

Gender Symposia During Donor Conferences: A Model to Guarantee Women Leaders A Voice in Setting Priorities for Reconstruction

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Donor conferences are critical for focusing global attention on a country's post-conflict priorities. Key decision makers representing the post-conflict country as well as bilateral and multilateral donors from around the world gather to define a path to peace and prosperity for a war-torn society. Sector experts present long-term needs assessments for analysis and discussion. Aid agencies announce pledges of financial and technical assistance.

Women are essential partners in rebuilding after war. Often the majority of the post-conflict population, women regularly maintain their communities through years of violence. They possess critical knowledge of local priorities and needs. Frequently, they are better trusted by conflict survivors and less tainted by the conflict than men. Along with their dependent children, women are also usually the majority of the displaced and most vulnerable.

Despite women's central importance to reconstruction, they are regularly marginalized by the donor assistance pledging process. Women and other civil society leaders are only sporadically consulted in determining reconstruction priorities and needs. Male government representatives dominate donor conference delegations.

A gender symposium held in conjunction with an international donor conference can help provide women and civil society with a voice in reconstruction. Such a parallel conference enables women from the aid-receiving country to highlight priorities to donors. It provides a venue for policymakers from around the world to consult with women representing diverse constituencies. It also offers female leaders from the conflict zone the opportunity to build relationships with key decision makers.

In conjunction with recent donor conferences for Liberia and Sudan, The Institute for Inclusive Security organized gender symposia that focused attention on female leaders and on women's needs and priorities in reconstruction.

The Liberia Experience

In February 2007, Inclusive Security partnered with The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Bank, and the Liberian Ministry of Gender and Development to host 18 women leaders from government and civil society for a one-day symposium in Washington, DC on gender and development. The event was held in conjunction with the Liberia Partners' Forum, which brought together the Government of Liberia, international donors, and development agencies to discuss debt forgiveness, establish priorities for reconstruction, and pledge financial assistance.

Before the symposium, Inclusive Security led a two-day preparatory conference to develop formal, written input to the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, the document used by donors to determine priorities for development. Participants made recommendations for improving each of the four "pillars" identified in the iPRS (enhancing national security; revitalizing the national economy; strengthen-



Julia Duncan Cassell delivered remarks at the World Bank on behalf of the Liberian delegation. During two days of consultations, the delegation developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for improving the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy developed by the government of Liberia.

ing governance and rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services). Additionally, they highlighted:

1. The need to balance efforts to ensure security with programs that drive economic development and improve health and education, which rebuild communities and demonstrate local progress.
2. That women's inclusion isn't only about guaranteeing women's representation. Rather, it is about recognizing the unique leadership women offer and training them to participate effectively in governance at all levels.
3. That many "women's issues," such as the need for an effective justice system and a means to combat HIV/AIDS, are also national priorities.
4. The importance of collaboration between the government and civil society.

Symposium participants were granted observer status in the Partners' Forum. Additionally, Julia Duncan-Cassell, superintendent of Grand Bassa County, delivered a statement to the Partners' Forum plenary on behalf of fellow symposium attendees.

The gender symposium and enhanced women's participation in the Partners' Forum increased the focus on engaging women and addressing their needs in subsequent planning. Several country delegations commented on Cassell's remarks and the importance of putting a human face on the reconstruction process. Subsequently, the World Bank Gender and Development Unit committed additional human and financial resources to ensure attention to gender in the development of the Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy. Liberian government officials and international donor community representatives in Monrovia established a working group to track consideration of gender throughout all pillars of the PRS.

The Sudan Experience

Norway hosted the May 2008 Oslo Donor Consortium to review progress on the implementation of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and to generate donor pledges to support further reconstruction and development in Sudan. Inclusive Security worked with the Norwegian Government and UNIFEM to hold a meeting of Sudanese women alongside the Consortium. Twelve women traveled from Sudan to Norway for a three-day conference that brought together major donors and senior officials from the World Bank, the UN, and the Government of Sudan. They were joined by women from the Sudanese diaspora living in Europe.

Prior to traveling to Norway, participants gathered their colleagues in civil society to review progress toward addressing women's needs in peace building and reconstruction. Upon arrival, they consolidated their work and drafted a set of priorities for increasing women's inclusion in all aspects of Sudan's development. They recommended four key strategies:

1. Fast-track efforts to address areas in which women's most serious human development deficits are concentrated;
2. Prioritize women's leadership;
3. Enhance cooperation between government and women's civil society organizations; and
4. Increase the accountability of governments and donors to women.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro, the most senior UN official in attendance, met with delegates at the end of their two-day Preparatory Conference. She called their contributions critical to progress in Sudan and highlighted their priorities in the Consortium's opening address.

As the Consortium commenced, the Sudanese women circulated their written priorities widely, leaving copies of the two-page document at materials tables, in common areas, and outside meeting rooms. Most importantly, they

presented their priorities directly at breaks, lunch, and evening receptions to senior leaders representing the donor nations, the Sudanese government, the UN, and the World Bank.

Inclusive Security, UNIFEM, the Norwegian government, and, most importantly, the women delegates themselves advocated extensively for admission to the formal Consortium meetings and for speaking opportunities. Only on the last day did organizers grant them access and an opportunity to address the plenary. Two participants conveyed the group's efforts through formal statements.

Following the conference, participants worked to sustain momentum built in Oslo. Aiming to broaden support and advocacy, they translated their priorities into Arabic and distributed them to colleagues throughout Sudan. They strategized to develop indicators and timelines for monitoring the implementation of recommendations and to sustain strong coordination among women from all parts of the country.

Donor discourse changed dramatically in response to the women's actions. Only nine donors had even mentioned women or gender in their opening remarks. Three days later, during the closing session while pledging funds for Sudanese reconstruction, 20 of 22 donor delegations mentioned the need to fund women's leadership and priorities. Norway set aside additional funds to address women's needs in southern Sudan. Norwegian State Secretary Raymond Johansen, as well as representatives of the Netherlands and Canada, explicitly acknowledged the important work of the women participants and called for their inclusion in the full session the next time the Consortium met.



The delegation of Sudanese women met with Joanne Sandler, Deputy Director-Program, UNIFEM; Asha-Rose Migiro, UN Deputy Secretary-General; and Erik Solheim, Norway's Minister for International Cooperation.

Replicating Successful Gender Symposia

Key to Success: Work early, assiduously, and consistently with organizers of donor conferences to give women access to the main conference, invitations to all associated receptions and dinners, and speaking slots to present their views and recommendations during relevant sections of the donor conference agenda.

→ **Recommendation:** Partner with local women's groups to advocate to local government authorities, international organization representatives, and donor country representatives for gender symposium participants to be given entry passes and speaking time to address all participants.

→ **Recommendation:** Focus particularly on cultivating support in the donor conference's host country and in the organization structuring the conference (often the World Bank, UN Development Programme, and/or the national government hosting the conference), as they control admission.

Key to Success: Reach out as broadly as possible to identify a diverse group of women leaders in government and civil society who can attend the donor conference and credibly and legitimately represent the views of women from the conflict area.

→ **Recommendation:** Solicit nominations from international and local groups that have experience working with women leaders; select individuals who are recommended by several sources and have a true constituency back home.

→ **Recommendation:** Make sure gender symposium participants hail from different parts of the country, represent various ethnic and religious groups, and lead within government or civil society.

→ **Recommendation:** Explore inviting representatives of the diaspora community living near the location of the donor conference; they can help enrich the discussion and increase the visible presence of women.

Key to Success: Plan for the gender symposium to begin one or two days before the donor conference.

→ **Recommendation:** Hold the symposