoing conflicts over recent decades, Iraq has suffered severe economic hardships. A direct connection was made between poverty and peace:

“When the economy is weak, the joints of social connections in the community will be loosened, the psychology of the country and people will be disturbed ... anger ... and fear will increase. In this atmosphere violence will be created. (And the other way around) – when there is peace and stability the economy will be revitalised.”

Lack of education was identified by the participants as a contributing factor for the oppression of women: “We have illiterate women, without skills, she knows nothing, she is getting married at twelve years of age, when she is fourteen she has her first baby ...”

“Social issues are not given any priority. But socioeconomic issues are really important, this is how we change the whole society. Most women are unskilled, illiterate women ... this is not good for the country in general. When we help women to become independent and be able to provide for their children, we are not only saying that we are helping women but we are improving all of society.”

If traditional, controlling norms of honour and other oppressive ideas were to change, they saw it as necessary to start by addressing problems of underdevelopment and lack of education: “Poverty is the core of the problem. We cannot start to say that honour killing is wrong. No, you cannot start with that”. It appeared that they invested a lot of hope in the idea that norms would change once education levels went up and people would feel that they had more economic space for action. Then the whole

society would also be able to break free from violent norm systems. While interconnections between poverty and violence certainly exist, such an understanding may also be a sign of the very limited space that women had for challenging structures of power.

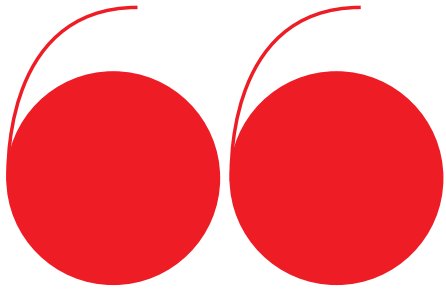
The situation of the several millions of war widows was particularly fragile. They have a dual status: in the official narrative they are given the role of heroes and sufferers for the nation and used to support the national narrative. At the same time, they are locked into a desperate situation, stripped of agency by traditions that forbid them to work and provide for their families. As astutely stated by one of the participants: “the widows are heroes of the nation, and at the same time they are ruined”. A widow is not supposed to work or remarry, and she might be internally displaced, far from relatives. But somehow she must provide for her family and children. “We see seven-year-old children begging, getting sucked into trafficking. They are often the children of widows. And they have to work to take care of their mothers”.

“People do not think about their physical needs, their sexual needs or psychological needs. When this happened most of them were young women, with small kids. If she would consider to remarry, well that is considered to be shameful, not possible. How can she even think like that!”

“This is a slow killing of that woman. The community kills her slowly,” one informant commented. Several participants saw their work with widows as an integral part of peacebuilding, through the socioeconomic support to this vulnerable group who suffered as a direct consequence of war and violence. The informants pointed to a multilevel approach. Several of them ran micro-credit projects specifically targeting widows.

At the same time, there was an awareness that although such projects were helpful for a number of women in creating a new socioeconomic space, a more profound transformation of society was needed to affect the feminisation of poverty that widows were such a salient example of.

Another issue concerned with more long-term and structural change was gender budgeting, at state as well as regional level. Participants pointed out that no women had been involved in the adoption of the ongoing five-year national economic plan. Another issue concerned the lack of enforcement of certain laws that actually have been passed. For example, the law that school is mandatory for both girls and boys, but “...no one follows up if the girls don't turn



So we need the statistics on the situation of widows, of women in general, so that the government and the international organisations can target the right groups and numbers.”

up in school. We have no idea what is going on”. Furthermore, the lack of statistics, which meant that any argument concerning the situation of women could not be backed up, and no profound analysis could be made of the gendered aspects of poverty:

“We have no statistics on women’s situation in Iraq. During the last fourteen years I spent all my days in court only with cases concerning women. That is why I am pointing out that it is really important to have statistics. So we need the statistics on the situation of widows, of women in general, so that the government and the international organisations can target the right groups and numbers.”

**Norms and values.**

**Negotiating the secular divide.**

An underlying question for many women activists in civil society is to what extent one should cooperate with religious leaders. What is the best strategy:

confrontation or dialogue? Many Iraqi women activists and politicians embrace religion actively and argue that a secular perspective is not necessary in order to push for women’s protection and participation. Several women were at pains to explain that Islam as a religion was not to blame: “If you look at the nature of Islam it is actually a tolerant religion that preaches good treatment of women. So it is bad implementation of religion that we see here”. They were willing to enter into cooperation with religious leaders, selecting key persons with whom they shared some common ground, and then working from that position, trying to expand areas of cooperation. One of the informants described how a working relationship had developed between the selected imams that they work with. She tells how one of the participating imams had told her the reactions he had received after he had started to talk about the rights of women at Friday prayers in the mosque: “After three Fridays, the women came to the

mosque. They said to him, because of your speech our husbands have behaved well. So please, repeat this speech from time to time". She argued that this cooperation also led to other doors opening for an acceptance of issues concerned with women's rights, within the Ministry of Religious Affairs for example, which used to be very much averse to women's organisations:

"To begin with, it was very difficult to even talk about honour killings. First we started with those politicians that to an extent were for women's rights, we did not go to those who were against women's rights. We lobbied among them... With the media, we applied the same logic."

In an interview with one of the representatives of the Islamic Scholar Union, he confirmed the growing relationship between imams and women's organisations in Iraqi Kurdistan. With between 5,000–7,000 members in Iraqi Kurdistan, they reach more than one million people at every Friday prayer:

"From the humanitarian perspective, we cannot be silent if a woman is going to be killed ... The biggest problem here is that people practice traditions. But they say it is religion. For example, a man kills a woman and thinks it is a good job. We believe that society will not be improved if we do not get rid of this violence. We give examples of verses in the Koran what the Prophet says and show the respect he treated his wives and daughters with."<sup>165</sup>

Some members of the focus group were more sceptical – and argued that at least one needs to tread very carefully: "We don't want to make the imams our friends. We do not ask them for permission and that's how step by step we are going with them continuously". To reach some common understanding on domestic violence might be possible but the moment other more contentious issues were challenged, for example concerning marriage, divorce or inheritance, they thought that the attempts at cooperation would break down. Still, they said, they have no choice. Either they are completely ostracised or they accept the present frameworks and try to change them from within. They had developed sophisticated skills for negotiating and finding loopholes and innovative strategies for widening their space, as illustrated by the following example concerned with the development of a small-scale business project for women:

"One of the officials said to us, what do you want, you women, do you want to be equal to men? He

answered himself – no! Then the organisations may actually do some tricks to achieve their objectives, otherwise you cannot succeed. It is a highly sophisticated game that is going on. We told the officials that we want to be business women. No, no, we don't want to be equal, we just want to be traders. We tell them that one of the Prophet's wives was a trader, so if she could be a trader, why not me?"

Another example was provided concerning a project designed for informing women about health issues. It was considered a 'safe' project that many women will be 'allowed to participate in', go to workshops, etc., to learn about health issues. However, while learning about these issues, they will also get insights into legal issues: "So we can indirectly achieve our objectives. Through health awareness we also provide legal awareness."

### Women against sectarianism.

#### Laying the ground for reconciliation.

Divisions in Iraq run deep and are multifaceted. Between religious groups, between secular and religious sectors, between regions – between men and women, and between fluctuating insurgent groups. A comment by one of the participants reflects the sometimes chaotic situation: "Even if you want to have reconciliation, the question is with whom should you talk?" Participants believed that as women's organizations they may hold the key to restoring the social fabric that was torn asunder during the years of occupation when leaders of sectarian interests took precedence with strategic support from the outside. Making a connection between gender inequality and sectarianism, one of the participants said that Article 41 (which, as described above, gives precedence to traditional law over secular law) will not only disadvantage women, but also "disintegrate the family and then destroy the community as well". This is because Article 41 affords a person's religious or ethnic identity precedence over their status as Iraqi citizens:

"It means that we will have one Shia court, one Christian court, one Sunni court and so on. ... People will not be treated the same and hence their religious identities will take precedence."

They believed that sectarianism was an elite project, driven by political struggles between the government and different factions with militias attached who in turn foment violence with the support of weapons and funds from neighbouring countries.



“If we look at the grassroots level, you can see that people are connected. You can see Sunni, Shia, Arabs, Kurds, Christians — all nationalities living in Iraq but they are interconnected and they have no problem living with each other”. For ordinary people, the reasons for siding with one or the other are often trivial, participants agreed. “Sometimes people believe the Al-Qaeda is better because they protect them from Al-Mahdi militia, so it is a very simple story really”.

In addition, it was pointed out that during the American occupation, sectarian interests gained in strength while those working for a unified Iraqi identity were marginalised. One participant described this change:

“Before the Americans came we did not use such terms as Kurds or Shia. I worked for many years, and not ever did anyone at work say that you are Christian, etc. I had many friends and I did not know if they were Sunni, Shia, Christian or whatever, but now after this sectarian focus, I know. I was lucky to be elected as one member of a particular council. The Americans distributed forms in this council and one of the questions you had to tick was: Are you Shia, Christian and so on... And I wrote: I am Iraqi.”

In the 1990s Saddam Hussein had already begun to turn to fundamentalist religious leaders in order to bolster his waning legitimacy. The American occupation had a continued focus on religious and ethnic representation as a key to consolidating peace. The preoccupation with consolidating peace through ticking boxes of religious identity may have been a strategy to appease sectarian interests, but as the quote above illustrates, it had deeply divisive effects that ordinary Iraqis were forced to take part in, whether they wanted to or not.

In discussions on how women can participate in working for reconciliation and building a unified Iraq, informants expressed a fear that increasing divisiveness and less and less contact between different identity groups were affecting women’s possibility to keep up their cross-border work. “Prejudice grows daily in a climate of fear”, one participant concluded. At a general level, participants were keen to stress the specific role women can play since they are “more peaceful than men”. It was a strong conviction among the participants, who said for example that “women by nature really love peace” and “if women are decision-makers the world will be peaceful”. They claimed a space as women that was an alternative to male leaders driven by hunger for power and influence that threatened

to pull Iraq apart. It seemed that such a positioning was an important building block in their work across religious and ethnic borders and strengthened their identity as peacebuilders. As their space for agency was strictly limited in the political climate of post-occupation Iraq, this identification held some promise of access to influence and power. The negative effects of stereotyping along the lines of specific biological traits of women and men were not discussed.

At the same time, because of ongoing violence between different factions, it was deemed an impossible moment to confront violent militias and attempt to act as bridge-builders, especially since the presence of women in politics and negotiations was actually one of the points of contention. In Iraqi Kurdistan however, the situation was relatively peaceful and women’s organisations there were part of a recently constructed reconciliation commission set up to bridge the gap between the regional government and opposition groups, which, at the time of writing, had paralysed politics in the northern region for some time.

Finally, it was pointed out that the deepest divide in Iraq today runs between men and women, and that all work that aims to bridge the gendered abyss in Iraqi society is also an integral part of reconciliation. As discussed in the introduction to *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, the building of a coherent and stable society greatly benefits from gender equality and the active participation of both men and women. Referring to the developing cooperation between religious leaders and women’s organisations discussed above, one informant said that such dialogues have as a direct aim to end ongoing violence, but just as importantly, they also have long-term effects and support the building of societal peace.

“We need to have many sessions with men and women together to work on how we can become closer and accept each other. We can play the role of mediators between men and women, and work on how to solve the problems among them. We can work on building reconciliation between men and women.”

All awareness-raising projects, among women as well as among men, were seen to be beneficial to peace in the long run. As the participant quoted above said: “People who are confident can be peace-builders.”

## Part III. Analysis

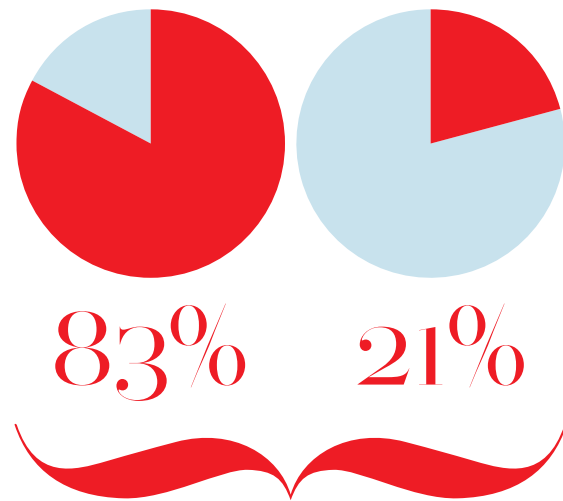
### Exclusions

Iraq is an example of how violence continues long after peace is officially installed. Violence and insecurity in domestic and public spaces severely limit women's possibilities for participation and the political space for women's activities and advocacy is narrow. It is necessary to understand how different kinds of violence affect women, how violence spills over from war into peacetime, and whether security and sustainable peace are to be built for all. Domestic violence and military violence are intimately connected as women's bodies are sites of violence in war as well as in peace. The violence directed at women in the insecure environment of Iraq follows the logic of using women's bodies for shaming. Violence may often be enacted in domestic or very local spaces rather than traditional spaces for warfare, and the bodies of women constitute part of this front. A 'continuum of violence' crosses many borders between the public and the private. A gendered understanding of violence lays bare how women's honour is linked to the moral core of a community.

While laws on domestic violence have been put in place in Iraqi Kurdistan and are on their way to being legislated in the rest of Iraq, there are many other discriminatory laws and practices that severely infringe women's rights and are formal obstacles to participation. It is important to note that several of the laws that women have fought against concern infringements of their personal rights as private persons. It is once again an example of how issues of a domestic character are intensely political for women in Iraq.

**P**overty acted as an overall exclusion factor, often in conjunction with lack of security. Women could often not work outside the home, as their movements were restricted and their possibilities for making decisions over the household economy were often limited.

The international exclusions of women and gender issues from the reconstruction of the Iraqi state are many. As the feminist researcher and writer C. Enloe concisely puts it: "Iraqi women's legal status became one of the spoils of war".<sup>166</sup> Iraq is an example of how more or less planned decisions are taken to not push gender issues in order not to alienate any of the counterparts. Gender issues become a 'problem' that threatens the fragile negotiation situation. Once the



Domestic violence is a widespread and growing problem according to women's rights organisations. In a survey conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2008, **83 percent** of the interviewed married women said that their husbands had '**controlling behaviour**' and **21 percent** said that they had been subjected to **physical violence**.<sup>147</sup>

situation has stabilised, issues of gender equality are supposed to be added to the recipe of post-conflict reconstruction. Unfortunately, when the loaded moment between war and peace has passed, it is very difficult to add gender as an afterthought.

### Achievements

Despite their constricted space for participation, women's organisations have continued a long Iraqi tradition of feminist interventions. They show great skills in negotiating in the politico-religious context that ultimately defines demands for power in Iraq today. Although they only manage to reach a very small percentage of millions of victims of violence, they have started to build up a network of shelters and a method for combining physical protection, legal aid and psychosocial aid.

Successful lobbying has occurred concerning legislation, which is a key area in strengthening women's rights. The fact that they managed to push through gender quotas for elected positions is a major accomplishment. They have managed to work in conjunction with international organisations and cooperate with women activists in other countries with experiences of quotas. At the same time, they astutely analyse how the quota system is in danger of being hijacked by party strategists who continue to exclude women with know-how and a political agenda, and they have defined strategies of

how to strengthen women politicians so that they can formulate their own politics.

**T**he laws on domestic violence that women's groups managed to push through in the regional parliament in Iraqi Kurdistan are another example of the determined and well-planned efforts that women's organisations have coordinated. They are involved in the slow work of changing traditions of honour and have developed innovative ways of cooperating with certain religious leaders. They have managed to identify change agents within religious structures and to cooperate with them on issues where they share the same understanding, such as domestic violence or honour killings.

Women's activists have also developed skills for pushing through their agenda indirectly when the hostile political environment prevented them from acting openly. One organisation gave the example of how 'unthreatening' information to women on health issues may be used to also develop awareness of existing laws among the women.

### Challenges

It is important to point out that while women's organisations, considering their marginalisation, have managed to create a platform within civil society, it is obvious that as in most post-conflict contexts, there is a daunting gap between informal and formal power structures. Strategies for getting access to decision-making are still not very well formulated, and as the participants in the focus group amply explained, obstacles are severe. On the positive side, one can see the momentum that the women's movement in Iraqi Kurdistan has reached. If more change agents within as well as outside religious structures can be identified and engaged to work for common issues, the potential impact is great.

To continue this work of careful strategizing and navigating in the highly religious and traditional context of Iraq is a great challenge, as sectarian power figures push for the traditionalisation of society. It also needs to be noted and taken into account that while many of the provisions in religious law are not compatible with basic women's rights, there are many women who are politically active in Iraq today who insist that women's rights and needs can be provided for within a non-secular system.

Another challenge concerns the gender quotas and how to bridge the power gap between the descriptive and representative politics of quotas. That is, the mere presence of women in the political system may

even prove to be counter-productive if the women are used as a way of legitimising decisions. To unite women across party borders is by no means self-evident. They have become engaged in certain political parties since they presumably support their policies, and gender issues may not be (most likely are not) high up on their agenda. To engage in such issues may jeopardise their positions within their parties and make them lose what little power they have. Women's organisations have an important role to fulfil as trainers and discussion partners for women in the beginning of their political careers.

To work on reconciliation across dividing lines is a great challenge for women's organisations. The divides can exist along sectarian lines as well as along liberal/secular vs. conservative/religious lines. A way to unite may be to concentrate more fully on the feminisation of poverty, which is a concrete consequence of the violence. The largely silent but massive presence of war widows in Iraq is a potential weapon to claim power. As a political category, they play an important role in the construction of post-war unity. To mobilise around their discrimination and how traditions are hurting these supposed 'heroes of the nation' is a potential platform for claiming power.

It should be noted that civil society in Iraq has been able to grow as a result of direct international funding. As donors turn to other hotspots around the world, civil society may see its funds and support diminishing. How to face this situation will be a great challenge over the coming years.

Finally, it should be noted that the deep divide between men and women that defines Iraqi society in general is an obstacle to gender equality. Maybe the biggest challenge of all is to start building bridges between men and women who share a belief in gender equality and human rights.

# 4.1

Population of Liberia in millions  
(The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

# 40%

Percentage of Christians in Liberia  
(Some sources claim 70% Christians)

# 40%

Percentage of indigenous religions in Liberia

# 20%

Percentage of Muslims in Liberia

# 990

Maternity mortality per 100.000 live births in Liberia

# 60.8%

Literacy rate in Liberia  
(Age 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)



Liberia is a multilingual country, official language is English, but Mande and Kru (Kwa) are widely spoken.

# Liberia.

## The custodians of peace.

In November 2011, women dressed in white once again gathered at the airfield outside Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, and by their mere presence managed to soothe the tense situation. The outburst of violence ahead of the runoff presidential election was reminiscent of the 14-year long conflict that nearly tore the small West African country apart. For the women's organisations that took an active part and played an integral role in the peace process in 2003, the incident was further proof that peace was still not consolidated and that they, as women and mothers, remained major players in the peace process.

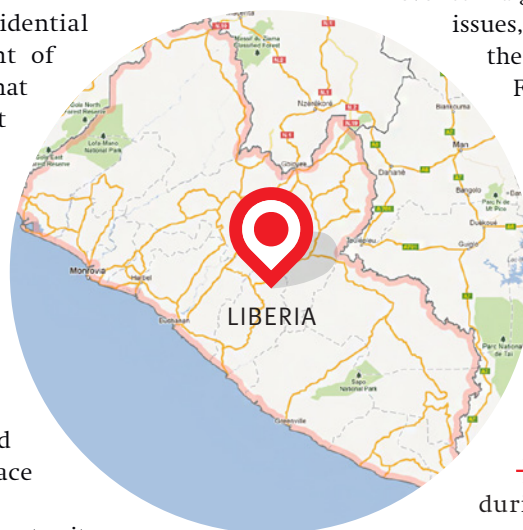
Using the window of opportunity that was opened during the civil war, women's organisations challenged traditional gender norms and mechanisms of exclusion and managed to increase their participation in formal political institutions, including the election of a female president. However, in the post-conflict period, the process of strengthening women's rights and partici-

pation has abated. Despite the presence of women in several important positions within the government, other issues have taken precedence. Within the international donor community, there is however still a great deal of focus on gender issues, with government bodies as the main partner.

For the women's organisations, the great challenge now is to find ways to continue the united struggle for peace and national reconciliation, and simultaneously to broaden their scope of activities to include political participation in a wider sense.

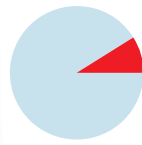
In summary:

- A window of opportunity during the war was used by women to strengthen their informal power. New societal structures paved the way for more visible power.
- Women are still the 'custodians of peace'. This identification with narrowly defined peace matters may hamper their ability to broaden their scope of activity, and women's organisations are struggling to stay relevant.





According to the traditional system of Hinterlands Laws, which exist in parallel with the Constitution, a woman is seen as the **property of her husband**. But, since the election in 2005 several gender-sensitive laws have been adopted.



# 14%

Share of women in parliament (Progress of the world's women 2011–2012).

- Lack of security and high levels of illiteracy constitute major obstacles to participation.
- In the immediate aftermath of war, the population was very supportive of measures to empower women. Today, key groups have withdrawn that support.
- Women politicians tend to prioritise official party line over women's issues.
- Increased representation of women in formal decision-making bodies does not automatically transform into a general empowerment of women or a sustainable change in patriarchal attitudes.

## Part I. Background

During the last decades, Liberia has suffered two civil wars with devastating effects on the population. In total, around 150,000 people were killed out of a population of 3 million.<sup>167</sup> The roots of the conflicts are manifold but revolve around the country's long history of political and economic domination by one small minority over the great majority. Later on, as the conflict escalated, an ethnic dimension was added, as well as the battle for control of the country's natural resources, especially diamonds.<sup>168</sup>

The first conflict took place in 1989-1996 and ended with an intervention by the West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG<sup>169</sup> which, together with the UN, managed to impose a ceasefire and general elections were held in 1997 – won by former rebel leader Charles Taylor. Later that year the war resumed again, now between two main opposition groups, LURD<sup>170</sup> and MODEL,<sup>171</sup> that both tried to topple Taylor. The humanitarian situation was dire and the level of violence reached proportions that shocked the world; in particular horrific forms of sexual violence against women and girls, as well as the recruitment of child soldiers.<sup>172</sup>

The fighting also had serious implications for neighbouring countries, most notably Sierra Leone

and Côte d'Ivoire, since the rebels operated from their sides of the borders. During the summer of 2003, ECOWAS<sup>173</sup> peacekeepers, supported by US and UN troops, managed to pave the way for peace talks in Accra, Ghana. Since then, peace has been officially installed in Liberia, although the level of violence against the civilian population, especially women, remains at a very high level.<sup>174</sup> The Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) was followed by general elections in 2005 in which Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president.

### Women in conflict

Estimates show that up to 38 percent of the members of the rebel groups were women and children, often but not always forcibly recruited.<sup>175</sup> They served as fighters and commanders, as cooks and bearers. The most striking consequence for women however was the sexual violence that took on enormous proportions, with tens of thousands of women and girls experiencing sexual violence and brutal abuse.<sup>176</sup> There are many testimonies of atrocities: of gang rapes taking place in front of the husband or father; and of the abduction of girl children forced to become the 'wife' of rebels with early pregnancy as a frequent result.<sup>177</sup>

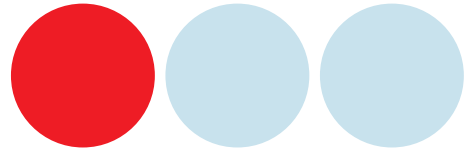
The official peace installed in 2003 did not bring true peace to the women of Liberia. The level of violence is still very high and for many women, the conflict is now primarily going on in their homes as domestic violence has become widespread.<sup>178</sup>

### Peace negotiations and women's role

After the failure of the ceasefire in 1997, a peace agreement was finally reached in Accra in 2003. Under the mediation of the former head of state of Nigeria, ECOWAS was the driving force behind the process that managed to break the vicious cycle of violence and install a transitional government that would prepare for general elections two years later. In order to make the peace agreement more sus-



The level of violence is still very high in Liberia, and for many women the conflict is now going on in their homes as domestic violence has become widespread. However, there is still **no law against domestic violence in Liberia.**



A quota guaranteeing women a **30 percent** representation in political offices and the leadership of political parties has not yet been adopted by the parliament.



West Point Women for Health and Development Association in Liberia work for women's rights. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

mass action for peace".<sup>181</sup> Despite ethnic tensions and socioeconomic and religious divides, the women had managed to unite and as women and mothers they had been instrumental in bringing the warring parties to the table.

tainable, a number of processes to strengthen the peace were included in the document, for example, DDRR<sup>179</sup> and SSR<sup>180</sup> and the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In the CPA there was scant mention of the specific needs of women, despite the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000 and despite the involvement of international actors such as the EU in the peace negotiations. One important paragraph stated that "The Parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elected and non-elected appointments": this was not adhered to, however. The women reacted to the exclusion by issuing their own declaration, the Golden Tulip Declaration, in which they demanded full participation in the process of rebuilding the country.

That women were more or less excluded from the peace process and the rebuilding of society after the war was all the more surprising considering the important — and internationally recognised — role they had played during the time of the peace negotiations; both as formal actors, invited to participate at the negotiations in Accra, and at an informal level through the grassroots movement "Women

In the transitional period, the UN peacekeeping mission UNMIL<sup>182</sup> chose not to invite women as active partners in the DDRR process, despite their previous close contacts with the rebels. However, when the failure of the process was imminent, including the risk of renewed fighting, the women insisted that they be allowed to participate. Approaching the rebels once more as mothers, they managed to persuade many of them to hand in their guns.<sup>183</sup> They also 'demystified' the peace agreement by explaining its content to ordinary people and by setting up benchmarks for the implementation process and engaging women and other civil society groups as watchdogs over the process.<sup>184</sup>

### International community

ECOWAS, the UN and the US had all been involved already during the war in trying to get the warring parties to cease hostilities and come to the negotiation table in Accra. Following the peace accords, the International Contact Group on Liberia (headed by ECOWAS and the EU) was assigned the important role of overseeing the implementation of the agreement.



WIPNET, a partner organisation to The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, at a meeting in Monrovia, 2011. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Mari Lindgren.

Immediately after the signing of the accords, UNMIL was deployed to Monrovia. A gender adviser was appointed with a mandate to oversee the process of gender mainstreaming within the mission as well as within all important decision-making bodies in Liberian public life. Another important actor in post-conflict Liberia was UN Women, which in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development, among other activities, has developed a programme to address sexual and gender-based violence.

### Political participation

Historically, in some ethnic groups, women had a large amount of invisible power. As mothers and wives, they were consulted by their husbands before decisions were made and also played an important role in conflict resolution at a local level. In particular, older women could gain a reputation as wise women with the ability to settle disputes, and as such became comfortable sitting in the decision-making fora together with men.

This informal and unrecognised power formed the basis of the women's capacity to unite and their claim to be listened to during the civil war. Ahead of the elections in 2005, which saw a female president as the winner, women's organisations managed to mobilise voters and explain to both men and women the importance of electing women. In her cabinet, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has appointed women to high positions, even though several of them have since been suspended. In 2008, 14 percent of the cabinet were women.<sup>185</sup> Other examples

and the leadership of political parties, has not yet been adopted by parliament. While the number of women in parliament and government increased markedly with the 2005 elections, commitment to women's issues since then appears to have waned, within government as well as the general population. In the most recent elections, held in October and November 2011, the number of women in parliament decreased to 7 out of 73 posts in the House of Representatives, and 1 out of the 15 new posts in the Senate (the remaining 15 posts in the Senate are up for elections in 2014).<sup>186</sup>

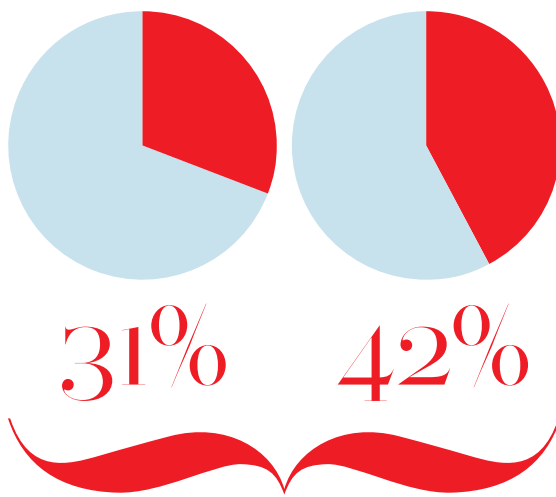
### Legal rights

According to the traditional system of Hinterland Laws, which exists in parallel with the Constitution, women are not allowed to own property, argue with men, participate in decision-making, do certain jobs or go to school.<sup>187</sup> A woman is perceived as the property of her husband and may be maltreated with total impunity, a fact that may in part explain the horrendous crimes committed against women during the war. There are several initiatives with the purpose of harmonizing the two systems and simultaneously reducing the worst effects for women.

Since the elections in 2005, several gender-sensitive laws have been put in place. One day after her inauguration President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf passed a new rape law that made rape a non-bailable offence and harshened the penalties for gang rapes. Rape within marriage is still not criminalised however. There is also new legislation on inheritance, which extends the right to inherit to include married women.

of pushing for the participation of women are quotas for women's representation that have been introduced, such as a 20 percent quota within the army and national police. Another quota, enshrined in the Gender Equity Act and guaranteeing women 30 percent representation in political offices





A high level of illiteracy is also contributing to economic insecurity. In rural areas, only 31 percent of the women are literate and 42 percent of women in Liberia have never attended school at all.<sup>192</sup>

Even though female genital mutilation is widespread in parts of Liberia, this harmful practice has not been criminalised. However, there are ongoing discussions about a new law on domestic violence, in which the prohibition of female genital mutilation may be included.

In addition, according to Liberian law, homosexual acts are still a criminal offence and there is no legal protection for LGBTQ persons.<sup>188</sup>

### Civil society

With the collapse of state institutions during the civil war, women's organisations took on the role as service providers in local communities. While working to reduce the effects of war, for example by providing health care for rape victims, they were also involved in peace-making at a very early stage.

During Charles Taylor's presidency, members of civil society were persecuted on a regular basis. With the Accra agreement, their position in Liberian society changed. Instead of their traditional role as watchdogs over national elected bodies, representatives from civil society, including women's organisations, were co-opted by the Transitional Government.<sup>189</sup> However, this closeness to power has not had the desired results when it comes to increasing women's rights. It seems clear that the co-optation of strong women from civil society into the official political arena has not always been beneficial to the

women's movement. Instead of strengthening co-operation with women's organisations, it is tending to result in competition for funds as international donors are increasingly working with ministries instead of civil society organisations. When international donors choose ministries as their counterpart, civil society organisations are often left without support. However, to a large extent, women's organisations still play an extremely important role, for example, in providing legal assistance, awareness-raising on women's rights, and providing services in remote areas that have been abandoned by state institutions since the war.

### Socioeconomic issues and security

During the first years of the civil war, the Liberian GDP fell by 90 percent, one of the biggest drops ever in the world.<sup>190</sup> Those most affected were women. Traditionally, it is the women who work the fields and bear the main responsibility for food security in the family. With the violence and displacement, which affected nearly all Liberians at one time or another, women found it extremely difficult to provide for their children and themselves. Even today, economic insecurity lingers on among women in rural areas: female-headed households constitute nearly 75 percent of the poor.<sup>191</sup> A high level of illiteracy is also contributing to economic insecurity. In rural areas, only 31 percent of the women are literate and 42 percent of women in Liberia have never attended school at all.<sup>192</sup>

Among the displaced, women and children are the majority and many of them face great difficulties in supporting themselves and their families. In addition, a great number are disabled due to the war (amputations or the presence of foreign objects in their bodies that have not been removed). A high level of physical insecurity is a further constraint, since women often have a long way to walk to the market or the field and thus run the risk of being attacked or robbed. After the conflict, the level of violence against women has remained at a very high level.<sup>193</sup> The lack of nationwide statistics makes it difficult to estimate current levels of sexual violence. However, it is commonly believed that the majority of cases are not being reported at all, but are settled within the community or the affected families.<sup>194</sup>

## II. Experiences of power and participation

This part presents the findings from field research in Liberia in December 2011. A focus group was conducted with 9 participants from key women's organisations, complemented by interviews with key informants from civil society and some key actors at the national and international formal levels.

### Peace and transition.

#### Women as national peacemakers.

"Our children needed to go to school. Our women, whether skilled or unskilled, needed to go to the market. But with the persistent war, they were not able to do that. So the women formed themselves into whatever group they could find, reconciling, mediating, dialoguing, saying let's go to our male counterparts, let's tell them, this is the time for you to see the bigger picture – the nation called Liberia."

The Liberian women became world famous for their contribution to the peace accords in 2003 and the subsequent struggle to maintain women's participation in the political landscape. Compared to many other conflict-affected countries informed by an underlying patriarchal structure, women in Liberia claimed and were given a greater space during the entire process: from peace negotiations, through the initial post-conflict phase, to the present struggle for reconstruction and stabilisation. Even today, almost a decade after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Accra, women are ascribed a crucial role in the ongoing consolidation of peace.

"We are still the custodians of peace. For example during these elections, because of our role in the peace process, we were able to meet the various political parties to discuss non-violence for the elections. We were able to meet the citizens, the various unions, youth, and other groups, to discuss the importance of non-violent elections. Now, if we hadn't gone through that thing, what happened on November 7 without any doubt would have been worse."<sup>195</sup>

Having lived through 14 years of extremely brutal conflict, everybody in Liberia dreaded a relapse into civil war, according to the participants in the focus

group. Therefore, the eruption of violence ahead of the runoff presidential election in November 2011 engendered a general fear among the population. For the women's groups, the election-related violence and the boycotting of the second round of the presidential elections by the main opposition party CDC was a palpable reminder of the continuing need to consolidate peace as well as a confirmation of the crucial role that women play in this delicate process.

"A lot of people talked about what was going on in the early days of the campaign. But not many had seen the writing on the wall. It was a war of words. Again, it was the women who started to see the arguments, the kind of violent statements that came forth. We realised that this is what went on during the war, that was how we talked to each other during the war and that could be repeated. And if we didn't do anything about it we would wake up one day and we would have gone back to war. So we started creating peace campaigns, we started engaging political parties, we started to have anti-war discussions and meetings with civil society... we talked about the fact that some of the political parties are trying to use you and manipulate you into violence and at the end of the day you will be killed."

"As we pulled those strings, those who were trying to be violent began to reflect. They didn't want to go back to war, didn't want to repeat the mistakes of the past. So it started to go forth, from the women's groups other institutions began to pick it up, then the churches, and then it became like a blaze, like a fire..."

The incident made it clear that the struggle for peace is far from over and that many challenges lie ahead, not least reconciliation between different factions of society. Peacebuilding has to be long-term, women in the focus group emphasised: sweeping old disagreements and conflicts under the carpet, the way it has been done so far in Liberia, can lead to a relapse into war.

"When you ask me whether we have peace I will say yes – and no. I will say yes, we have peace sufficiently to take us to elections. I will say no, we have not had peace because it is not concretised, it is not consolidated, it is not deep, it is not being sustained... Let UNMIL go, and if we can live here together then, then we have peace."

1



1. Street of Kakata, 2011. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Mari Lindgren. 2. Young women at the Centre for Liberian Assistance, partner organisation to The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, 2011. CLA provides education and support to young women in Monrovia. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Mari Lindgren. 3. WIPNET, a partner organisation to The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation at a meeting in Monrovia, 2011. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Mari Lindgren.

2



3

### Power and exclusion. New patterns of gender roles.

As illustrated by the opening quote on page 74, the women assumed the role of peacemakers partly out of desperation. The immediate goal was to convince the warring parties to put an end to hostilities, since this more than anything would improve the lives of women and the children they cared for. As pointed out by the participants in the focus group, peace in itself was a gender-justice tool. "Women and children were dying. They suffered the most in the conflict. So that was the underlying premise when we met and talked with President Taylor and the rebels."

Furthermore, even though traditionally the Liberian culture has been strictly gendered and women often excluded from positions of power, there are several ethnic groups with a history of women leaders and chiefs. Thus, the general assumption that all African women are oppressed cannot be applied to

the Liberian context, the participants pointed out. In some ethnic groups, especially in the south-eastern region which has been cut off from the rest of the country since the war, women have in effect been powerless and in the hands of their male relatives. In other regions, however, they were already appointed to powerful positions in their communities and participated in decision-making arenas on an equal footing with the men even before the war.

During the years of armed conflict, this history of participation at community level linked up to the breakdown of societal structures and laid the ground for a re-formulation of gender roles and hierarchies of power. To a high degree, the war turned women into heads of households and the main breadwinners in the family. Assuming this new important position also gave them the self-confidence and the authority in the eyes of the population to defy traditional patterns of exclusion and take an active part in the peace process.

“When this new role was provided to the women it gave them a freedom, a leverage to participate in any process that would secure their family, because they were now heads of households... Then there was the war that brought down the societal structures, those impediments, those stereotypes that hinder women, in their own tribal contexts. So women assumed the roles that traditionally they would not have assumed.”

### Motherhood and collaboration as peacemaking tools.

An additional method of gaining trust and respect was to approach all parties involved in the conflict as mothers. As mothers, they appealed to the rebel group LURD and President Charles Taylor to meet and agree to a ceasefire. At a later stage, after the failure of the first phase of the DDR process when the country almost went to war again, they again appealed as mothers to the ex-combatants to hand in their guns.<sup>196</sup> With the traditional respect given to mothers, especially grandmothers, referring to this stereotypical peaceful and neutral identity proved an effective way to be listened to.

“We have a culture in Liberia where a woman as a mother is respected and where she is able to influence her role and cultural status... Our strategy was... looking at our context as mothers, as people who give birth. And looking at all the warring parties as our children.”

It was the regional women’s organisation the Mano River Women Peace Network, MARWOPNET, with chapters in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea<sup>197</sup>, that managed to identify and locate the rebel group LURD that was attacking Liberia from Guinea. Once identified, the rebels were approached by the women who urged them to meet with President Taylor.

“We made a sub-regional effort because the conflict had become sub-regional. They were attacking from our sister nation Guinea. And we went to Mr Taylor and he said that he didn’t know who attacked him, who attacked Liberia. He had heard the name LURD but he didn’t know who they were. And if we could find out who they were, he would be happy to meet with them. So, we took on that responsibility... And LURD consented to meet with Mr Taylor, provided we would be there. Because they trusted us.”

This major breakthrough paved the way for representatives from MARWOPNET to be invited to the

peace talks in Accra; first as mere observers but soon as official participants with a seat at the table. “The rebels insisted on having the women there, it was the dynamic in the room that made this happen, it could not be any other way”, as one of the focus group participants recalled. However, as underlined by the participants, without the unity of women from all levels of society, they would not have come out as strong: what they lacked in formal power they compensated for in strength of numbers. While women from society’s upper layer participated directly in the talks, grassroots women were gathering outside the conference hall and at the airfield in Monrovia, forming what would become known as the “Women’s mass action for peace”.<sup>198</sup> Dressed in white they sat together, day after day, praying, crying and constantly sharing information with the ‘official’ women inside the hall. “We used to say that whether you are a woman in government or a woman at grassroots level, when the bullet comes, it has no eyes”.

### Political participation.

#### Lack of support from women with power.

In fact, without realising it, the women in Liberia had been putting UNSCR 1325 into practice. The majority of them had never heard of the Resolution, and yet they demanded not only to be allowed to participate in the peace negotiations but also to be given a voice in the re-structuring of the country afterwards. Building on the momentum from the peace talks in Accra, and the trust that had come with it, women’s organisations managed to sensitise the population to the need for greater participation by women in the elections that followed in 2005 – both as candidates and as voters. With the help of male members of parliament, they managed to push through an improved rape law – a success that however was not to be repeated concerning the Gender Equity Act. That the women failed to gain acceptance in parliament for this particularly important bill had several causes according to the participants. Liberia’s deeply rooted patriarchal society was one of them and so was the lack of support from the women in parliament, some of whom were opposed to a quota system since they feared that this would lead to less qualified women entering the political arena. Others had little interest in women’s issues and preferred to vote according to the party line.

“There were many women, women who are role models for us all, women in the executive, in the

legislative and in the judiciary, who said the bill is not needed. So how could we push for it in parliament? We need support from women with a position, who are gender-sensitive. But they are not gender-sensitive, they are not feminists, they are just political activists.”

In spite of these manifest achievements, and despite the fact that the entire donor community has given gender issues special attention, the position of women in formal political arenas has not been sufficiently consolidated, according to the participants. “We need a lot of support for women and we think because we have a woman president it’s okay. It is not okay.”

What they witness now is a kind of ‘back to business as usual’, they asserted, where women’s issues are not taken as seriously as previously. One concrete illustration is the decline in the number of women elected at the elections in 2011, indicating that the position of women in politics is still far from consolidated.

“I saw women candidates speaking the truth, what they want to do and what they don’t want to do. But the voting populace don’t want to hear that. So how do we educate citizens to know the truth and to know the rules and the responsibilities of the law-makers?”

According to the participants, one crucial change is the withdrawal of active support from important groups in society, such as men and women within government and parliament.

“We lost the support of the men. They were not happy that we elected a woman as president. First, they voted yes, and then they came to their senses, so to speak, when the euphoria was over. And they did not like it. So the support was there, and then they withdrew it.”

Furthermore, the women in government positions were not as committed to women’s issues as the women activists had been hoping for. Instead of being the vanguard of women’s rights and working in collaboration with women from civil society, the latter were often treated as competition, especially over funding. The focus group participants traced this discouraging development back to the nomination of women whose primary concern was party politics and not gender issues. The whole process of nomination to candidature for government and other important institutions was not transparent

enough, they argued, as it was more about having the ear of the president than about merit.

“We need to train women who want to take up leadership, to explain to them about feminism and gender, to make them understand, and not assume that they already know just because they are women. They don’t just know.”

Additionally, the women’s organisations are also themselves partly responsible for the backlash, they concluded. During the first phase of the conflict in the 1990s, the women’s groups managed to create public awareness of gender and women’s issues. Through workshops at all levels – from government and religious leaders and schools to various communities – they were able to change the mentality of the population. “At that time, it was easy for us women to come and build consensus among the rest of the population around women’s issues,” as one of the participants recalled.

“However, since 2005, after we won the election most of the women thought we had arrived. But since then we have new people coming in, we have the internally displaced and the refugees who were not gender-sensitised. So, we cannot rely on the training we did back then in the 1990s... Also, we ourselves did not continue forging alliances and building capacity, not with ourselves as women’s groups, nor with the students, the youth or other civil society stakeholders. We didn’t do that.”

The discontent expressed by the participants in the focus group regarding the deficiencies in co-operation with women in positions of formal power was contradicted by certain actors at the formal level, who instead emphasised the progress made and underlined the importance of having women in several top positions, including as President.

### Truth and reconciliation. Revisiting history.

“What we need now is to sustain the peace we have. We have a relative peace now. We should talk about reconciliation; we need deep-rooted reconciliation in this country.”

The participants all agreed that in order to consolidate peace in Liberia, a profound reconciliation process was necessary. However, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was set up after the war did not have the desired effect. Rather,

it created another split in the country: for or against the recommendations of the Commission.<sup>199</sup> “After the TRC report, those who talked about it and said that there were good things in the report became ostracised and targeted. Because people who were in positions that they wanted to keep, they didn’t want to talk about the report.”

However, since the elections in November 2011, when violence once again erupted, more voices have been raised to bring the report back to life. The events served as a wake-up call for the population, as the informants put it.

“The TRC did extensive work and came up with a lot of recommendations, but aside from this, the issue of reconciliation, of psychosocial healing and trauma healing, was never our priority. Reconciliation is not part of our lives. With our history, with the Americo-Liberians coming, and all the conflicts we had before the civil war, we should have had a good system in place to reconcile people at every level. There is still a lot to do in order to really reconcile.”

In Liberia, there are many divisions that run deep and have repeatedly caused tension in the society. One of the most long-lived is the division between the native population and the Americo-Liberians, or settlers: freed slaves that left the US in the 1840s and founded the nation of Liberia. Over the years, this particular group has been the one most often holding power. Furthermore, there is also deep distrust between many of the country’s 16 ethnic groups – something that was aggravated during the civil war. Hence, in order to achieve true reconciliation, it is necessary to go a long way back in history, they said.

“To be able to really put the pieces together, we have to go maybe 50-60 years back, so that we can connect to what is happening now. Because we are talking about rewriting Liberian history, and if you don’t have it right now, you will never have it right at all.”

Women in Liberia contributed to a great extent to the work of the TRC, both as members of various working groups and as witnesses themselves. Women’s organisations visited rural communities to increase public awareness about the process and held nationwide workshops to obtain women’s views on the various pillars of the TRC.

To continue striving for national reconciliation would be a logical task for women’s organisations in the future, the participants concluded. Although today they are mainly preoccupied with the specific objectives of their respective organisations,

women’s co-operation has definitely not come to a halt; something that was proven by their collective actions to prevent violence during the 2011 elections. There is a lot of hope placed in the younger generation, both women and men, as they have started to loudly demand their right to be an integral part of the peace and governance processes.

In order to more thoroughly overcome the deep-rooted divisions in the society, it is necessary to lay the foundations for a national identity, the women pointed out, and hence to focus on issues of concern to all Liberians, irrespective of ethnicity or Americo-Liberian or native Liberian descent.

“We must say that we are Liberians first. Then, if we have this central identification, it will not matter if you are a Krahn or a Kru.<sup>200</sup> Part of that is still affecting us. We need to identify ourselves on a national level and it is women who can teach our children that you are Liberian first.”

#### Poverty and insecurity. The fight for survival.

“My only daughter was raped, and died from it. That was in 1989. After that I was traumatised. We went to look for food and nobody was looking after the children. She was eight years old... After that I took an interest in children’s care. When we started our women’s group we decided to develop that particular aspect, so we opened day-care. Nobody paid, it was just to prevent our children from dying.”

During the war, the level of violence was extremely high in Liberia. Women and children faced a constant threat of being raped or subjected to other forms of gender-based violence. Today, the frequency of rape is still very high, as is the level of domestic violence.

For women in Liberia, poverty and lack of security have been closely interconnected. Poverty made them leave their children alone while going out to look for food, as illustrated in the quote above. Poverty also continues to affect their daily lives in a multifaceted way. One example that the informants put forth was the risk of being robbed or raped on the way to the market. In rural areas, women often have to walk long distances to reach the nearest market or town, which exposes them to danger. However, taking a local taxi, usually a driver with a motorbike, may be just as hazardous.

“For me, I am not afraid to go to the market. But in the interior, in the villages, when a person is carry-

ing a woman on a motorbike, he may take her cell phone, her money and he may rape her... If people like those drivers that get empowered, if they live on their own income, I think that the level of violence against women will be reduced.”

This quote describes a development that potentially could pose a threat to stability and the consolidation of peace, the women said, as frustration is growing among those who feel excluded from the development. A large proportion of the population, many of whom nowadays belong to the opposition party CDC, has been pushed to the margins of society and left without employment or any tangible hopes for the future. The lack of jobs and other activities make the youth susceptible to alcohol or drug abuse, which in turn leads to an increase in violence. Additionally, as some of the participants pointed out, after all the years of brutal conflict and the falling apart of the social fabric, the entire population is suffering from trauma, which increases the risk of a relapse into violent conflict. In order to come to grips with this development, there is a great need to include groups that up until now have been excluded, the women stated.

“We have not sufficiently rehabilitated ourselves when it comes to change. There is no process going on, no follow-up activities after the DDR process. Everybody thought it was alright. But everything is not alright... At that time, the men also felt that women had taken over their role. And a chain is as weak as its weakest link. So when you talk about security and domestic violence, this is our weakest link right now, we have a long way to go.”

Liberia is still one of the world’s poorest countries. Poverty not only affects women’s security but also hinders their possibilities of participating in the democratic process. For instance, in order to stand as candidates, it is normally necessary to be nominated by a political party, which is difficult in a country where the majority of the population still prefers to see a man in such a position. Hence, many women opt to run as independent candidates and use their personal wealth to finance the campaign. For the vast majority of women, this way of getting access to formal power is far beyond reach. Another excluding mechanism is the tradition of buying votes, which is linked to the lack of trust between voters and political candidates, according to the informants. “If people don’t trust a political candidate, they want money from that person in order to give him their vote. Because they know that tomorrow when he gets

to the senate or parliament, he will not do anything for them”.

In order to change the prevailing situation and reduce poverty among women, education is key, the women emphasised. The literacy rate among women is still very low at around 40 percent of women and in rural areas just surpassing 30 percent, according to Liberia’s latest Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). During the war, almost the entire educational system collapsed, with the consequence that an entire generation did not attend school at all.<sup>201</sup>

### Laws and tradition.

#### Working against impunity.

Fuelled by the arguments put forth by women’s organisations, one of the first acts of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2005 was to sign a law which turned rape into a criminal offence. This was a much-needed step, since rape, often with very brutal features, had become practically endemic during the war and showed no sign of declining afterwards. Previously, only gang rape had been illegal whereas other forms of rape were a bailable offence. According to the informants, the new law, in combination with campaigns highlighting the possibilities of accessing health care and the available measures to punish perpetrators, has increased the willingness of women to seek justice. “Before, rapes were surrounded by hush, hush, it was a stigma. This has changed now”. However, there is a striking rural-urban divide in how rape and other forms of sexual violence are perceived by the population. Outside of Monrovia, in the rural counties, the stigma surrounding rape still prevails, leading the majority of the affected to seek settlements outside of the courtroom, using the customary law to reach reconciliation between the rape victim and the perpetrator.<sup>202</sup>

A specialised unit to handle cases of sexual and gender-based violence, together with a Criminal Court that specialises in crimes of sexual violence, are other government initiatives that have led to a marked improvement in women’s possibilities to seek legal justice. The number of cases being brought to justice has increased manifold.

There are a number of obstacles preventing women from getting legal redress after having been subjected to rape however. One is the question of evidence: the lack of medical and health care facilities close by makes it difficult to get the medical examination needed before presenting the case at court. Another obstacle concerns implementation of the rape law. At county level, there is a severe shortage of skilled staff at the magistrate courts. “Most

of the people accused of rape are let free. Families also play a role in this since there is no follow-up. If you live 5–7 walking hours' distance from the Court, parents often abandon the idea of seeking justice for their daughter".<sup>203</sup>

The traditional justice system, which exists in parallel to the formal justice system, is another serious impediment to women's access to legal rights, including after being raped. In traditional societies, if the perpetrator pays, it is often sufficient for the family, who then abstain from seeking legal justice. To reduce the influence of the traditional system through education and awareness-raising is thus a priority for some of the women's organisations. One concrete example is the system of mobile law units, with the purpose of bringing the law to the population instead of vice versa, carried out by one of the organisations.

"We have this mobile law and we take it to the market place. A woman who sells mangos can come to us there at the market and she gets her access to justice, we tell her how she can do it. We give her awareness of her rights... Also, we talk to mothers and grand-mothers and we say, look, you have your rights to land and everything but we need to engage the young generation also and you can help us, (since they are your) children or grandchildren."

The lack of trained lawyers and skilled staff within the formal justice system make it difficult to strive for an immediate phase-out of the customary system, according to a UN representative. What is needed instead is to facilitate the co-existence of both systems, and to reduce the negative effects on women as far as possible. The establishment of community-based 'peace huts' is one such initiative. Based on the traditional male decision-making forum, the palawa huts or peace huts, allow women to meet and discuss important issues. In some traditional villages, rape is one such issue that is now being 'delegated' to the peace huts. "The women go through the accusations of rape and then decide if they shall go to the police or not. Once a rape case has gone through the peace hut, the police tend to take it more seriously".<sup>204</sup>

In some parts of the country however, there is a long way to go before the existing laws and justice mechanisms will have any real impact on women's lives, the informants emphasised. Especially in the south-eastern part, which was cut off from the rest of the country during the conflict and still suffers from extreme underdevelopment, the customary laws are very biased against women. For example,

they still use trial by ordeal.<sup>205</sup> The formal justice system barely exists in these parts of the country, and the few courts in place are often corrupt.

"You talk about justice, but in the south-eastern region people use mob justice, they take the law into their own hands. If they accuse you of something, they will not go to court; rather they will beat you to death... And even if you go to court, the man who raped you can pay the judge. So people never trusted the justice system. Also, if you go to the police they will say that they can do nothing because they have no transportation. So why are we advocating for the women to go to the police or justice system when they just say we have no transportation, no car, no gas? You have to pay money. And if you don't have money you feel it is unsafe to go there."

#### Civil society. Weakened relations with international and national actors.

The unity between women's groups that proved so successful in connection with the war still exists, according to the informants. They use this unity to mobilise in times of crisis, as illustrated around the time of the elections in November 2011. Simultaneously, they are struggling to find their place in post-war Liberia where 'peace' increasingly has to make way on the political agenda for unemployment and other pressing social issues. However, for the participants it was clear that in order to achieve a better and more inclusive post-war society, with a markedly reduced risk of renewed violence, striving for long-term peace and stability had to continue.

"What is peace? Peace is development, peace is security, peace is health, peace is economics. If you have food on your table, that's peace for you. So this is where we will galvanise our support for the next 10-15 years because we have to solidify the peace, we have to consolidate it, we have to maintain it. We are not out of the wars yet, we are not saved yet."

At the same time there was an articulated need among the women to get national and international acceptance for the work they do and to stay relevant in post-war society. To expand the scope of activities to also include women's participation in a broader political sense was a major challenge, they underlined. One obstacle identified was the lack of a strong and united women's movement with defined structures. They have their women's 'groups' that can easily mobilise in times of crisis, but otherwise they work in isolation. In order to get really strong





“...If you live 5–7 walking hours’ distance from the Court, parents often abandon the idea of seeking justice for their daughter.”<sup>203</sup>

and to be listened to by formal actors, domestic as well as international, they need more institutional capacity as well as long-term funding, they stressed.

“We are not taken seriously enough because we have not developed the institutional capacity. Our roles are tied to this. For instance, the UN, they don’t have to deal with women’s groups because we are not seen as an institution or taken seriously enough.”

In addition, several participants expressed concern over the relationship between women’s groups and the Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD), indicating a shift in power relations since the war. During the period of emergency, international donors would come and work directly with the women’s groups. Now, with a functioning government in place, a large portion of donor funds is channelled through the government. This is a welcome development in many ways and a clear sign of improvements in the bureaucracy. However, a consequence for the women’s organisations is that they now have to apply to the Ministry for funding and thus have lost some of their independence.

“It is the role of these state actors to encourage and support women’s organisations... But we are seen as competition – for funding, and especially for recognition – so we are not supported the way we should be. In fact, some parts of our programmes the government will do themselves to get the credit.”

Another consequence is that the relationship with the international community has undergone a major shift. The international community has contributed to keeping the spotlight on women’s issues, despite other pressing issues competing for attention, the informants emphasised. The downside of the very strong international interest in post-conflict deve-

lopment is however that the concrete peace work carried out by civil society and women’s organisations has not been adequately recognised, they explained. The fact that the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325 for example, is a recognition of the important contribution made by women to peace and security. Nevertheless, when the international community partners with national actors, the women’s organisations feel excluded from this process. “Most women’s organisations and individuals are still not aware of UNSCR 1325 and do not consider their work as a part of this process, even though it actually is 1325 being implemented,” as one informant put it.

Another very important peacebuilding tool from which they also feel excluded is the SSR process. This process, with the aim of transforming the military and police forces and in this way strengthening security for the population, was run to a large extent by a private American company.<sup>206</sup> As civil society was not sufficiently involved in the process, the implementers encountered severe obstacles in accessing ex-combatants in remote areas.<sup>207</sup> Without pronounced local ownership, there is a risk that the process will not be sufficiently sustained, and that the withdrawal of the UNMIL in the future may lead to the eruption of violence, according to some of the participants.

“For me, I think the entire SSR process has been a project for the international community. And what do I mean by that? There is no ownership from the Liberian perspective to say that we are responsible to sustain this peace. People associate the SSR process with jobs, where they go to get a salary. And in the absence of the UNMIL, it will cause eruption of violence.”

Overall, the women’s groups called for more long-term support from the international community in order to really consolidate the peace efforts carried out so far. Also, having stronger women’s organisations with greater capacity would make it easier for them to approach the government and offer them conflict and gender-related training, a measure that the women considered to be of significant importance.

“Since 2005, we listen to political leaders when they speak, and we hear that they are not conflict-sensitive. But what you say in post-conflict can inflame the situation. We could train them on conflict-sensitive issues, and train them to be more gender-sensitive.”

## Part III. Analysis

### Exclusions

The war in Liberia provided women with several openings that they did not enjoy previously and thus enabled them to increase their participation in official life. There are still major obstacles hindering their empowerment and participation on a broader scale however. At the time of writing, nearly 10 years after the signing of the peace agreement, the women of Liberia still have to fight for their rights, and in some aspects the development is even going backwards.

The case of Liberia illustrates the absence of a natural crossover between the role of peace advocate and conflict resolver on the one hand, and gaining more formal power within the traditionally patriarchal structures of the political landscape on the other. One obvious example is the failure to win acceptance for the Gender Equity Act, despite a female president and several women in senior positions within government institutions. One conclusion to be drawn from this is the risk of focussing solely on the number of women in decision-making bodies, for example, by advocating for a quota. As the case of Liberia poignantly illustrates, the level of gender awareness among the actors may play just as an important role as their number.

**T**he reasons behind the continued exclusion of women from the public arena are manifold and at the same time interconnected. Traditional and stereotypical gendered norms that prevail to a large extent in rural areas, which geographically constitute the majority of the country, have a major impact on the perception of women as subordinate to men in all important areas of life – in the public as well as the private sphere. Historically considered to be the property of male family members, women are still stuck in abject poverty and illiteracy with scant possibilities of transforming their own lives. Despite some formal legal progress, such as the reformulation of the inheritance law, grim reality continues to keep women excluded from formal and visible power in most parts of Liberia. Moreover, the support they enjoyed from men during the years surrounding the peace negotiations and the subsequent elections seems to have died.

Another obstacle for their broader inclusion in public life is sexual violence. In post-conflict societies as well as in patriarchal systems where women



Today, Liberia's women – as well as the entire country – are at a crossroads. The events around the election period in November 2011 were a clear indication of the difficult path still ahead for the country.

are denied control of their bodies and sexuality, the incidence of rape and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) is often strikingly high. Despite the concerted efforts of women activists as well as government and international donors to put an end to the massive violence against women, including sharpening the rape law, underlying norms and frustrations among the male population have rendered this difficult. As women try to advance their position, men may respond with violence, as this is an effective mechanism to prevent the reformulation of gender roles and prevent women from claiming their rights. Another factor that contributes to the 'normalization' of gendered violence is the long history of impunity, which is a legacy of the war but also part of a tradition in which reconciliation was preferred over formal justice.

### Achievements

The case of Liberia shows how women during the peace negotiations were able to transform informal power into formal power, and how these claimed spaces of power had a real impact on the negotiations taking place within the closed spaces of power. By uniting and finding common ground as women, they used their strength in numbers to overcome traditional, excluding norms. In a country as divided as Liberia, where ethnicity and socioeconomic gaps have combined to cause the near destruction of the country, women showed that reconciliation and national unity was a feasible path for the future. This was once again demonstrated in the weeks preceding the elections in November 2011. By engaging in collective action, the women managed to curb the violence that was threatening the entire election process.

**A**lthough the success story of the peace negotiations may not have fed into a deep-rooted transformation of stereotypical gender roles, the importance of women's participation should not be underestimated. Generally, women's self-confidence has increased due to their role in the peace process, and even in rural areas, more women are now prepared to stand up and speak their mind. As argued by feminist researcher Meintjes, true transformation is about "internal processes of consciousness, of creating words and language that will provide women with a sense of their own agency".<sup>208</sup>

This new agency has been manifested in various ways. Women were instrumental in increasing gender-sensitivity within the legal arena, such as the new rape law and the creation of the special court for cases of sexual violence. They were also successful in pushing for a gender quota within the military and police force — crucial steps in a country with a widespread culture of abuse within the security sector.

### Challenges

Today, Liberia's women — as well as the entire country — are at a crossroads. The events around the election period in November 2011 were a clear indication of the difficult path still ahead for the country. The deeply traumatised population is inclined to expect the worst, and the nervousness that lies just under the surface could easily escalate into new waves of violence. In Monrovia, large groups of unemployed and frustrated men constitute a potential power base for individuals seeking to exploit their discontent in order to gain power.

In this still very volatile situation, women have an important role to play as peace makers, the principal custodians of peace. Simultaneously, by profiling themselves as the country's principal custodians of peace, and by insisting on using the seemingly apolitical identity of 'mother' as their main marker, they run the risk of becoming trapped in traditionally more female arenas such as peace and reconciliation. In order to remain relevant in post-emergency Liberia, women's organisations must embark upon a search for new fields of intervention, bringing all the gains from the transitional period with them. As researcher A. Pillay states: "The challenge is to protect the seeds of transformation sown during the upheaval and to use them to grow the transformation in the transitional period of reconstruction".<sup>209</sup>

This is a process that must take place at two parallel levels. Gendered norms and traditions are

deeply rooted in Liberia, and as the situation slowly stabilises, pre-war patterns of power seem to be re-emerging, in particular because a very large group of unemployed men — many, but not all, of them ex-combatants — feel excluded from the initiatives taken by the government and the international donor community to improve socioeconomic conditions.

The deeply enshrined exclusion mechanisms described above can help us understand why the window of opportunity that was opened during the conflict seems to have been shut again. Hence, the women themselves cannot rely solely on the support that they gained in connection with their accomplishments at the time of the peace negotiations. The extraordinary circumstances that contributed to the strong position of women and their unity at that time, are, hopefully, history. This implies however that women's organisations must find other motivators for uniting and speaking with one voice. In Liberia, there are so many women with hands-on experience of peace work, which could be utilised through translation into other activities in the struggle for women's equal participation.

However, in order for this to happen, the international community must support the women in their efforts to broaden their scope of activity and to be taken seriously by bodies that hold formal power. With all the attention on Liberian women in their capacity as peacemakers, there is a potential risk of an emerging 'peace tourism'. Almost a decade after peace was officially installed in Liberia, actors from all over the world still want to meet them and hear their story — a unique circumstance that may render it difficult for them to move on and engage as actively in new areas of society.

As one of the participants explained during the focus group: "as soon as there is a national crisis, everyone starts calling for the women. But afterwards everything is back to normal again".

# 3.8

Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in millions (The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

# 31%

Percentage of Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

# 44%

Percentage of Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina

# 17%

Percentage of Bosnian Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina

# 9

Maternity mortality per 100.000 live births in Bosnia and Herzegovina

# 97.9%

Literacy rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Age 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)



Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the strongest gender equality laws in the world.

# Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## Preparing for the next step.

In November 2011, more than four hundred women from all parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina travelled to the capital Sarajevo to demonstrate outside the national parliament.

They were there to protest against the political deadlock, which had led to more than a year without a government. Under banners bearing slogans such as “Form a Government” and “Respect the Gender Equality Law”, women gathered to influence the political process. Women’s organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been very vocal in the post-conflict transition period and have made a considerable mark on the peace process. Women were the first to cross front lines and start the processes of reconciliation in the years immediately following the peace agreement. They have been active in providing shelter and psychosocial support to women and their advocacy work has led to legal provisions for women’s rights and gender equality at national and international levels.

Despite these achievements, more than a decade

and a half after the end of the war, women political activists are struggling to keep up the momentum from the activism of the early post-war years. Access to formal political structures is hard to win and ‘traditional’ values developed as part of the

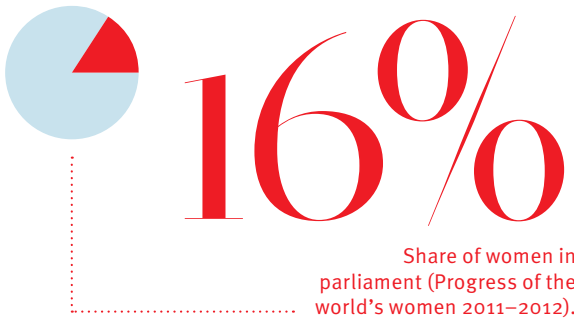
ethnonationalist agenda and created gendered exclusions.

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina gives insights into long-term peace building and specifically how the missed opportunity of including gender aspects in the peace accord have had long-term consequences.

In summary:

- The traditionalisation of society along ethnonationalist lines leads to a shrinking space for women.
- It is a challenge to translate informal power into formal power. Examples from local contexts show that it is possible.
- Civil society risks getting marginalised when state actors are strengthened. New roles need to be defined.





# UNSCR 1325

**National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325:** As the 13th country in Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted an action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

- Gender-blind strategies of the international community have long-term negative consequences for women's participation.
- Women's organisations hold the potential for driving reconciliation processes. Difficulties in 'dealing with the past' risk blocking such processes.
- A gender-equal peace needs to include socioeconomic transformations. The work of women's organisations demonstrates that peacebuilding is a wider concept than just dealing with war and violence.
- Successful strategies include gender quotas, media and public campaigns, lobbying for legislation on domestic violence and continued networking across identity borders.

employ discriminatory practices and civil servants are employed according to ethnic criteria. Schools are often mono-ethnic and three curricula are used. Public space is contested and has become arena for making different claims on an ethnopolitical basis. The media generally function as mouthpieces for different powerholders.<sup>211</sup>

## The Dayton Peace Accord

The Dayton Peace Accord created a system of highly decentralised power-sharing in which the three major constituent groups (Bosniak, Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats) are represented.<sup>212</sup> While this model made it possible to get the warring parties to lay down their arms, it has had the post-conflict effect of cementing ethnopolitical agendas and empowering ethnopolitical entrepreneurs.<sup>213</sup> The country was divided into two parts, more or less along the front lines at the time of the Peace Accord. The two entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska as well as the district of Brčko were given a high degree of autonomy. In addition, the Federation was divided into ten cantons. Ethnic representation is guaranteed in more or less every elected position as well as in public institutions. A three-member presidency has been set up, consisting of one Bosniak, one Bosnian Croat and one Bosnian Serb representative.<sup>214</sup>

At the negotiations, gender equality was disregarded. There were no women among the signatories or mediators, and no Bosnian women were present in the negotiating teams. In addition, no representatives from civil society were invited to the negotiations, which resulted in the exclusion of women with expertise in peace building, as they were mostly based in informal structures. In the writing of the Accord, no proactive measures to get women involved were taken. The absence of gender issues have had long-term effects, as the Dayton Accord was a detailed roadmap for Bosnia and Herzegovina's reconstruction in military as well as civilian terms, including the writing of its new Constitution.<sup>215</sup>

## Part I. Background

When the Dayton Peace Accord was signed in December 1995, it ended the worst atrocities committed in Europe since the Second World War. Ethnic cleansing, mass rape, concentration camps and the genocide in Srebrenica were some of the crimes committed. Part of the disintegration of former Yugoslavia, the war between 1992–1995 was driven by ethnopolitical actors who were struggling for territorial control of interethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their nationalistic war strategies aimed to create ethnically homogenous areas through the expulsion of people belonging to the 'wrong' ethnic groups. More than 100,000 people were killed and about half the population, up to two million people, were forced to flee. About 10,000 people are still missing and more than 100,000 people are internally displaced.<sup>210</sup> In this war against civilians, women were in the line of fire. Systematic rape was a highly effective tool for ethnic cleansing and specific 'rape camps' were established.

A decade and a half after the end of war, ethnopolitical divisions continue to have deep effects on people's everyday lives. Many local authorities

# Traffi cking

Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a national action plan against trafficking. However, despite major improvements, trafficking is still a grave problem.



The gender equality law states that **at least 40 percent** of all positions in decision-making state bodies must be occupied by the underrepresented gender. However, this quota system has led to very slight improvements so far.

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1. Vedrana Frasto is active within the Bosnian organisation Fondacija. Photo: Imrana Kapepanovic. 2. Women of all ages in Bosnia-Herzegovina face many challenges. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation.

## Continued international presence

The international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been massive. The Dayton Accord gave the international community far-reaching powers to oversee the transformation of Bosnian society. While the military aspects of the peace agreement, guaranteeing security, have been upheld by the presence of international peacekeepers, the civilian aspects of the peace agreement have been implemented by the Office of the High Representative (OHR), whose powers overrule the sovereign powers of Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the start, the OHR has repeatedly been criticised for its lack of gender awareness and it has not worked systematically to include women in those structures and bodies in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the OHR has been responsible for designing.<sup>216</sup> The OHR itself has been an example

of the exclusion of women from prominent positions in peace processes. Its leading troika has always been 100 percent male. All the High Representatives have been men, as well as the second and third persons in command (the Principal Deputy High Representative and the Senior High Representative), a total of 23 people over the years.<sup>217</sup>

In addition, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (another influential organisation that was afforded the mandate to monitor and help organise elections in the Dayton Accord) did not include gender analysis in its start-up phase.

At the same time, Bosnia and Herzegovina exemplifies what a difference the appointment of key persons with an interest in gender issues can make. In the late 1990s, women were appointed to three key positions: Special Representative of the Secre-



Women's rights activists from all over Bosnia demonstrating for equality and the formation of a new government in Bosnia, Sarajevo, November, 2011. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/Nina Genneby.

tary General within the UN mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Head of the OSCE Democratisation Department, and Head of Office for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These leaders took a personal lead in organising close consultations with women's organisations. They also made it a priority that issues like domestic violence and women's political participation came up on the agenda of the international community.

After many years of discussion a Gender Coordination Group was created in 1999 where the international community tried to coordinate efforts toward gender equality and women's rights.<sup>218</sup> The fact that OSCE changed from ignorance to the active promotion of gender awareness, and became instrumental for the inclusion of gender quotas for election lists, may be alluded to this moment of engagement with the Bosnian women's organisations.

### Legal rights

In the post-conflict process, women's organisations have successfully lobbied for change concerning legislation on human trafficking, domestic violence and gender quotas, for example. Over the last few years, significant legislative changes have been made. Legal provisions for women's rights and gender equality are in place. As the 13th country in Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted an action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. The adoption of its Anti-Discrimination Law, the Law on Gender Equality and the National Gender Action Plan were other major achievements. In addition, a National Gender Agency (GA) has been set up as well

issues have also been established at municipal levels. However, the commission members have not been given any funding, training is non-existent or inadequate and many members have no knowledge about the mission or mandate of the commission. In general, actual implementation of the legal framework, is very limited.<sup>219</sup>

### Women's political participation

The ethnification of society and a consequent return to 'traditional' values have meant a shrinking of hard-won political and social space for women. Between the Second World War and the hardening climate in the early 1990s, women in Bosnia and Herzegovina as part of Yugoslavia had asserted themselves in the public arena. The communist party recognised the importance of having women on their side, so they ensured women's political participation and although patriarchal values were entrenched, particularly in rural areas, women were accepted as political, economic and social actors. However in the first free elections in 1990, preceding the war, women all but disappeared from the political scene. The elections brought to power ethnopolitical parties that represented the three main constituent groups with political programmes — all to a greater or lesser extent advocating patriarchal, 'traditional' values.<sup>220</sup>

Recently, the gender equality law was amended such that it stipulates that at least 40 percent of all positions in public administration and decision-making state bodies must be occupied by the underrepresented gender. So far, the quota system has had limited

as Gender Centres at entity levels with the task of coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the Gender Action Plan and the harmonisation of strategies and programmes. Commissions on gender



impact. At the time of writing, more than 80 percent of positions in decision-making state bodies are held by men. No woman has held the position as Head of State within the three-member Presidency, or as Prime Minister, and only three women have held a ministerial position within the Council of Ministers. The trend is the same at lower levels of government. Women only hold four of the mayoral seats (2.85 percent) and 469 of the seats overall (14.9 percent) in local assemblies.<sup>221</sup>

### Civil society

The independent women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina was more or less born out of the threat of war in the early 1990s. During and immediately after the war, women were the first to cross entity lines and unite around issues regardless of ethnic identity, and from the very beginning their work intimately connected action for peace with action for gender equality. It included organising psychosocial support to victims of war, aid for widows, income-generating activities, as well as schooling and care for the elderly. Since then, their work has widened and deepened to include most spheres of society, including a strong focus on legislative issues, support to women in politics and working against domestic violence.<sup>222</sup> Funding to civil society is presently undergoing changes as gender agencies at state and entity level are accessing international support with the aim of strengthening these structures so that they can be the direct funders of civil society actors. At the same time, international funders of civil society are downsizing or changing focus to projects that deal with democratic reform and good governance and directly related to the process towards EU membership, at the expense of less funding for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.<sup>223</sup>

### Security and violence

Gendered violence was a major feature of the war and continues to be a highly contentious issue. Civil society has pushed through some legal and practical mechanisms of protection, but attitudes defining the cultural and socioeconomic status of women are taking longer to change. There are no available statistics on domestic violence, but data from organisations working directly with victims of violence indicate an ongoing steady rise in numbers.<sup>224</sup> Trafficking is another directly war-related problem. Bosnia and Herzegovina turned into a major hub for trafficking after the war, a development fuelled by the number of sex buyers, which rose sharply with foreigners arriving in great numbers to the

country. Non-existent legislation made it possible to openly run bars with organised prostitution and they became suddenly a visible presence. Women's organisations have played an instrumental role in organising support for victims of trafficking and prostitution, educating the police, and putting pressure on government to put institutional mechanisms in place and harmonise laws with international standards.

**D**espite major improvements, trafficking is still a grave problem although in a different guise, consisting mostly of girls and women in domestic underground establishments.<sup>225</sup> Concerning gender-based violence during the war, there are only patchy laws that protect civilian victims of war, and no special recognition of women victims of war. Since 2010, there is an official strategy for "Providing Aid to Women Victims of Sexual Violence during the War", which focuses on social, economic and psychological support as well as the prosecution of perpetrators. However, so far the strategy has not been translated into any real and tangible measures.<sup>226</sup>

### Socioeconomic challenges

In 2010, the average official unemployment rate was 27.2 percent. Per capita income was 30 percent of the EU average in 2009.<sup>227</sup> Economic divides between rural and urban parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina run deep. Many people in the semi-rural and rural areas survive on strategies of subsistence farming, remittances from relatives abroad and foreign aid transfer of assets from the state to private entrepreneurs.<sup>228</sup> According to the social exclusion index of the UNDP in Bosnia and Herzegovina, more than half of the population is excluded in some way. Statistics indicate an ongoing feminisation of poverty. In the most vulnerable categories, such as the elderly, the disabled, displaced persons and the Roma, women are identified as particularly vulnerable.<sup>229</sup>

## Part II. Experiences of power and participation

This part presents findings from field research in Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2011. A focus group of 12 participants from women's organisations was held in Sarajevo. In addition, interviews with key informants from civil society and some key actors at the national and international formal levels were conducted.

### Patriarchy and ethnonationalism. Raising awareness among women.

"If gender justice is not incorporated in all parts of society, then we are talking about a society that is not only unfair but a society that is far more susceptible to war."

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina pinpoints the dilemma of how to make peace sustainable, and the opportunity for long-term transformation offered by the formative moment of peace building. The participants in the focus group agreed on the close interconnections between peace, gender and power. As one participant said: "all activities (concerned with women's rights) that we have implemented so far are totally related to peace". They had moved on from the most pressing consequences of war and now they were struggling to find space in the power structures of the post-conflict state and to relate to formal spaces such as parliament, government and international bodies. Should civil society be watchdogs and activists? Or implementers of state-run projects? What issues should women activists focus on? Domestic violence, gendered participation in political structures, or reconciliation projects?

The focus group agreed that as a starting point, women's organisations need to raise awareness of how traditional values based on patriarchal structures are becoming cemented in Bosnian society. Their ongoing attempts to access power and take an active role in politics were hampered by the development towards more conservative gender roles in society.

"We have seen a re-traditionalisation of gender roles. After the period of socialism and the status that women then had — with all its limitations — a period came of total exclusion of women from the public space, and also the hidden discrimination

within families ... We have to change the roles that were imposed during the 1990s."

The war was driven by ethnonationalist entrepreneurs, and ethnonationalism is still the defining force of Bosnian post-conflict society. Participants pointed to the highly gendered characteristic of ethnonationalism, which has rendered even more stable by rhetoric from all religious communities:

"Nationalism and gender are related. Nationalism is supported by the religious community and it is really a partnership that prevents women from doing politics or having power."

As another informant explained, patriarchy, nationalism and religion are three vertical structures that support each other and have developed in conjunction. The partnership that she mentions refers to invisible power structures that obstruct women's participation in society outside condoned roles:

"To break against socially acceptable behaviour brings certain consequences. Sometimes unsaid, sometimes outspoken ... First you become conscious of inequalities, of the need for a more plural democracy, and you protest against the circumscribing of your freedom to pursue your own ideas and plans. Then they wait for you in the bushes, these informal sanctions that warn you that your place is not there. So when women are to make decisions on whether to participate in politics, they have to negotiate all those things. She has to manage and make peace with all those conflicts. I am still not able to do that..."

Several organisations were working on various projects to empower women to challenge these informal sanctions, often specifically focused on women and girls in the rural, more traditional, areas. Their space for making choices for themselves was not only limited by their often harsh economic situation, but also by an increasing retraditionalization of society. Commenting on her experience of working with girls and young women in rural communities, one participant said that lack of information and economic dependency were the most prevalent problems:

"When it comes to women in rural areas, that lack of information is so evident. The only thing that they know is to remain at home, take care of children and they believe that they do not have the right to voice their opinions. Not only do they not know

their rights to participate in the adoption of (gender-equality) laws, but they do not even know that they are beneficiaries of those laws.”

Another participant reflected upon the precarious situation of those women who do get access to ideas that challenge the ethnonationalist/religious framework. Awareness-raising projects might even lead to ostracization and very few real changes in their everyday lives – sometimes these women might even lose the limited power that they had access to within domestic spaces:

“We are working with women who continue to live there. And we change them. The consequences may be that those women become excluded from those spaces of power that they had access to up until then. They are without the necessary tools and equipment and they are ultimately abandoned even by those who supported them up until then. I very often ask myself – what have I done? I come along and then I simply abandon them.”

Many of the participants recognised the frustration that the above quote expresses. They felt that there was always too much to do, and that they wished that they could engage with the women they met on a more long-term basis. It was difficult for individual women who were introduced to new ideas but still stuck in a situation of highly circumscribed agency. At the same time they all stressed that the conclusion could not be to stop introducing new ideas and offering an alternative. As one of them said: “... knowledge can never bear bad consequences”.

### Domestic violence and poverty.

#### Working for social justice.

Violence against women has been a major issue for women’s organisations. Internationally, their advocacy concerning the systematic use of rape during the war fed directly into international lobby organisations and changed international law forever. Nationally, they have been instrumental in putting focus not only on the gender-based violence of the war but also on ongoing violence against women. Women’s civil society organisations had built up a network of safe houses for victims of domestic violence, they supported victims of trafficking and prostitution, and they worked in psychosocial projects with women who were still suffering the consequences of the gendered violence of the war. As well as offering protection, they also raised victims’ awareness of their legal rights.

While their work with victims was widely appreciated, the organisations suffered from a chronic lack of funding from state institutions. When the victims of violence leave the centre of attention, they enter a void. There are no state-funded programmes of economic empowerment and most women victims remain homeless and unemployed. As a result, they often return to their violent husbands.<sup>230</sup> The participants pointed out the need to combine awareness-raising advocacy with concrete measures for women, if changes are to be long-term:

“We never speak out about policies that the state is not willing to take up responsibility for, that is, policies to empower them both economically and socially. If you ask the victims and survivors of violence, what they need is housing ... and a job so that they can put bread on the table. But we do not fight for their social and economic problems, we can simply fight for their temporary sanctuary. We are just in a vicious circle. We are forcing the state to prosecute the perpetrators. But we do not force the state to provide the victims with housing and so on. And (the state) did not in the first place provide the foundations for them to no longer being victims at all.”

Participants felt that, in effect, they were providing services that the state should have been providing. They wanted to get better at pointing out and analysing how domestic violence is connected to the socioeconomic situation and put pressure on the government to provide long-term support: “Why is the woman returning to the man who beat her? (To solve) that would require money in the budget that is much more than what they are giving for the safe house”.

The participants discussed the connections between working against domestic violence and working for peace. They agreed that there was a clear connection between the two and understood the overall brutalisation of gender relations as a consequence of the gender-based violence that was such a prevalent feature of the war. The widespread impunity and the number of people involved in trafficking and prostitution has created an unspoken acceptance of violence. “The extent of domestic violence is precisely a consequence of the fact that victims of war and violence have never gotten recognition,” said one participant.

Another participant pointed to the relationship between formal and domestic spheres, as violence in the private sphere stops women from “participating in the public sphere”. In order to create a gender-

equal peace, the need for security in close, private spheres has to be recognised as well:

“Some people would probably say that what we do (working against domestic violence) has absolutely nothing to do with peace. It depends on how you define peace. I believe that the creation of peace by one person enable the feeling of security in another person and then adding one after another of more people who feel safe. For example, providing protection from violence in close relationships.”

### Politics and participation.

#### From the grassroots to elite level.

As the discussion above shows, participants identified a disconnect between their work and their ability to effect real long-term socioeconomic change. They recognised that civil society actors did not have any decision-making power, and that it was of crucial importance that more women got involved in politics. Women’s organisations had been instrumental in pushing through gendered quotas for elections to decision-making bodies. At least 30 percent of the names on party election lists must be women. Although the catastrophic results from the first two free elections have improved, the quota system has not meant any great change in real terms. Many women whose names are on the list of the political parties were said to be there only as ‘window-dressing’. They are unused to political life and the parties do not provide any training in political skills such as taking part in public debates. While interviews with women politicians was outside the scope of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, a female politician quoted in the Alternative CEDAW report from 2010 gives a telling insight into how space may be limited for women politicians within their own party structures:

“I do not even know the number of sandwiches I made in the election campaign that we distributed in refugee centres and poor neighbourhoods during public debates. This task was assigned to me by the campaign staff, even though I was a candidate positioned high up on the list. My male fellow candidates did not have that obligation and that was why I felt bad all the time during the campaign.”<sup>231</sup>

Furthermore, gendered quotas do not automatically mean that gender equality is mainstreamed on the political agenda. The patriarchal values ingrained in the ethnonationalist politics of Bosnia and Herzegovina are shared and upheld not only by men

but also by women. “Will my rights really be represented by women in parliament? We have political women whose standpoint is no different from their male counterparts,” one participant said. At the same time, it was recognised by focus group participants that it was strategically difficult for many female politicians to push for gender equality even if they wanted to or had enough knowledge about the issues: “they cannot represent our position because they will simply be marginalised within their political parties”. Added to this vulnerable position is the fact that female politicians seem to be judged according to different parameters than their male counterparts. Media reports tend to focus on either their private lives, or on finding fault with their political activities: “Even if media give her (a female political candidate) support from the beginning, they will kill her for one small mistake”.

In this process, women’s organisations had an important bridging role to play. The role of civil society actors was to inspire woman to be interested in political issues in the first place, making them aware of gender issues, teaching them how to ‘do politics’ and claim their space within political parties and other political structures. Several organisations represented in the focus group were involved in providing training and workshops for women politicians from various political parties. They worked at the national, entity, cantonal and municipal level, but also at the smallest unit level called ‘mjesna zajednica’, which typically involves a neighbourhood. The local level was identified as of crucial importance for two reasons: firstly to build up a good base of women engaged in politics; and secondly in order to influence the forums where crucial decisions are made that directly affect many women’s daily lives. At the level of the ‘mjesna zajednica’, it was possible to identify different mechanisms of exclusion that kept women outside physical and symbolic spaces for decision-making. As one participant from a rural area explained:

“In the villages there are no longer any spaces for women to meet. The community centres are devastated or they have been turned into something else. The community centres in some places are transformed into something called incubators for small business, mainly failed efforts to change some things in the community without any proper plan. Before we had libraries but they have been turned into cafés or bars where only men go. The decisions in political parties are mainly agreed upon in those bars, and women are simply not welcome in those



1. “Living free from violence is not a privilege, it’s my right!” was one of many messages during the demonstration for equality and the formation of a new government in Bosnia and Herzegovina by women’s rights activists from all over, Sarajevo November, 2011. Photo: The

Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation/ Nina Genneby. 2. “Never forget the genocide in Srebrenica”. Manifestation during the Serbian peace organisation Women in blacks 20th anniversary celebrations in Belgrade October 7–8, 2011. Photo: Women in black.

places. We (the women in the village) try to organise some alternative form of council, but it is not so easy to do. We do not have the space to meet.”

One of the participating organisations was active in a poor, rural area in north-eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. For several years, the organisation had focussed on empowering women to take part in local politics. Its aim was twofold: firstly to break down barriers preventing women from taking part in public spaces and public discussions; and secondly to make sure that gender issues were put on the agenda. The members of the organisation set up local meetings on a regular basis between local female politicians and other local women’s organisations, as well as with ‘ordinary’ women from rural areas. The organisation was widely respected in the area, mainly because they run a number of socioeconomic projects that have benefited the whole community, and the female politicians have recognised the opportunity for their own empowerment through their connections with these projects — a space has been created for them to ‘do politics’. In addition, civil society actors have created a space for ongoing connections between female local politicians and the rural constituency. “The women politicians are very aware that if they do not listen, we will not be voting for them in the next elections”.

The local councils have proven to be a good learning space for women politicians. Several of them have now been elected to the municipal councils of one of the small towns in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, where today eight out of 31 members are women. The women activists said that the majority of female politicians were “voting in line with the local women’s organisations’ priorities”. The local gender action plan that was to be adopted in the municipality was pointed out as a concrete result of this female presence.

“Five women’s organisations are running projects that are managed by women and we do not invite the male politicians to present themselves and take part in discussions on the projects. We invite the women that we think will be good. We invite women not according to what political party she comes from but according to whether we think she will represent our views in the local council.”

Another informant shared a story of how one particular young woman in a village in central Bosnia managed to get access to the formal space of power at the local level of the *mjesna zajednica*.

“Information was spread in the village that a meeting was going to take place and that new members

were to be elected. When she showed up the president asked her, “what the hell are you doing here?” She said she was there to attend the meeting, and he asked her who invited her. She answered, “Well, I am here because I heard there was an open invitation that was spread in our village”. She showed through the discussion that she was an able person and she was later elected to that council. The first step was to take the decision to attend that meeting, and she took that step.”

### Elite exclusions.

#### Relating to formal structures.

As described in the background, Bosnia and Herzegovina has well-developed formal structures for ensuring gender equality, the most important being the National Gender Agency (GA) at state level, and the Gender Centres at entity level. The main mandate is to present and analyze the status of gender equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They are partly a result of intense lobbying by women’s organisations. These new gender equality mechanisms have as one of their functions to act as co-ordinating bodies between state structures and civil society, and to distribute funding. Hence the landscape for civil society working with gender issues has changed considerably. It had been a mission of the civil society sector to support and advocate for the creation of national structures, but at present the organisations are disappointed. The structures were described as “empty shells” that have not had any real impact on women’s participation in general in Bosnian political life. At the same time, they were described as powerful state bodies that had shrunk the space for civil society. Working with the newly established institutions proved to be “a double-edged sword”, they said. The main problem was that the GA and gender centres at entity level had the power to approve projects and decide on funding. “They are getting the power to approve funding for us for small projects in areas where we are the ones with the expertise, they simply misuse our expertise”. The participants complained that they had become service providers for the state bodies, still doing the work they had done for years, but today with diminishing funding and less independence. A typical situation is where they get funding for only half of a project, for example, concerning help to victims of violence, and then run it anyway on a voluntary basis, although with a chronic lack of money. The women’s organisations were frustrated: they had the expertise but without any decision-making power. At the same time, they had to make a pragmatic

choice: “Either embrace partnership or continue as small projects”.

The GA saw its role as a coordinating body for NGOs, the formal structures and international donors. While in general expressing positive views on NGOs, the office of the GA described some of the organisations as “donor-driven” and “just looking for money,” and stated that “they must be better controlled”.<sup>232</sup> A gap of understanding emerged between this position and the position expressed by the focus group participants. As representatives of civil society, they saw their role as two-fold: not only to run projects; but also to be a “corrective body” that would closely monitor formal actors and at the same time maintain direct links to local contexts:

“I think that civil society is absolutely needed to monitor policies because the gender mechanisms are part of the executive power. (We need to) monitor the results of their work on the real life of the real woman ... increasingly they have no communication with citizens.”

#### Mixed feelings. The relationship with the international community.

Not only was the encounter with the new national and entity structures difficult and at times contradictory, ever since the war, women peace activists had stood in an often close relationship with the international community. All through the post-conflict period, international actors have had a lot of decision-making power, including the space afforded to gender issues.

“The implementation of gender perspectives is dependent on the international architecture of the decision-making process. Because the international community has a lot of influence on gender issues... at the highest level these issues were dealt with by the international community.”

Participants willingly acknowledged the important role several international actors had played in raising gender issues, and support from outside had been instrumental for many of their campaigns and projects. At the same time, they pointed out that the international administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the Peace Accord had missed many opportunities for including women in peacebuilding. The general sentiment expressed by participants was that while the international community would support them and point to their work as important, when it came to ‘real’ decision-making, they were

“not recognised as relevant players”. As pointed out above, no Bosnian women were invited to the Dayton peace negotiations and there was no presence of civil society actors. A recent example of ongoing exclusion was the Butmir process, which was an initiative by the EU and the United States to push for the harmonisation of legislation and break the political deadlock which has prevented the implementation of the remaining aspects of the Dayton Peace Accord. The top Butmir conference organised in 2009, at the EUFOR Headquarters in Butmir near Sarajevo, by Sweden (at the time, chair of the EU) and the US did not achieve its aims and was in most respects a failure.<sup>233</sup> Notwithstanding the collapse of the negotiations, it is also notable for the complete absence of women, despite intense lobbying from women’s groups. As pointed out by participants, fifteen years earlier in the Dayton process, women had not pushed particularly hard to be included, since in general awareness was low concerning the importance of the negotiations and they did not yet have the know-how nor were they well organised enough for a successful lobbying campaign. Since then, the recognition of women’s participation, especially through the UNSCR 1325, has improved – internationally as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina itself. But the EU and US representatives that organised the conference “... were the ones who basically closed the circle around Butmir. They did not have a single woman at the negotiating table”, as pointed out by one of the focus group participants.

In October 2009, two prominent civil society organisations represented in the focus group, wrote a letter of protest to the Butmir talks initiators (Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State and the High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina). The letter requested that:

“...the international representatives and local leaders include women in the continuation of talks on constitutional changes in the BiH. Women were excluded from all negotiating teams, which have been deciding about the fate of the BiH, starting from the time of the Dayton Peace Accord signing onwards. Butmir talks are no exception to this, while the results of these talks will have an impact on all BiH male and female citizens equally ...The EU countries are obliged to defer to the gender balance, pursuant to resolutions, declarations, rule books and road maps, when adopting any decision at the EU level. Contrary to the expectations of the BiH women, but also of the women from the region, Butmir talks initiators ignored all the above men-

tioned, and proceeded with the practice of ignoring and excluding women, although they were in a position to decide about who was to sit at the negotiating table. This has only encouraged local politicians to continue the practice of discrimination against women, the violation of domestic legal regulations, in particular the BiH Law on Gender Equality, and to ignore obligations that were taken over by the signing of the international and regional relevant agreements...”<sup>234</sup>

Why were women not invited to the Butmir process? Why had no lessons been learnt from the harsh criticism against the exclusionary Dayton process? Interviews with persons involved in the first conference point to a lack of awareness of the importance of involving actors from other parts of society in a consultative process. Also a disregard for civil society in general was evident. Despite evidence to the contrary, one representative maintained that the NGO sector, including women’s organisations, had been uninterested in taking part. A representative of the EU delegation acknowledged that it was a mistake not to include women, but said that it “just happened that way” and could give no further explanation of how participants were selected.<sup>235</sup>

A more positive example concerned the OSCE and the organisation’s work with the election law. In cooperation with the OSCE, women’s organisations conducted meetings in different towns where a draft of the election law was discussed. In the draft there was no mention at all of issues concerning gender representation of women, but women lobbied at various levels in “a synchronised move” as one of the focus group participants put it, and through key persons’ advocacy in the Provisional Election Committee, the gender quotas were accepted in the provisional election law in 1998 and formally adopted in the national election law in 2001.<sup>236</sup> It was pointed out that part of this success was due to the presence of key persons that got involved at the right time, as described above in the Background. While structures may appear to be set in stone, there is often a lot of space to act for key persons. It was quite possible, the participants argued, to change patterns of exclusion if only certain key persons had an understanding of the importance of gender issues.

Furthermore, it was hard, they said, to push for gender-equal representations in various bodies in Bosnian society when the international community showed such a dismal example.

## Violent past, fearful future. Working with reconciliation.

“In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we don’t actually have peace. It is more like a state of expectancy, where everyone is waiting for something to happen.”

Despite a decade and a half of technical peace, no national reconciliation process is ongoing in Bosnia and Herzegovina today. Impunity is a major issue as the majority of perpetrators and beneficiaries of the war have never been punished. On the contrary, many perpetrators are respected as well as feared by many. “How come a war criminal can be a role model? Because we let them be free citizens, we let them have money. Our war criminals are national heroes,” one participant said.

“During the war, certain criminal structures were created. The majority of those people have never been prosecuted ... Those are the people who believe that everything is allowed for them. And in the end everything is allowed for them, they can do whatever they want. They are not being punished at all. Certain parts of these structures participate directly in the organisation of the trafficking of women. So we do have a parallel world that functions alongside our lives, a world of crime.”

This impunity relates back to the discussion regarding the continuum of violence that was referred to above. The present trafficking networks are directly linked to criminal networks that grew in strength during the war. Today, they trade in women, yesterday they traded in weapons, as several women said.

In addition, this impunity feeds on the strategies of silence as a way of maintaining peace. In some ways, such strategies help former foes to live side by side again and may be the only available means of maintaining peace. Even at the national level, conflicting stories and interlinked ethnonationalist rhetoric threaten to pull apart the Bosnian state. Young people do not remember the pain of the war and are easily drawn into romanticised images of fighting and war and fall prey to extremist views. The lack of a real understanding of the past was an issue of great concern to most informants: “we have a new generation of Nazis, not even nationalists but Nazis. Young boys get into fights because of their national identity”.

The women’s organisations were clear that silence about the past had also helped them to meet across borders and focus on common concerns. At the same time, it meant that they had backed away from con-

fronting the past. But maybe the time for speaking out about atrocities had come:

“At present we (the women’s movement) are not able to publicly denounce what happened in the war. When it comes to certain things that a particular ethnic group did, we are always silent, because we have a consensus that we should not hurt each other and we are just pushing problems beneath the carpet. After sixteen years it is time to take on the responsibility for raising these issues.”

Women’s organisations have the possibility of being ground-breakers in taking on the challenge of dealing with the past. This is the only way that they can continue to be a peacebuilding force in society, some participants maintained. After all, the women’s organisations were the first to cross front lines and reconnect with women belonging to other ethnic groups. They should build on their unique experiences of co-operation straight after the war, as expressed by one of the participants, who remembered what she felt when she first met women from the ‘enemy’ side:

“The fatigue among us was so evident. You could feel a lack of tolerance, judgement, condemnation, although none of us was involved in the war and none of us had killed another person. At that time, I felt all those bad feelings for the other side. But in that period, thanks to our sanity, we started to build a really good relationship among ourselves ... now I feel so free, I can say my name, I really feel that everyone in this room is my friend.”

They had met through their common outcry against atrocities. They were united in their abilities to dare to stand up against the fear and all had experiences of challenging the war mongers. They could share ‘good stories’ and provide a counter-narrative to the stories that fed on fear and distancing. This comment by one of the participants who had stretched out a helping hand to persons ‘on the other side’ serves as an example of such ‘good stories’ that are silenced in the post-conflict ethnonationalist climate in large parts of Bosnian society today. It was told by one of the participants who lived close to one of the so-called rape camps in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina:

“I managed to provide shelter and save three Bosniak girls from being raped that night but I don’t know what happened the night after that. I almost lost my head over it, I never felt as great a shame when their



mothers thanked me so much for saving their daughters. I cannot believe that one needs to be thanked so much for saving someone from being raped.”

There have been victims of the war on all sides. That is the common premise that we need to start from, they said. One concrete suggestion for how to do this would be to lobby for a national remembrance day for victims, gathering around the common identity as victims, as mothers, and thereby building on the legacy from the first period of working together across borders: “You are a victim regardless of nationality”.

“All of us are in the end victims of war. We should all agree to dedicate one day each year for the victims of this war, regardless of ethnic identity. That day should be the same for the entire state. We should hear one another and try to understand one another. We should try to share those stories that are still in the back of our minds in order to understand each other. That can certainly help us to build our shared future here.”

#### Losing power? At a crossroads.

“For the last ten years we have been losing power, we are losing the chance to be the ones that are deciding about peace.”

The discussion concerning what role women’s organisations could and should play in a reconciliation process, including discussing war crimes and confronting impunity, opened up one of the most difficult discussions for the women’s movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina today. They acknowledged that as time passed, it had become harder to formulate what role they should play in Bosnian society. While the women’s organisations were clearly peacebuilders at the end of the war, the slow political process and the stalemate in national politics have meant that their focus has been put on other issues that are more indirectly part of peacebuilding. “We have moved away from the issues that could actually contribute to the recognition of us as actors and players in peacebuilding”.

“I would go back to just after the war when we were all full of enthusiasm and speaking publicly somewhere. I am speaking about dialogue, about building civil society. At that time we were humiliated and discriminated against in all ways. But personally I was so much more willing and had so much more energy to work on something that

I loved so much ...In the end of the 90s we were fantastic. We spoke publicly, I spoke publicly, we stepped across borders. And now we are beginning to withdraw from that public discourse.”

But the events of the war still greatly influence everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One issue concerns trials for war crimes. As the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is beginning to close down its work, national judiciary structures are slowly starting to prosecute war criminals. Here, there is space for women’s organisations to work directly with issues concerning the war, such as supporting women who come to witness about crimes of gender-based violence and who are given very little economic or psychosocial support, as one informant suggested.

“We, defenders of human rights, have to go back 16 years and we have to work on the causes. This is where I see myself, satisfying justice, in support of women victims of war.”

Others thought that domestic violence was an area where women’s organisations could make a real difference and that it might be better not to jeopardise the ongoing co-operation by turning towards the contentious issues of war and war crimes.

“We have opened the story of domestic violence against women, and we are not even close to ending it. Now, if we open the story of war, and then if we have to decide to give up (on fighting domestic violence), it would mean that we lied to all of those women that we promised something. We have to decide what our priorities really are to be. Yes, I’d like to open up these issues, because I am a witness to many things that took place. But with what can we achieve more?”

Emerging discussions during the focus group made it evident that people felt that it was hard to co-operate and unite the various organisations. Should there be such a united front? Who should push it? What issues are important?

“I have a feeling that if we don’t synchronise ... we will not achieve much, because I think the key answer to why we haven’t managed to achieve a lot is because our work has become fractured ... We (need to) create a really large network to work on this jointly, otherwise all our efforts will be simply forgotten.”

## Part III. Analysis

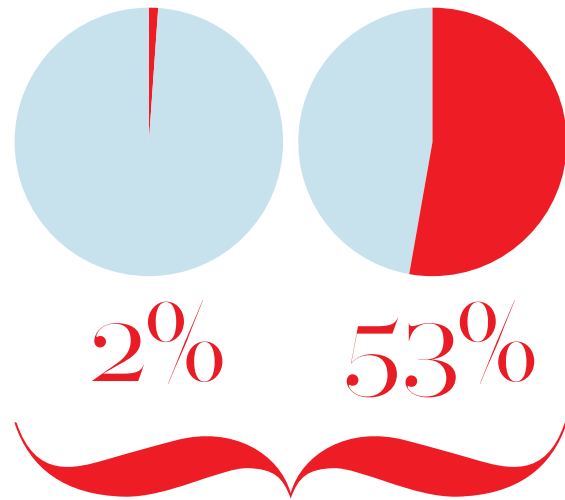
### Exclusion

While war often opens up opportunities for broader gender roles, it was clear in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina that ethno-political war came with a backlash for women as in so many other conflicts. It is a backlash that continues into peace time. The vertical power structures, of which nationalism, patriarchy and religion are three intertwined legs, were cemented. The ways these structures exclude are manifold and powerful. Firstly, women who challenge the exclusionist practices of the nationalist project and engage in women's rights and peacebuilding across borders are considered to be 'double traitors'. They doubly betray the gendered nationalist project, as the idea of the homogenous nation-state uses women as markers of nationalism who are expected to uphold the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. They often do that at great peril, as many women active in anti-nationalistic peace work testify to.<sup>237</sup>

**T**he exclusion continues into the political sphere, in which women are not perceived as fully legitimate actors. At a general level, many people are alienated from politics, which is seen as a separate, more or less corrupt sphere, as "people learn to cope with politics rather than engage in it".<sup>238</sup> Women active in politics are often considered to be 'matter out of place' who should not engage in the dirty game of politics. "Politics is dirty" is a common saying in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which displays the deep distrust of politics and politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, as well as the underlying gendered understanding of politics.<sup>239</sup>

Despite the achievements of gender quotas, the reluctance to make space for women in politics is great. Even women who manage to claim a place on election lists as a result of the quota system find themselves making sandwiches rather than politics, as was illustrated above. To the women's own experience of being excluded from the public space when they do politics can be added media statistics. A media monitoring project showed that in daily newspapers, only 2 percent of reports focused on women (53 percent on men). In the local election campaign of 2008, 99 percent of all billboards and posters promoted male candidates.<sup>240</sup>

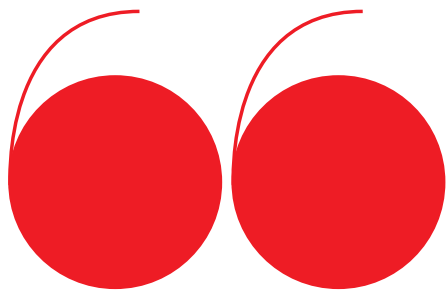
Concerning the exclusion as a result of the international presence, it is clear that the gender blindness



A media monitoring project showed that in daily newspapers, only 2 percent of reports focused on women (53 percent on men). In the local election campaign of 2008, 99 percent of all billboards and posters promoted male candidates.<sup>240</sup>

among the architects of the Dayton Accord have had far-reaching consequences for the democratic structure of the country. As Bosnia and Herzegovina might be the post-conflict country with proportionally the highest international presence ever, it is important to note the long-term consequences of the mistakes made in the beginning. It also needs to be noted that the learning curve — from Dayton to the Butmir process — has not been steep. While gender equality is a 'buzzword' in Bosnia and Herzegovina just as much as in any post-conflict context, it has not been translated into the proactive involvement of women or lessened suspicions of, or disinterest in, civil society actors as legitimate actors at the negotiation table.

**L**ack of security and the prevalence of domestic violence was clearly understood to be a continuation of the violence of the war years — a legacy of the war. Research shows that there are often higher levels of intimate violence after conflict. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the prevalence of trafficking and prostitution is also a direct consequence of the war and the economic and political power structures and networks created in wartime. It needs to be understood also in relation to the conservative norms in society discussed above, which further strengthen the exclusion of women.



# Women active in politics are often considered to be ‘matter out of place’ who should not engage in the dirty game of politics.

## Achievements

Women’s organisations have always been the voices for peace in the region. They have managed to work on issues that unite across ethnic barriers. In the legal arena, this work has resulted in progressive gender legislation concerning domestic violence, trafficking and discrimination in various forms. A national gender action plan has been adopted as well as gendered quotas on election lists. Quotas were a direct result of women organising and teaming up with key persons who represented international organisations. Also, support to women politicians may be instrumental in not only making women take the step into politics, but also helping them to push a gender-aware agenda.

In some areas several organisations have made successful connections with local politicians. There are great possibilities for hands-on change at the local level. Using the goodwill and popular leverage that their local development projects create, civil society has increased its access to formal spaces of power, and at the same time strengthened the power of elected women.

Although this theme was only touched upon in the focus group, it is imperative to also note that Bosnian women’s organisations have made ground-breaking achievements at a global level, since their work with victims of sexual violence and victims of trafficking for example has fed directly into the work on international legislation around rape and sexual violence in war as a crime against humanity, as well as UNSCR 1325. Many active individuals with high levels of expertise are directly engaged with different UN bodies and other global and regional platforms for policy change.

## Challenges

Women’s organisations have an important role to play in supporting women who choose to act in the formal space of politics. The know-how and experiences of women activists can be a bridge-builder between informal and formal spaces of power. As the participants acknowledged, a mere rise in the number of women in politics through gender quotas does not mean that gender equality is increased if women are used only as ‘window-dressing’ and kept from having any influence.


As Bosnia and Herzegovina slowly moves away from its post-conflict state, the landscape of international donors, national structures and civil society actors is changing. New power imbalances are created when donors turn to other more pressing contexts and there are national structures in place that NGOs must relate to, and at the same time safeguard their role as monitors and watchdogs. In turn, state actors must learn to develop a democratic understanding of the role and importance of an independent civil society sector. When international funders are taking a step back, it may also provide a positive opportunity to change a situation in which some NGOs have played the role of service providers for donors and to a lesser extent have been able to formulate their own goals. To step out of this self-sustainable loop may be an opportunity for civil society actors to become less fragmented and take more deeply proactive steps to engage in different sectors and forums in Bosnian society.

The struggle goes on to claim access to formal arenas and be taken seriously as partners. While participants expressed a lot of frustration over the difficulties in making gender issues part of the public discourse and the way many powerholders keep their doors shut, they also showed many examples of how they had managed to identify change agents in different spaces and at different levels and use them as access points. The experiences from working in local contexts may provide lessons, such as the young woman who challenged hidden networks of power when she decided to go to a local council meeting, which normally only men attended, even though the invitation was an open one. Focusing on finding key individuals within formal structures – national and international – that are open to change may prove to be a constructive path to take.

Another issue that is under-explored is the link between domestic violence and socioeconomic context. Many women have limited access to economic means and little power over household finances. One aspect of the feminisation of poverty at a societal level is that safe houses are under-funded and, because women who have been abused are regarded as passive victims, they are not given a chance of setting up a new life without their violent partners. Under-funding also hits the victims of the war who suffered gender-based violence. As trials in the national war crimes court and local courts are gathering momentum, women who testify are left with very little support. Continuing to provide concrete support to victims of war-related or domestic violence,

and at the same time lobbying for increased awareness of the socioeconomic dimensions of violence, is a great challenge for the women's organisations. Finally, the women's movement as a forum for dealing with the past may be a productive path to take. As ethnic categorisations have become fixed in discourse and impossible to escape, the politics of identity has become the tool used by power-hungry politicians who managed to persuade people that they could not live together. As a result, there are deeply conflicting stories of the past that continue to divide Bosnian society. There is little agreement about what happened in the war, and why. People become imprisoned by the invisible but insidious power of nationalist discourses and in fear of threatening fragile coexistence choose silence. As several participants pointed out, the new generation's ignorance of the war and the crimes committed then is just one sign of this silence around the recent past. Sharing stories across ethnic divides and reaching a more multi-dimensional understanding of the victims and agents of war is a painful and precarious process. However, to challenge the continuous hold of the ethnonationalist narratives may also open the way for imagining what an inclusive, gender-equal peace might entail. Hence the process of 'dealing with the past' is part of the transformation of society towards a sustainable democracy that includes gender equality.

To conclude, a central lesson from the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is how an analysis of the connections between gender equality, power and peace opens the way for an understanding of the complexity of peacebuilding as well as the long-term consequences of the first phases of peacemaking on sustainable peacebuilding. Today Bosnia and Herzegovina has peace. Reflection needs to continue on what the content of that peace is to be.





# compa risons & conc lusions

The five cases that have been presented in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, provide a unique mapping of the obstacles that women have to overcome, in order to participate fully in peace processes and in a post-conflict society. Put together, a striking pattern of exclusion becomes apparent. While each context has its own specific characteristics and challenges, central mechanisms of exclusion can be found across these cases.

In the introduction, the Power Cube, developed by IDS at Sussex University, was presented as an instrument for analysing power (page 14). In this comparative chapter, we use the Power Cube as an inspiration for structuring observations and looking for patterns of exclusion. The findings strongly indicate interconnections between the spaces of power (closed, invited, claimed), the forms of power (visible, hidden, invisible), and the levels of power (global, national, local) that the Power Cube outlines.

## Spaces of power

The concept of spaces outlines not only physical spaces but also different realms of action, discourse and policy where decisions are made. Spaces can be closed, invited or claimed.

### Closed spaces

Closed spaces refer in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* mainly to decision-making arenas as negotiations, institutions and political structures. They are realms open to a defined set of actors who may or may not act as representatives of others. While we often talk about spaces as a term to define a more abstract social or political space, it became clear in the case studies that space in its most physical concrete sense, was also sometimes off-limits to women. In the two most volatile environments, Iraq and the DRC, participants testified that many ordinary women refrained from participating in meetings because of lack of security. Poverty had similar excluding effects. Women could not afford to travel to meetings or to finance election campaigns – or even get involved in any activities beyond mere survival. Women were also excluded from certain physical spaces of decision-making due to social norms. In some rural areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, political decision-making took place in cafés and bars to which only men went. Informal barriers stopped women from even entering these ‘male only’ spaces.

Moving beyond the concrete physical understanding of space, it was also clear how closed spaces were maintained as male realms through certain practices. As the case study of Armenia and Azerbaijan illustrates, the corruption that dominated politics acted as a powerful excluder, since women as potential ‘intruders’ were kept outside the circle of corrupt stakeholders. In the South Caucasus region, corruption is both a consequence of the frozen conflict, and feeds on it. The informants from this region describe how male networks successfully maintained power in all (major) decision-making bodies. Similarly in the DRC, the widespread system of paying for votes meant that women, often with very little access to, and control over, money, were automatically excluded from participating in election campaigns. At the same time, women negotiated these mechanisms of exclusion by challenging the widespread acceptance of corruption and nepotism. They managed to frame the entry of women into politics as an alternative to such practices. It was a positive positioning that may lead to growing support and acknowledgement for women politicians, and hence represent a great potential for change. Studying corruption from a gender perspective, would deepen understandings of what complex effects corruption has on participation and inclusion in fragile societies. It is an important observation that should feed into peacebuilding efforts to target corruption, as it may have the indirect consequence of opening up political space for women.

A way to open closed spaces for political participation was through gender quotas, as practiced in Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Iraq. No doubt the introduction of gender quotas has been a great achievement. In patriarchal societies it is often imperative to break the cycle of men electing men, and quotas may be the only way to get more women elected or appointed. Another example is the DRC, where women managed to get a 30 percent female quota in influential democratic institutions, such as the Electoral Commission and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, the selection process of which women will be put on election lists is controlled by party committees, that select inexperienced women who will vote and obey. In all cases with gender quotas, women interested in politics and with potential leverage, were often kept off the lists. Furthermore, worries were expressed about the overall effect on the view of women in politics, when those listed on the party lists were inexperienced. It was women for ‘window-dressing’, a phrase used in several contexts.

**Religion and tradition****Obstacles to women's participation****Evident:**

- In the widespread acceptance of violence against women, including domestic violence and 'honour killings'.
- In the slander targeting women that is used as an effective tactic to hamper their participation in public spaces.
- In threats targeting active women's family members in order to silence them.
- When women do not get access to necessary and valid information needed for full participation.
- In the rising of religious fundamentalism that infringes on women's rights.
- In the lack of support for women candidates among male and female voters.
- In the international community's compromises on women's rights in peace negotiations.
- In attempts to discredit women's rights by branding them as 'ideas imposed from the West'.
- When customary law takes precedence over formal law, especially concerning family law and violence against women.
- When girls are not allowed to continue their education, or even start to go to school.

**Violence against women****Obstacles to women's participation****Evident:**

- In the high rates of rape and sexual violence against women.
- In the widespread impunity for criminal acts of violence against women, including domestic violence.
- In the absence of the issue of violence against women in security policy discussions.
- In the lack of freedom of movement that women activists' encounter.
- In the increased violence by sectarian and fundamentalist groups targeted at women.
- In defamation campaigns against active women intended to discredit their reputations and make them more vulnerable and less likely to get support from the community.

Attempts to present ideas of gender budgeting in Bosnia and Herzegovina for example had failed.

To get access to formal, closed spaces through gender quotas, for example, in the short term may even have some negative effects on women's power. It is important not to be content with 'just' pushing through legislation on quotas, because long-term capacity-building efforts are necessary if informal power structures are to be challenged. Civil society actors do important work to support women politicians through awareness training and through media monitoring, to show the absence of women politicians in the public space.

**W**omen's organisations showed an awareness of these problems and were engaged in educating women politicians, regardless of political agenda, as a way of

developing an overall competence among women who had or were in the process of getting access to closed political spaces, such as parliaments and local councils. Women's organisations also had to deal with disappointment when the physical presence of women in decision-making bodies did not lead to improvements in women's rights, as participants in all contexts acknowledged. They met many people who believed that while it was all very well to open the way for women's participation in politics, it might still be 'safer' to have men in leading positions. It seemed that change in itself was understood as a potential threat to the fragile political and social context in these societies.

It was also noted that even in contexts in which closed doors had been opened through gender quotas, there were some areas where it was extremely hard for women to gain access. Finance was such an area. Women were not present in committees working on state budgets, for example.

**Invited spaces**

Demands for accountability and participation have led to the creation of invited spaces, into which powerholders invite other representatives to participate, observe and/or be consulted. Once again, violence kept these doors closed for many women. It is important to note that even when invited, dangers may be too great to overcome. A concrete example is the women that took part in the focus groups for this study. Some of them had to take risks — negotiating roadblocks in Iraq, and exposing themselves to the possibilities of mugging and rape by travelling through parts of the DRC.

Women politicians and women activists are especially targeted for violence, and all participants strikingly bore witness to death threats and/or ongoing slander. While all the women in the focus groups said that they had made active choices not to let threats or actual violence stop them from carry-



**Gender stereotypes****Obstacles to women's participation****Evident:**

- When stereotypes are used, such as motherhood and women as more peaceful than men, which may open doors for participation, but also limit women's agency.
- In self-blaming and self-punishment among women for not doing or knowing enough.
- When the traditional roles for girls and women, such as household responsibilities, limits their possibilities for participation.
- In male relatives exert power over women's freedom of movement.
- In media coverage focusing on the flaws and private lives of women in positions of power, rather than on their professional achievements.
- When politics is regarded as a 'dirty business' that is not 'appropriate' for women.
- When people do not accept women as politicians/leaders.
- When women activists demand more of elected women than of their male counterparts.
- In the international community's lack of recognition of women's organisations.
- When war and conflict are seen as issues exclusively for men to discuss.

**Corruption in conflict and post-conflict settings****Obstacles to women's participation****Evident:**

- When women have less chance of being elected because political positions are considered to be worth money.
- When many decisions tend to be made in informal male networks.
- In decreased space for independent civil society and an increase in the number of GONGOs that the government controls.
- When power structures that emerged during the conflict are used by criminal networks in post-conflict settings for human trafficking.

ing out their work, other women may refrain from making the choice of getting involved and stepping into the public arena – even when invited. Formal actors have to recognise ongoing security risks that may make it difficult for women to follow set procedures for cooperation and participation.

A fair amount of the debate on invited spaces in peace processes concerned peace negotiations, in which decisions are made that have long-term effects on the post-conflict order. Despite the increasing focus on women's participation through UNSCR 1325, there were few changes in how formal actors – both national and international – acted in order to include women. The learning curve was more or less flat, as the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates. In the Dayton peace process in 1995, there were no Bosnian women present, and as discussed in the case study, neither were there any Bosnian women present in the so-called Butmir process 14 years later. In the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh, there have been some women involved, but all the international representatives

have been male. In the DRC, civil society actors had to fight hard to be given the status of observers in the Sun City negotiations. That they managed at all, was mainly thanks to the strong support of international mediators, whereas the warring parties were opposed to civil society participation, arguing that they had not been in arms.

The exception was Liberia, where representatives from a regional women's organisation, who had played an important role in getting the combatants to the peace negotiations table, were invited to participate as observers, and later received formal status as civil society participants at the table.

This study thus concurs with other studies, that focus exclusively on negotiations; namely that to a large extent peace negotiations are still closed spaces, despite the explicit call in UNSCR 1325 and on of the follow-up resolutions of UNSCR (1889) for women's participation in peace negotiations. Attempts at various points in different peace negotiations to create invited spaces in which women's organisations would be able to participate, through Track-II processes for example as outlined in the introduction, have had limited impact. These methods need to be continuously developed.

**Claimed spaces**

The third aspect of spaces concern claimed spaces, which may be created by those seeking power outside formal realms. In *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, we understand claimed spaces to be those created by social movements, civil society and other actors in the informal sector. They are public arenas, where claims can be made and issues raised that otherwise are not put on the political agenda.

### Excluding power arenas

Obstacles to women's participation

Evident:

- When women are excluded from governmental committees in which financial decisions are made.
- When elected women without a strong position in their own political parties experience difficulties in pushing for women's rights.
- In the lack of responsibility taken by the international community when it comes to including women in peace negotiations.
- In the very few women appointed by the international community as mediators and negotiators.
- When female politicians are excluded from the closed arenas in which decisions are made.

### Legislation and state structures

Obstacles to women's participation

Evident:

- When mechanisms for gender equality are underfunded and lack any connection with reality for women.
- In the competition for funds between gender equality authorities and women's organisations.
- When the funding from national institutions to civil society organisations includes conditions that makes it hard to develop an independent civil society.
- When legislation concerning gender equality, domestic violence or women's rights is adopted without funds for or the political will to implement it.
- In women's lack of economic rights, including the right to inherit, to ownership and access to financial resources.

**T**he strong and dynamic women's organisations in all the contexts studied are successful examples of claiming a space in volatile circumstances. They have provided a space for women to meet and to formulate their demands, but lack of security was once again an obstacle to creating strong, claimed spaces. For example, the women's movement in the DRC was fragmented, and ongoing violence and poverty hindered women from meeting and mobilizing at a national level. This was also a problem in Iraq, where, for example, women's groups in the relatively safe region of Iraqi Kurdistan, and groups in other parts of Iraq, would benefit from more frequent meetings to share experiences.

Claimed spaces may be a powerful base from which to exert influence, which women's grassroots organisations in Liberia discovered, as they mobilised from their own space (a space that was also physically separate, located outside the building in which the formal peace negotiations took place). The women from the grassroots movement actually refused invitations to take part in the formal process, out of fear of being co-opted and corrupted and losing touch with civil society and their broad support base. For them, their own claimed spaces were proof of their uncorrupt and sincere intentions as peace makers. They assessed that their power to influence was greater from the outside.

From a similar point of reference, many participants had chosen to refrain from formal institutions and instead used civil society as a powerful site for advocacy. Their point of departure was that actors at grassroots level often have a genuine desire for

peace, that will be of direct benefit to their own lives, compared to powerholders and war-makers who may stand to lose more from peace than they gain. In Liberia, women dressed in white still gather at the airfield in times of potential crisis, as during the elections in 2011, when outbursts of violence threatened peace and the democratic process. This activity served as a very powerful reminder of women's role during the conflict and had a stabilising effect on the entire society. To uphold their claimed space as 'clean' and separate from mainstream politics also paved the way for international support. The fact that civil society representatives stood outside of corrupt politics was one reason for them gaining respect and funding from international donors.

Women's organisations also created their own invited spaces where they were in charge. Instead of waiting to get invited, they themselves invited stakeholders to forums. An interesting example is how an Armenian organisation trained women from the region in human rights, refugee issues and conflict theory, in order to meet with representatives from embassies of the countries running the formal peace negotiations. In a more informal process, women in Iraq have reached out to religious leaders and invited imams in Iraqi Kurdistan to participate in workshops on honour killings and domestic violence. The imams in their turn spread the message against violence in the mosques. Similarly, women in other contexts contemplated whether they should reach out to interested men and invite them to the women's claimed spaces in order to work together.

It is also interesting to note how certain issues were owned by women's organisations. One example concerns reconciliation and cross-border initiatives – something that women in all contexts had experience of, or were interested in taking up. The issue was dealt with in a particular political realm that women could claim as their own, and where to a certain extent they could set the agenda. Whereas actors from formal spaces, at national level or international level, had taken part in creating divisionist structures, women's organisations were considered to be without hidden interests and with a track record of cooperation across borders. Ever since the war ended, Bosnian women's organisations had managed to uphold one of the few interethnic political spaces in the divided country. At the same time, it is worth noting that certain informal agreements had made this cooperation possible, such as choosing not to bring to the fore contentious and conflicting understandings and narratives of the war, which was a strategy also used by the Liberian women's movement. As both the Liberian and Bosnian contexts illustrated, silence has been the preferred means of coping with the controversial past, both in society in general and within the women's movements. Being able to move on in the reconciliation process might be the biggest and most pressing challenge – and the best chance women's organisations have to have an impact in post-conflict contexts.

The observations above could be used to initiate discussions on the importance of creating linkages between different spaces of participation. Civil society, the focus of this study, has claimed significant space. Now it is imperative to try to more clearly identify moments of opportunity for opening doors between formal and informal, or claimed, spaces.

## Forms of power

Forms of power refers to the way power manifests itself in visible, hidden and invisible forms, and impacts what is put on the agenda and what is not.

### Visible forms

Visible forms of power are enacted in tangible arenas and through mechanisms of power, for example, legislative processes, political bodies and consultative forums. It has rightly been acknowledged that conventions and resolutions, such as CEDAW and UNCSR 1325, are key instruments for supporting women's protection and participation, as well

as international legislation around gender-based violence, such as systematic rape as a weapon of war. The introduction of gender equality laws in post-conflict countries are tangible results, that the international community uses as a point of reference. But as participants in all cases testified, these gains may not translate to any 'real' action. Implementation remains a key challenge. Countless citizens may never even have heard about the legislation. Not even civil servants may be aware of new laws that strengthen the rights of women. Furthermore, women's rights are squeezed between customary and official law. Traditional law often curtails women's power in the private and domestic spheres, for example, by regulating marriage and inheritance – issues of paramount importance for women's chances to be in charge of their own lives and bodies. In several contexts there are inheritance laws within the customary system, as well as the official legal system that disadvantage women and add to the feminisation of poverty. The inclusion of Article 41 in the Iraqi Constitution (which gives religious law precedence over family law) is a case in point. The fact that in the transition period the American administration did not take up the fight against the Article is an indication that women's rights are not prioritised in a negotiation situation.

Another example of lack of implementation concerns schooling. As the case of Iraq shows, all children have the right to education, but many girls do not go to school and there is no monitoring of this. In this context, one may also generally note that there is an urgent need to address the high rate of dropping out of school among girls, due to early pregnancies and sexual harassment by teachers and fellow students, which is a common problem in Liberia and the DRC.

It is imperative that the formal power that legislation outlines, is translated into real power. Otherwise the adoption of laws (that are never implemented) can act as an excuse for carrying on business as usual. This is an area with great potential for representatives of the international community to exercise their influence.

### Hidden forms of power

To understand the lack of access to formal, closed spaces, one needs to look at the way doors are kept closed through expressed or unspoken forms of power. By hidden forms of power, we mean the creation of barriers to participation, what is put on the agenda, such as the discursive framing of what is important or not. These exclusions may be expressly



# Slander of female political candidates, and women's rights activists especially with regards to their morals, served as an effective, excluding mechanism, since many women did not want to risk their 'good name' by going into politics."

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or more silently reinforced – but are nonetheless powerful.

A salient feature in all cases was the prevalent idea that women as a category did not fit into politics. In Armenia and Azerbaijan, the idea of politics as 'dirty' for women was all-pervasive, and consequently women in politics were also 'dirty'. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, this idea is expressed in the saying that "politics is a whore". In the DRC, politics, just like peace and security, were matters for men, and women involved in politics were often labelled 'rebels' or 'prostitutes'. Slander of female political candidates, and women's rights activists especially with regards to their morals, served as an effective, excluding mechanism, since many women did not want to risk their 'good name' by going into politics. Many activists preferred to work behind the scenes in order to maintain some anonymity. By not putting their activities on display, they protected their personal security, but their contribution to the peace process in this way became less well-known to the general public.

Domestic violence was a salient example of hidden forms of power. Importantly, all participants connected domestic violence in the ongoing post-conflict phase to war-related gender-based violence. Cultural norms that allowed the abuse of women had been reinforced through the widespread violence in wartime. The impunity that many war criminals enjoyed concerning sexual violence, despite international legislation, was one consequence of this disregard for crimes against women. Honour killings in Iraq had become intertwined with the ethnic cleansing strategies of militias and other actors, and used to justify ongoing violence.

The feminisation of poverty was also a consequence of hidden forms of power. Cultural and social norms mean that women often bear the brunt of the financial insecurities that conflict has created. Although levels of poverty vary significantly between the cases studied here, it was pointed out everywhere that women struggled to find income, and when they managed it was often in informal sectors with little long-term security. The little finan-

cial freedom they may gain was often restricted, as male relatives were in control of their right to work or to take a bank loan, to which women in Iraq, the DRC and Liberia testified. Furthermore, women were often responsible for single-headed households. Women in rural areas in particular were locked into strictly limited roles, including child-bearing, child-rearing and hard agricultural work – with little space for agency outside of the household.

Women challenged hidden forms of power through awareness-training and different schemes for the protection and empowerment of women. They saw this work as intimately connected to an overall peacebuilding strategy. By challenging violent and corrupt networks of power that kept doors closed against women's participation, they were participating in the transformation of society towards sustainable peace.

### Invisible forms of power

Invisible forms of power are concerned with how the discourses of the powerful are accepted by the powerless, and may be defined as the internalisation of norms and ideas that limit agency.

For example, in the DRC, women themselves, influenced by tradition and culture, tend to question the presence of women in politics. Deeply rooted patriarchal structures and traditional exclusion, in combination with a blatant lack of education, mean that many women do not challenge their own powerlessness and sometimes even support the existing gender roles, despite the low level of power given to women within that structure. For many women, the man must be the one to make important decisions, otherwise he is not considered a 'real' man. The other example is from Armenia. In one of the quotes, a participant contends that the difficulties she faced in a political position had nothing to do with her being a woman, despite overwhelming evidence that as the sole woman in the meeting space she had to face very strong exclusionary practices.

One interesting aspect of invisible forms of power concerns the way women activists in all cases used images of women as inherently peaceful and neutral, or biologically inclined as mothers to nurture peace. Women in Azerbaijan and Armenia stressed their role as mothers as 'naturally less corrupt', while in Iraq several activists asserted that women are 'by nature' more peaceful than men. In Liberia, "a woman as a mother is respected". In the women's movement's successful lobbying for peace, their strategy was "to look at our role as mothers, as people who give birth. And to look at all the war-

ring parties as our children".

This pervasive narrative can be interpreted in multiple ways. For many women, the mother image seemed to be deeply empowering, with concrete results in terms of access to power, as they could tap into social and cultural notions of positive female qualities. Identification as peaceful women and mothers united in grief for their children, could override ethnic or religious identities, and was a powerful driver for women's reconciliation initiatives. Nonetheless, some participants acknowledged that, at the same time, such discursive frameworks may function as a motivation for the exclusion of women from visible power. They saw such understandings to be particularistic and building on internalised and fixed understandings of what it means to be a woman. While it might be effective in the short term, they believed that such a framing of women's claims to power would have detrimental effects on their long-term efforts towards building a gender-equal post-conflict society.

One consequence may be the strongly felt disappointment expressed in all focus groups concerning the role women politicians played in their society. When they did not represent women as a group, they were considered to be more or less traitors. An essentialist understanding of gender reduces women to their sex and they are not ascribed any complex political identifications and strategies. Hence, it may be that women's organisations, through the discourse of women as a category of peace-loving mothers, actually reinforced the separate realm of woman politicians, who were judged more harshly than their male colleagues and looked down upon. Women civil society actors need to recognise and negotiate the tension between the power gained on the one hand from their position as victims and respected mothers, and on the other the detrimental effects that such discursive frames may have as they function as a motivation for the exclusion of women from visible power.

## Levels of power

The final aspect of the Power Cube concerns levels of power, which refers to the different layers of authority and power held by decision-makers, including the international, national, local and household levels.

### International

Through UNSCR 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the importance of women participating in peace

processes is formally acknowledged. Nonetheless it seems exceedingly difficult in practice to change prevailing exclusions. Organisations, institutions and teams at an international level are themselves designed to exclude women. Without a doubt, deep-set gendered structures define the very organisations that are part of peacebuilding interventions. Few women are present in the international structures set up to administer and sometimes govern post-conflict societies, or to negotiate peace deals. For example, there were very few women in leading positions in the international institutions set up to govern the peace process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, there are no women involved at the international level in the Minsk Process.

**F**urthermore, representatives of the international community once again backed away from confronting patriarchal and abusive practices that severely limit women's agency. In the ongoing peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, a context in which the international community is still highly involved, activists argued that the international community is paying lip-service to issues of gender equality, while in reality ignoring issues that women's organisations are pushing for time after time. The passivity of the American administration in Iraq and lack of protests against the infringements of women's rights in the post-conflict Iraqi constitution is another example. When representatives of the international community play along with ideas that women's rights may be culturally defined and limited in some contexts, they severely undermine decades of local struggles for women's rights.

At the same time, local protests against ideas of gender equality are often framed as protests against imported 'Western' ideas. As Iraqi women in this study pointed out, this may in turn make it even more dangerous for women in local communities to advocate for their rights and for gender equality. It severely undermines women who argue that ideas of fundamental rights and gender equality are not imported values but grounded in their own local communities and national histories. There are plenty of peacebuilders in the local context, with a base in women's organisations who would protest against the understanding that they have been co-opted by Western ideals. Dealing with this precarious balance is a great challenge for the international actors present in environments that are hostile to women.

This double exclusion of women, noted in all cases,

means that women are not in themselves considered important and gender equality is ignored, while at the same time, the sphere of civil society in which women are most active is also excluded. In the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh, top officials routinely neglected to consult with other than (male) representatives of formal elite structures.

There are other examples of how the relationship between the local and the global is defined in a one-way process. We noted in the introduction the limiting stereotypes of women as victims that international engagement has been part of producing. The women in the DRC struggled to break free from the one-dimensional role of rape victims that the gaze of the outside world has reduced them to. They referred to the steady current of foreign visitors to the women's hospital in Panzi as "rape tourism". Another interesting, parallel observation can be made concerning what may be called the "peace tourism" to Liberia, that has developed as internationals pay 'compulsory' visits to the peace movement. Paradoxically, the great deal of attention afforded the Liberian women as a consequence of their successful peace work, seem in part to be hindering them from developing new roles in post-conflict Liberia. Notwithstanding the remarkable achievements of the peace movement a decade ago, the gaze of the outside world makes them stick to a familiar and safe story. One may also view the arduous struggle of the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, to reformulate their goals and take up new challenges, in the same light. It is therefore important for international actors to be critically aware of the way they are party to constructing limiting stereotypes.

**R**outine exclusions and stereotypes may be transformed when actors in key positions decide to act. As the case of the international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina illustrates, for 'change agents' with an interest in gender issues and in civil society, it is quite possible to start more inclusive processes. Competent women, an active civil society with direct contact with the grassroots, is imperative in order to be able to build a comprehensive peace, and international legal frameworks. For individuals within the international community who want to make a difference by promoting women's participation, there is great potential to work for a more productive encounter between local and international 'change agents'.

## National

International actors were recognised for often playing a decisive role in supporting women's organisations. External funding was of utmost importance for the participants in order to survive. Not only for the money, but also for the independence it gave them in claiming their own space and mobilizing without having to adapt to national structures. But in those contexts where peacebuilding has gone on for some time and peace is under way, international actors turn away from civil society as national structures become consolidated. Funds are directed towards the newly set up agencies for dealing with gender equality, and civil society actors are expected to seek funds from them instead. While this is a logical and in many ways welcome development, it may be necessary for the international community to tread carefully so that it is not just the skeletons of institutions that are put in place, but also democratic values. It seemed that the national structures in the cases studied, found it difficult to manage the balance between supporting civil society and allowing it to criticise the hand that feeds it, as often is the case in 'immature' democracies.

**A**s for the women's organisations, it became more difficult to uphold the watchdog role when the funding came from the government instead of international donors. For many organisations, the transfer from international support to national support had meant a lessening of independence. The power and leverage that they had gained from direct co-operation with international structures was lost along the way.

In Armenia and in Azerbaijan, a prevalent pattern had developed where (male) politicians and other stakeholders constructed 'GONGOS' (governmental NGOs), which crowded the space that civil society actors had claimed. They clearly recognised that civil society does have power, as well as access to funds, and had moved in to access some of that power. It was a worrying development that civil society space had been hijacked to a certain extent through the construction of GONGOS. In a similar development in the DRC and Liberia, politicians and people with power had created their own civil society organisations, which contributed to blurring the line between politics and civil society.

Sometimes the regional level may prove to be easier to work at than the national, and cooperation at the regional level may strengthen the voice of women at the national level. In the DRC, suc-

cessful cooperation between women from the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi has put increased pressure on each government to fight sexual violence. In Liberia, the existing network of women in Sierra Leone and Guinea was instrumental in bringing the rebels to the negotiation table in 2003. In the Balkans, women work across former Yugoslavia — the most recent initiative being the regional project called the Women's Court, which will monitor and deal with gender-based war crimes.

An overall challenge is to investigate how civil society organisations relate to the new state structures of the post-conflict state, and take into account that they may be both threatened and empowered by the new relationships of power formed when international donors shift their interest to state actors.

## Local

Most women's organisations participating in the focus groups were active at the local level, where many women without access to formal power structures are able to build up a power base. They gain legitimacy from their know-how, and they have an opportunity to circumvent formal structures. In the local community one may do work that is not possible at higher or more formal levels, for example, working with bridge-building and laying the grounds for reconciliation. Such processes may start very early in the peacebuilding phase and benefit from the local and informal context.

However, the gap between women involved at the local level, and the national structures, was great. This was partly an effect of power gaps between the formal and informal levels. Many of the focus group participants at the local level complained that women in formal structures were disconnected from the local level, and in effect had become part of an elite who could be more interested in international dialogues than staying in touch with rural areas. Women in the DRC said that women who get elected to parliament were not connected to local constituencies.

**I**t is no doubt important for women's organisations to focus on empowerment at the local level. At the same time, paths to help power travel from the local level to other levels need to be established, and efforts need to be made to increase awareness that political change is a long-term process.

Finally, we turn to the most local space, the domestic. It is at the household level that men often make decisions as to whether women are allowed to go to a meeting or to vote at all, for example.

We have already discussed the issue of domestic violence as an obstacle to women's control over their own bodies, and a pervasive threat to close relationships with children and other members of the family. The connection between domestic violence and conflict-related violence can also fruitfully be analysed from the levels perspective, as it for example opens the way for a debate on international and national legislation, in relation to customary or traditional law that is often practiced in the local setting. Participants in all cases recognised the intimate connections between their work against domestic violence and for peacebuilding in general. They were aware of the continuities of violence that blurred the line between war and peace, and how layers of violence were manifested and interrelated. It is imperative that other actors in the peacebuilding arena acknowledge the sometimes brutal, sometimes subtle, workings of power that make such ongoing violence possible; and understand domestic violence as part of the wider landscape of violence and lack of security in the post-conflict order.

## Concluding remarks

*Equal Power – Lasting Peace* set out to increase knowledge about the multifaceted obstacles that women have to overcome in order to participate fully in peace processes. It has been a profound learning experience to listen to the women whose voices form the core of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*. They have generously shared their unique knowledge and experience concerning the multiple ways that women's agency is curtailed, and how these obstacles may be challenged.

The point of departure for the study was that power needs to be recognised and explored in different realms. To understand how power travels, we focused on the interrelatedness of mechanisms of exclusion. Power gained in one space may be held back by substantial exclusion in another. It is clear that even when gains have been made in the formal spheres of power, such as legislation on gender equality, they are not properly implemented and are often obscured by hidden forms of power that uphold discriminatory practices and exclusions of women. Layers of violence are manifested at different levels and are intimately intertwined. Domestic violence in the household is connected to public violence and threats. Without an understanding of the continuities of violence across levels and spaces, lack of security will prevail.

A deepened understanding of these interrelations can be an important step towards change. It is our hope that policymakers and other actors can take to heart the observations presented in *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*. We also hope, as one of the stated goals of this endeavour, that women activists who work for gender equality in countries going through transitions from war to peace, may find the strength to challenge the patterns of exclusion that emerge here, not as context-specific but as part of wider gendered hierarchies, ultimately opening the way for transformations towards equal power and lasting peace.





# things to bear in mind

## To the International Community

### 1. Address all levels of violence against women

Violence against women is a major obstacle to women's participation in peace and democracy processes. Violence takes many forms and is present at different levels and in all parts of society – from the domestic sphere to the national political arena. It includes domestic violence, sexual violence, threats and violations of human rights.

→ It is vital to put an end to impunity for gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and sexual harassment. Customary law should not be accepted or used if it violates international standards and human rights. The international community should work with local women's organisations to identify the best strategies for appropriate legal frameworks, to avoid laws being adopted under donor pressure that don't respond to women's analysis and demands.

→ In many societies, violence or threats of violence against women human rights defenders are not recognised as strategies to silence them but rather as part of a general problem of violence against women. The international community must recognise and identify the structures and reasons underlying the violence, and must offer protection in order to secure women's participation.

### 2. Address gender inequality and power imbalances

The different actors within the international community, such as the EU and the UN, should lead by example and be role models for women's participation and women's human rights. They likewise have a key role to play in bringing the voices of women from conflict-affected regions into policy making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

→ If the international community's organisations are gender-equal and include women at all levels, this sends important signals to women in the local context. Today, the international community does not live up to the standards it has set when it comes to appointing senior women to its missions. The international community's institutions need to be transparent, systematically collect sex-disaggregated data, employ quotas when necessary and use or create rosters of professional women.

→ A gender perspective needs to be included in all forms of reporting, where and when meetings were held, how many men/women participated, etc, in order to make sure that women participate in the peace and reconstruction processes.

→ Power analysis, of which gender is an integral part, should be required in all conflict analyses and assessments. It is an important tool for revealing layers of discrimination as well as the multiple identities of each actor (gender, clan, religion etc).

→ Improve communications with civil society through structured consultation and the exchange of information and analyses. The international community has an obligation to meet local women's organisations. In doing so, the international community is accountable for not only listening but actively seek to incorporate the given information to their work and to the peace processes.

→ Slander is a powerful suppression technique used against women everywhere to diminish them. Be observant, since what is said might not be true but simply a strategy to silence women politicians or activists. The international community should legitimise women human rights defenders when others are trying to de-legitimise them.

### 3. Recognise that building democracy takes time

Building democracy takes time and involves much more than free and fair elections. Funding is a long-term commitment, as is developing inclusive approaches to peacebuilding. In many ways, today's focus on holding post-conflict elections very quickly has proven to be counterproductive for democracy and for women's rights and participation. Supporting a variety of political parties and civil society organisations that can act as watchdogs is of utmost importance to rebuilding societies.

→ Studying corruption from a gender perspective would deepen the understanding of the effects that corruption has on the participation and inclusion of women in fragile societies. Targeting corruption may have the indirect consequence of opening up political space for women. The international community should support the work of civil society organisations to document, deconstruct and combat corruption and organised crime.

### 4. Increase funding for women's organisations and make it more strategic

Women's organisations are a key factor in implementing peace agreements, laws and regulations in a society. Women's organisations have the best knowledge of local needs and problems. They are essential for democratic development, and should not be made into service providers for international institutes or the society.

→ In order to develop their potential to the benefit of the whole of society, women's organisations need flexible and sustainable core funding.

→ The international community should be led by local women's organisations in designing the best strategies for women's empowerment. This is to ensure that the agenda is home-grown, appropriately paced and not open to be branded as "ideas imposed from the West".

→ In order for women's organisations to become stronger players in peacebuilding processes, they need to be able to meet and support each other and to create networks. Facilitating this is an important task for the international community, and can be achieved by offering and funding secure practical/logistical support such as safe transport, safe spaces, communication technologies, etc.

### To Women's Organisations

A strong women's movement guarantees that women's rights are not forgotten and are prioritised in the peace and reconstruction processes, and thereby is also crucial to democratic development.

→ Women's organisations need to stand up for the expertise and knowledge they possess. They need to occupy public spaces and advocate for relevant issues to be put onto the political agenda. It is a shared responsibility of the academic world, donors and women's organisations to research, document, analyse and spread this information in order for different stakeholders to see and acknowledge the importance of women's organisations in conflict areas.

→ When women from civil society come together, they become a stronger force for change. Women's organisations need to support each other and work strategically together to create networks, platforms, advocacy campaigns, exchange information and cooperate in other ways.

→ Women active in political parties are often faced with higher demands and are expected to occupy a higher moral ground than men, not least by civil society. Women activists tend to demand more of elected women than of their male counterparts. Women's organisations should be observant about slander, which is used against both women human rights activists and women in politics. Women elected to political office need support and information.

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# abb. reivia tions

**BiH:** Bosnia i Hercegovina

**CEDAW:** Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

**CSO:** Civil Society Organisation

**CDC:** Congress for Democratic Change in Liberia

**CPA:** Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians united for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties

**DDRR:** Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

**DRC:** Democratic Republic of the Congo

**ECOMOG** – Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

**ECOWAS:** Economic Community of West African States

**EPNK:** The European Partnership for the Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

**EU:** European Union

**GA:** National Gender Agency in Bosnia and Herzegovina

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**GONGO:** Government Organised Non Governmental Organisation

**HIV/AIDS:** Human Immunodeficiency virus Infection/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

**ICC:** International Criminal Court

**ICGLR:** International Conference on the Great Lakes Region

**ICTY:** International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia

**IDP:** Internally Displaced Person

**IMF:** International Monetary Fund

**IT:** Information Technology

**LBGTQ:** Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer

**LURD:** Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy

**MARWOPNET:** Mano River Women's Peace Network

**MODEL:** Movement for Democracy in Liberia

**MONUC:** United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

**MONUSCO:** United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

**NAP:** National Action Plan

**NGO:** Non Governmental Organisation

**NKR:** The Nagorno Karabakh Republic

**OHCHR:** Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

**OHR:** Office of the High Representative (in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

**OSCE:** Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**OWFI:** Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq

**PRSP:** Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

**SGBV:** Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

**SSR:** Security Sector Reform

**STAREC:** Programme de stabilisation et de reconstruction des zones sortant des conflits armés

**TRC:** Truth and Reconciliation Commission

**UN:** United Nations

**UNAIDS:** Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

**UNAMI:** United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

**UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund

**UNICEF:** United Nations Children's Fund

**UNMIL:** United Nations Mission in Liberia

**UNSCR:** United Nations Security Council Resolution

**US:** United States

**USAID:** United States Agency for International Development

**WIPNET:** Women in Peacebuilding Network

**WHO:** World Health Organization

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- <sup>1</sup> Hereinafter UNSCR 1325.
- <sup>2</sup> Hereinafter Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- <sup>3</sup> Hereinafter the DRC/DR Congo.
- <sup>4</sup> The analytical tool Power Cube is presented on page 14.
- <sup>5</sup> Harbom and Wallensteen (2010). See also the World Bank 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> Kaldor (2007), p. 6ff. See also the World Bank 2011.
- <sup>7</sup> UN (1992).
- <sup>8</sup> Bell and O'Rourke (2010), p. 947.
- <sup>9</sup> Richmond (2010). Väyrynen (2010), p. 141.
- <sup>10</sup> World Health Organisation (WHO) 2012. <http://www.who.int/gender/whatisgender/en/>
- <sup>11</sup> Sorensen cited in Coulter (2009), p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Cockburn (2004), p. 28.
- <sup>13</sup> Yuval-Davis (2004), p. 171.
- <sup>14</sup> Giles and Hyndman (2004), p. 310.
- <sup>15</sup> End impunity for UN Peacekeepers Who Rape and Abuse, Reuters Alert net, (2011) <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/04/14/idINIndia-56324520110414>
- <sup>16</sup> In his seminal article in 1969, peace researcher Johan Galtung defined structural violence as a social structure or institution that prevents people from meeting basic needs (Galtung, 1969).
- <sup>17</sup> UNIFEM defines the term “feminisation of poverty” as “the burden of poverty borne by women, especially in developing countries” (Chen et al, ((2005)). The gender research team BRIDGE at the Institute of Development Studies outlines three meanings of the sometimes controversial term: “that women have a higher incidence of poverty than men; that their poverty is more severe than that of men; that there is a trend to greater poverty among women, particularly associated with rising rates of female-headed households”. The researchers argue that it is important to understand women’s poverty not only as a reflection of income, and that a disaggregation of data concerning female-headed households for example is needed. Education, decision-making power and domestic violence are other aspects that need to be taken into consideration in order to fully understand the feminisation of poverty. BRIDGE concludes: “There is evidence to demonstrate that because of the weaker and conditional basis of their entitlements, women are generally more vulnerable to poverty and, once poor, have fewer options in terms of escape. Gender discrimination in the household and the market can result in the unequal distribution of resources, leading to women experiencing a greater severity of poverty than men” BRIDGE (2001), p. 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Levels of violence against women tend to increase before and after war. Increased violence against women is an indicator that conflict is likely – thus can be used as an early warning system. Increased sexual violence is one of the indicators used by the UN in its monitoring concerned with genocide prevention (Anderlini, ((2007)) p. 30).
- <sup>19</sup> Väyrynen (2010).
- <sup>20</sup> Yuval-Davis (2004), p. 170.
- <sup>21</sup> UNSCR 1820, which followed 1325, put further focus on sexual and gender-based violence. UNSCR 1960 concerns efforts to end impunity among perpetrators. UNSCR 1888 and 1889 deepen and strengthen calls for women’s participation in peace and reconstruction processes.
- <sup>22</sup> Eriksson Baaz and Stern (2010), p. 12f.
- <sup>23</sup> Giles and Hyndman (2004), p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Bell and O'Rourke (2010), p. 978.
- <sup>25</sup> Cornwall (2003), p. 1330.
- <sup>26</sup> Korac (2004), p. 270f.
- <sup>27</sup> A study by peace and conflict researcher Mary Caprioli has shown that gender equality also contributes to peace within states (Caprioli 2000). Another study based on an analysis of the Uppsala Conflict Data Project shows that there are robust associations between higher levels of gender equality and lower levels of intrastate armed conflict. More equal societies are associated with lower levels of intrastate armed conflict. (Melander 2005). It has also been reported that more women in government means less corruption (the World Bank cited in Anderlini, ((2007)) p. 131).
- <sup>28</sup> Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman.
- <sup>29</sup> Bachelet (2011).
- <sup>30</sup> Bell and O'Rourke's analysis of peace accords shows that only 16 percent make any reference to women at all. Before UNSCR 1325, it was 11 percent. After the resolution, this figure increased to 27 percent, which is a welcome development, however there is still a long way to go before such references are systematically included. Furthermore, the references are often insubstantial and scattered (Bell and O'Rourke ((2010)).
- <sup>31</sup> UNIFEM (August 2010).
- <sup>32</sup> UNSCR 1970, UNSCR 1973.
- <sup>33</sup> The principle states that if a government cannot or is not willing to protect its own population, the international community must act in protection of the civil population, with force if needed, and the principle contains clear wordings on the gendered nature of war and peace (International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, <http://responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/component/content/article/35-r2pcs-topics/3177-women>).
- <sup>34</sup> Anderlini (2007), p. 5.
- <sup>35</sup> Peacemakers (2012). <http://www.peacemakers.org/naps>
- <sup>36</sup> Available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms\\_Data/docs/hr/news144.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/hr/news144.pdf)
- <sup>37</sup> European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) <http://www.eplo.org/implementation-of-unscr-1325-in-europe>
- <sup>38</sup> Wanis-St. John and Kew (2008), p.13.
- <sup>39</sup> Chandhoke (2010), p.182.
- <sup>40</sup> The term “Track II” was coined by Joseph Montville, who separated traditional diplomatic activities (Track I =

diplomacy) from unofficial, informal interaction between members of advisory boards and nations (Chigas, 2003). One example of successful participation by women in Track II is from Uganda, where women's advocacy resulted in the fact that UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1612 (about children and armed conflicts), were recognised and included in the ceasefire agreement. Kvinna till Kvinna (2011).

<sup>41</sup> Bell and O'Rourke (2010), p. 974.

<sup>42</sup> Hall (2002), p. 32. Dahl 2005 (1961).

<sup>43</sup> Hall (2002), p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> Foucault (1993 and 2000).

<sup>45</sup> Lukes (2005), p. 108ff.

<sup>46</sup> Mosedale (2005), p. 250.

<sup>47</sup> Mosedale (2005), p. 251.

<sup>48</sup> Shaheed cited in Kottegoda (2010), p.79.

<sup>49</sup> Read more about the Power Cube at [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net), a resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change. The website contains practical and conceptual materials and is warmly recommended for a more comprehensive overview and analysis of power than this report can encompass. See also Gaventa (2006) for a discussion on the use of the Power Cube.

<sup>50</sup> Gaventa (2006), p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Väyrynen (2010), p. 145.

<sup>52</sup> [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net) p. 11

<sup>53</sup> [www.powercube.net](http://www.powercube.net) p. 12

<sup>54</sup> It has rightly been argued that in order to understand gendered dynamics, we need to look at how they affect both men and women. As the next step after this report, it would be very worthwhile to also interview men who are involved in gender-equal peacebuilding and learn from their experiences of gender inequality in peace processes.

<sup>55</sup> Bryman (2008), p. 476.

<sup>56</sup> Bryman (2008), p. 482.

<sup>57</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

<sup>58</sup> According to personal interviews with women activists working with dialogue programmes, November and December 2011.

<sup>59</sup> The term 'frozen' is used to describe the current state of the conflict with "no real war – no real peace", although approximately 20-30 soldiers die every year from casualties at or near the line of contact (the ceasefire line).

<sup>60</sup> "For more than a decade the ceasefire line, or line of contact (LOC), separating Azerbaijan and de facto Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh, has been observed by all parties without external peacekeepers or a permanent monitoring force. This self-regulating aspect of the ceasefire line is unique to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the absence of a permanently deployed force, OSCE monitors the LOC through regular visits". (Antonenko ((2005)), p. 42).

<sup>61</sup> More than one million people were displaced during the

war. The current numbers of refugees and/or IDPs are disputed.

<sup>62</sup> Ayunts (2011) p. 25.

<sup>63</sup> The Minsk Group spearheads the OSCE's efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in and around Nagorno-Karabakh involving Armenia and Azerbaijan. They visit the region regularly to conduct high-level talks with the parties to the conflict. They also hold meetings with the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and the other members of the Minsk Group to brief them on the process. Since 1994, the process is run by a co-chairmanship consisting of Co-Chairs from France, the Russian Federation and the United States. The permanent members of the Minsk Group include the following participating states: Belarus, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Finland and Turkey as well as Armenia and Azerbaijan and, on a rotating basis, the OSCE Troika. OSCE Overview <http://www.osce.org/mg/66926>

<sup>64</sup> Personal interview, Yerevan, 25 November 2011.

<sup>65</sup> Telephone interview, 5 December 2011.

<sup>66</sup> "EU officials have recently gone on record saying that they are not interested in such a move, but that the EU is now seeking a role in the peace process mainly by supporting confidence-building measures between the sides. In 2010, the EU started cautiously supporting a European civil society programme (The European Partnership for the Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, EPNK) aimed at building dialogue and contact between the conflicting parties." (Sammut, ((2011)), p. 5).

<sup>67</sup> Personal interview, Yerevan November 24, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Telephone interview, December 5, 2011.

<sup>69</sup> Zardush, Alzida in Telmansoy (2011).

<sup>70</sup> Wikigender. [www.wikigender.org](http://www.wikigender.org)

<sup>71</sup> Women's Campaign International. [www.womenscampaign-international.org](http://www.womenscampaign-international.org)

<sup>72</sup> In the parliamentary elections 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Quota Project: Global Database of Quota for Women.

<sup>74</sup> Hausman, Tyson and Zahidi (2011), p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> The National Democratic Institute 2011. [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

<sup>76</sup> The election of parliamentarians is run in two ways: by party list or by single members list, and the parliament is comprised of 56 single member district representatives and 75 members of party lists. In the last parliamentary elections (2007), only five women competed for single member seats and none were elected. The National Democratic Institute 2011. [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

<sup>77</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development.

<sup>78</sup> Amnesty International, November, 13, 2008. [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

<sup>79</sup> International Rescue Committee, Azerbaijani Program (2004), p.11.

<sup>80</sup> Novruzova and Sindelar (2012). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 2011.

- <sup>81</sup> Academics describe marriage by abduction as the practice whereby a man takes a woman by force, rapes her and then attempts to use the stigma of rape and, should she become pregnant, the shame of pregnancy to secure the marriage. <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/topic,463af2212,469f2e452,45f147f811,0,,,html>
- <sup>82</sup> Amnesty International <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/countries/europe/azerbaijan>
- <sup>83</sup> Participants spoke of a divided environment with on the one hand NGOs run by people with no official records (who have created their own non-official posts), and on the other hand government initiated GONGOS with well-developed contacts with and protection and funding from official actors. (Governmentally Organised Non Governmental Organisations.)
- <sup>84</sup> Telephone interview, December 4, 2011.
- <sup>85</sup> International Alert.
- <sup>86</sup> Also people from the disputed area Nagorno-Karabakh participated in the meeting.
- <sup>87</sup> The stuck position in the peace negotiations (with total focus on borders and the status of entities) was confirmed in interviews with international stakeholders.
- <sup>88</sup> (Of course) not only women's organizations do important work to bridge the gap between the formal peace process and the society at large. One example is The Independent Civil Minsk Process that was initiated in 2009 by IKV Pax Christi and the local Helsinki Citizen's Assemblies. The aim of this parallel process is to increase the civil society's involvement in the peace process by providing information and stimulating public debate. (IKV Pax Christi).
- <sup>89</sup> The initiative brings together women-peacemakers from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia aiming to coordinate their actions and policies to become important actors in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction. Participants in the initiative include women refugees, IDPs from rural communities and other women activists.
- <sup>90</sup> According to data from the UNDP, women earn less than men in all countries of the former Soviet Union. In some countries, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, women on average earn approximately 50 to 60 percent of men's average wages. UNDP (2012).
- <sup>91</sup> In Azerbaijan, a woman was appointed head of the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs.
- <sup>92</sup> Between the years 1990-1996.
- <sup>93</sup> El-Bushra, Judy, and Ibrahim M.G. Sahl (2005), p. 98.
- <sup>94</sup> For example, in her research Harvard Business School Professor Rosabeth Moss Kanter has showed that when women make up a minority in leadership positions in corporate business, traditional gendered hierarchical structures tend to remain. (Kanter in Wahl et al, ((2011)) pp. 76-81).
- <sup>95</sup> According to personal interviews in November and December 2012.
- <sup>96</sup> The participants in the focus group conducted in Yerevan (Armenia) claimed to have very limited (or no) communication with the local EU delegation.
- <sup>97</sup> "Personally I was very sceptical in the beginning. I did not think it would work. But I was wrong. Now I can see that there is a change in people. It was a real discovery for me when I saw that they can cooperate. Random women came together and could speak, laugh and talk about very sensitive issues. From the beginning they were literally yelling, why are we here, we do not want to be here, etc. But the last meeting was so different, now they said that we were so stupid in the beginning, now we can see that we have the same problems." Personal interview, Yerevan, 24 November 2011.
- <sup>98</sup> The concept of 'the red apple' come from the tradition of showing a bed sheet stained with blood from a bride on her wedding night to the relatives of the groom to demonstrate that the bride was a virgin. If the relatives of the groom are satisfied, they send back a bowl of red apples to the bride's parents' house.
- <sup>99</sup> Conciliation Resources (2012), p. 3.
- <sup>100</sup> Personal interviews in Armenia and Azerbaijan November and December 2011.
- <sup>101</sup> The presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia.
- <sup>102</sup> Personal interviews in Armenia and Azerbaijan November and December 2011.
- <sup>103</sup> France, Russia and the US.
- <sup>104</sup> An annual survey of more than 60,000 households in more than 60 countries has found that women are less likely than men to pay bribes. Nawaz (2010).
- <sup>105</sup> European Union. [www.eeas.europa.eu](http://www.eeas.europa.eu)
- <sup>106</sup> For more information on the genocide in Rwanda, and the following mass exodus of Hutus to the DRC, see World Without Genocide, for example. <http://worldwithoutgenocide.org/current-conflicts/democratic-republic-of-the-congo>
- <sup>107</sup> South African Institute of International Affairs (2004) p. 21.
- <sup>108</sup> Lack of statistics, in combination with the stigma surrounding rape, makes any estimation precarious. Figures from the Ministry of Gender estimate that over one million rapes have occurred since the onset of war. Sida (2009) p. 42f.
- <sup>109</sup> International Alert (2005), p. 44.
- <sup>110</sup> Peace Women (2010). <http://www.peacewomen.org/>
- <sup>111</sup> Personal interview, Bukavu, January 17, 2012.
- <sup>112</sup> Instead of a quota, the DRC legislation states that women have a right to a significant representation within national, provincial and local institutions. This wording has been criticised by women's organisations as being too vague.
- <sup>113</sup> CEDAW Alternative Report (2004), p. 9.
- <sup>114</sup> European Network for Central Africa, March 2012.
- <sup>115</sup> Personal interviews, Bukavu, January 17 and Kinshasa, January 21, 2012.
- <sup>116</sup> There are several reports about staff within the UN peace-keeping mission suspected of rape in the DRC. See Sexual

Violence in conflict, April 2011, for instance.

<sup>117</sup> Personal interview, Bukavu, January 19, 2012.

<sup>118</sup> Sida (2009), p. 46.

<sup>119</sup> STAREC – Programme de stabilisation et de reconstruction des zones sortant des conflits armés – is a governmental initiative, supported by the international community, for the stabilization of the eastern DRC. Its mandate is to consolidate peace, restore the authority of the state, to help displaced persons to return home and to relaunch local community economies.

<sup>120</sup> World Bank <http://www.worldbank.org/>

<sup>121</sup> Sida (2009), p. 51.

<sup>122</sup> USAID (September 2010).

<sup>123</sup> A government-initiated peace programme for the eastern DRC.

<sup>124</sup> Personal interview, Kinshasa, January 21, 2012.

<sup>125</sup> ICGLR is an inter-governmental organisation comprising 11 countries in the Great Lakes area. The aim of the organization, founded in 2000, is to bring peace and stability to the entire region.

<sup>126</sup> Personal interview, Kinshasa, January 21, 2012.

<sup>127</sup> Telephone interview, Geneva, May 16, 2012.

<sup>128</sup> Once a week, on markets days, women were accompanied to and from the market by peacekeepers in order to maintain their safety. This initiative came to a halt around the election period in November 2011, when the troops were needed elsewhere.

<sup>129</sup> Peace Women (2010), p. 1.

<sup>130</sup> OHCHR (August 2010), p. 320.

<sup>131</sup> More than 300 women and men were raped by armed men over four days in the summer 2010. See Amnesty (2010).

<sup>132</sup> Personal interview, Kinshasa January 24, 2012.

<sup>133</sup> Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu, treats victims of sexual violence and has become famous for its work during the conflict. The international media are flocking to the hospital.

<sup>134</sup> Personal interview, Kinshasa, January 23, 2012.

<sup>135</sup> Personal interview, Bukavu, January 19, 2012.

<sup>136</sup> International Criminal Court.

<sup>137</sup> Personal interview, Kinshasa, January 24, 2012.

<sup>138</sup> CEDAW Alternative Report (2004), p. 31.

<sup>139</sup> International Alert (November 2010).

<sup>140</sup> Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, (October 2010), p. 40.

<sup>141</sup> The so called oil-for-food programme ran from 1995 to 2003 and was devised by U.S President Bill Clinton in order to cushion the Iraqi civilians from the effects of the economic sanctions. Under the programme, Iraq was allowed to sell oil on the world market in exchange for food and medicines.

<sup>142</sup> Iraq Body Count [www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/number/211/](http://www.iraqbodycount.org/analysis/number/211/)

<sup>143</sup> Human Rights Watch (February 2011), p. 6. See also Kvinna till Kvinna, <http://kvinnaatillkvinna.se/situationen-idag-1>

<sup>144</sup> OWFI, (2010), p. 6.

<sup>145</sup> Human Rights Watch (2011), p. 11f.

<sup>146</sup> The Organisation of Women's Freedom in Iraq (OWFI) 2010. See also Human Rights Watch (2011), p. 11f.

<sup>147</sup> Cited in Human Rights Watch (2011), p. 21f.

<sup>148</sup> Cited in Human Rights Watch (2011), p. 10.

<sup>149</sup> Enloe (2010), p. 101.

<sup>150</sup> Pratt (2011).

<sup>151</sup> Global Security <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/igc.htm>

<sup>152</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna <http://kvinnaatillkvinna.se/situationen-idag-1>

<sup>153</sup> Enloe (2010), p. 101.

<sup>154</sup> UNIFEM (2007), p. 2.

<sup>155</sup> Ahmed (2010).

<sup>156</sup> Law No. 8: the Law Against Domestic Violence in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It was adopted in 2011.

<sup>157</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna <http://kvinnaatillkvinna.se/analys-inforvalet-2010>

<sup>158</sup> Human Rights Watch (2011), p. 6ff.

<sup>159</sup> Personal interviews January 2012.

<sup>160</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna <http://kvinnaatillkvinna.se/situationen-idag-1>

<sup>161</sup> Foreign Policy, (April 27, 2011).

<sup>162</sup> UNICEF [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq\\_statistics.html#0](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html#0)

<sup>163</sup> Personal interview, Skype, May 12, 2012.

<sup>164</sup> Personal interviews, Stockholm 14 December 2012, telephone 12 February 2012.

<sup>165</sup> Personal interview, Erbil, January 17, 2012.

<sup>166</sup> Enloe (2010), p. 121.

<sup>167</sup> UNMIL <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmil/background.shtml>

<sup>168</sup> European Union [http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article\\_7000\\_en.htm](http://www.europa-eu-un.org/articles/en/article_7000_en.htm)

<sup>169</sup> Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group was a West African multilateral armed force, established in 1990 to intervene in Liberia.

<sup>170</sup> Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy.

<sup>171</sup> Movement for Democracy in Liberia.

<sup>172</sup> More information about sexual violence for instance



is to be found in Human Security in the Mano River Union, International Alert, May 2010 and Sexual violence against women and girls in war and its aftermath, UNFPA, June, 2006. Regarding child soldiers in Liberia, see Child soldiers Global Report, 2008 for instance.

<sup>173</sup> The Economic Community of West African States was founded in 1975. It consists of 15 West African states and its mission is to promote economic integration in the region.

<sup>174</sup> According to police statistics, rape, especially of girls between 10 and 14 years of age, is the most reported crime in Liberia (UNICEF 2008).

<sup>175</sup> International Center for Transitional Justice (2008).

<sup>176</sup> There are many different estimates on how many women were actually raped during the civil war in Liberia, ranging from 9 percent to 75-80 percent. For a more extensive description on the difficulties of measuring the level of sexual violence in wartime, see Bulletin of the World Health Organization, (2011) 89:924-925.

<sup>177</sup> For a more detailed account of the atrocities committed against women during the conflict, see Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2009 for instance. Another very strong testimony can be seen in the film "Pray the Devil back to hell" (2008).

<sup>178</sup> As with sexual violence, there are no reliable statistics on the occurrence of domestic violence. However, some reports show that the incidence has increased after the war. See for example Association of female lawyers in Liberia (Afell) 2011 and International Rescue Committee 2012.

<sup>179</sup> Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

<sup>180</sup> Security Sector Reform.

<sup>181</sup> Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace was formed as a response to the brutality of the war and gathered thousands of women from all segments of society who came together at the airfield in Monrovia to sing and pray for peace. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Leymah Gbowee was one of the leaders.

<sup>182</sup> The United Nations Mission in Liberia was established in September 2003 to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process. The Mission was also mandated to assist with preparations for the general elections in 2005.

<sup>183</sup> Personal interview, Monrovia, December 7, 2011.

<sup>184</sup> United States Institute of Peace (May 2007).

<sup>185</sup> CEDAW Alternative Report (2008).

<sup>186</sup> The general elections held on 8 October 2011 concerned the first round of Presidency, as well as all seats in the House of Representatives and half of the seats in the Senate. The National Elections Commission (NEC) oversaw the election. Previous to the election the Female Legislative Caucus had worked with the introduction of the Gender Equity Bill ("The Fairness Bill"). The draft means that 30% of all political posts and political parties shall be represented by women, but the bill has not gained support by the Senate. Instead the national Election Committee (NEC) made a deal with the political parties that 30% of their candidates should be made

up by women in time for the election. This did not turn out to be the case, and among more than 900 candidates only 105 were women (the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation).

<sup>187</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Report, Volume 3.

<sup>188</sup> Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender and Queer.

<sup>189</sup> National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (2004).

<sup>190</sup> CEDAW Alternative Report (2008).

<sup>191</sup> Millennium Development Goals (2010 Report).

<sup>192</sup> Millennium Development Goals (2010 Report).

<sup>193</sup> UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2006), p. 12.

<sup>194</sup> International Crisis Group (2006), p. 15.

<sup>195</sup> The day before the presidential runoff, the main opposition leader Winston Tubman urged his supporters to boycott the poll, claiming that the first round, won by the incumbent Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, had not been free and fair. As his supporters demonstrated, a clash with the police left at least two people dead. In order to stem further violence the women gathered at the airfield and called for a peaceful election.

<sup>196</sup> When the UNMIL-led DDR process commenced in December 2003, thousands of armed ex-combatants threatened to resort to violence, as they were disappointed with not receiving full payment at once. Centre for International Cooperation and Security, University of Bradford 2008, p. 8.

<sup>197</sup> In 2008, Côte D'Ivoire also joined the regional network. All four countries have suffered from tensions or armed conflict during the last decades.

<sup>198</sup> Under the leadership of Women in Peacebuilding (Wipnet) and one of the three recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, Leymah Gbowee.

<sup>199</sup> The final report of the TRC included a list of 49 names of people who should not be allowed to hold public office due to their involvement in the civil war. Among these names was Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

<sup>200</sup> There are 16 ethnic groups in Liberia of which Krahn and Kru are two.

<sup>201</sup> International Development Law Organization (2010), p. 15.

<sup>202</sup> US Department of State (2010), p. 17.

<sup>203</sup> Personal interview, Monrovia, December 1, 2012.

<sup>204</sup> Personal interview, Monrovia, December 7, 2012.

<sup>205</sup> In such cases, the accused is forced to swallow a poisonous brew or to endure other forms of torture to see if he or she survives and thus is deemed innocent. In Liberia, the poison most often used is called sassywood, made from the bark of a tree.

<sup>206</sup> The company was in charge of reforming the Armed Forces of Liberia as well as the Special Security Service, whereas the UNMIL were in charge of reforms within the Liberia National Police.

<sup>207</sup> Post-conflict Peacebuilding in Liberia, Center for International Peace Operations/Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, (2007) p. 110.

<sup>208</sup> Meintjes et. al. (2001), p. 8

<sup>209</sup> Pillay in Meintjes et al (2001), p. 44

<sup>210</sup> Research and Documentation Centre, [www.idc.org.ba](http://www.idc.org.ba)

<sup>211</sup> Saferworld (2010), p. 5f.

<sup>212</sup> In the 1991 pre-war census, 44 percent defined themselves as Muslims (today Bosniaks), 32 percent Serb, 17 percent Croat and 6 percent defined themselves as Yugoslav (a term available to those not wanting to state ethnic identity) (Yugoslav Survey 1, 1992, presented in Lampe 2000, 337).

<sup>213</sup> International Crisis Group (2009). See also Chandler (2000), p. 67.

<sup>214</sup> Dayton Peace Agreement, Annex IV, Article 1, 14 Dec 1995.

<sup>215</sup> UNIFEM August (2010).

<sup>216</sup> Personal interview, Sarajevo November 2012.

<sup>217</sup> Office of the High Representative <http://www.ohr.int/ohr-info/hrs-dhrs/>

<sup>218</sup> Söderberg, Jacobson, Agneta, (2003), p. 25.

<sup>219</sup> Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (2010) p. 31. See also European Commission (2010).

<sup>220</sup> Björkdahl (2012), see also UNDP (2007), p 10.

<sup>221</sup> Equal Power – Lasting Peace <http://www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org/five-conflicts/bosnia-hercegovina/>

<sup>222</sup> Thomasson (2006), p. 14ff.

<sup>223</sup> Saferworld (2010), p. 11.

<sup>224</sup> Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (2010), p. 42.

<sup>225</sup> Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (2010) p. 49. See also European Commission (2010), p. 18.

<sup>226</sup> European Commission (2010), p. 18.

<sup>227</sup> UNDP <http://www.undp.ba/index.aspx?PID=25&RID=26>

<sup>228</sup> Black (2001), p. 180.

<sup>229</sup> UNDP (2007), pp. 10 and 31.

<sup>230</sup> Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (2010), p. 45.

<sup>231</sup> Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (2010), p. 33.

<sup>232</sup> Personal interview, Sarajevo, November 7, 2011.

<sup>233</sup> The Butmir initiative collapsed in Dec 2009. Unrealistic time plan and a “take-it-or-leave-it approach” by internationals with little credibility are pointed out as blatant flaws of the process. Sebastián (March 2011).

<sup>234</sup> Helsinki Citizens Assembly Banja Luka and United Women Banja Luka sent the Letter of Protest on 27 Oct 2009.

It was addressed to Butmir talk initiators Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt, US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and High Representative to BiH Valentin Inzko. Signed by Lidija Zivanovic, Executive Director, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka and Nada Golubovic Executive Director, United Women Banja Luka.

<sup>235</sup> Telephone interview, January 19, 2012.

<sup>236</sup> Jenichen (2009), p. 101f.

<sup>237</sup> Barry and Nainar (2008), p. 18.

<sup>238</sup> Björkdahl (2012).

<sup>239</sup> Helms (2007), p. 236.

**The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation** supports women during times of war and conflict to increase women's power and influence in society. We collaborate with over 130 organisations that empower women to participate in working for sustainable peace and rebuilding.

In wars and conflicts, violence against women and girls is used as a method of warfare. Women are subjected to mass rape, are mutilated and killed. Women are locked in their homes and girls are not allowed to attend school. Women's voices are silenced if they express what they think and feel.

But history shows that women are important actors in the struggle for peace. The world witnessed this in the Balkans, in Liberia and in Northern Ireland. Yet women are seldom allowed to play a part in deciding how to arrive at peace and democracy. This is why The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation exists. Our partner organisations educate people in women's human rights, they work with women's health issues and combat violence against women. They create meeting places for women, where it is otherwise difficult

to meet. They wield political influence and create dialogue across the borders of conflict.

Kvinna till Kvinna is a Swedish Foundation which supports women's organisations in Central and West Africa, the Middle East, South Caucasus and the Western Balkans.

The role of The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is to provide financial support and mediate contacts between organisations, in co-operation with our partner organisations. Our mission is to participate in empowering women's movements in regions of conflict.

We influence development assistance and security policies by contributing to increased awareness of the situation of women in conflicts and the importance of women's representation in peace processes. We spread information about women in conflicts to the general public, government bodies and organisations in Sweden, and at the EU and UN levels.

We support studies and research relating to women's conditions in conflicts and the positive effects of women's participation in peace initiatives.

“We have to achieve gender equality in society. We will then acquire power, which will give us the means to achieve sustainable peace.” Quote from a Bosnian woman peace activist.

How are transitions from war to peace made? Who has the power to build peace? Who decides what the peace should entail?

*Equal Power – Lasting Peace* explores obstacles to women’s participation in peace and democracy processes in regions affected by armed conflict. *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* addresses the gaps between words and practice in peace building by gathering experiences and knowledge

from 79 women peace builders working in five different conflict contexts: Bosnia and Herzegovina, DR Congo, Iraq, Liberia and Armenia/Azerbaijan/Nagorno-Karabakh. They have a wealth of concrete experience of how exclusion works in practice and what windows of opportunity may open.

As the quote above from a Bosnian woman peace activist illustrates, there are intimate connections between gender, power and peace. The aim of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* is to explore these inter-connections and in addition, to contribute to a better understanding of the power gaps that prevent women’s participation in peace processes.



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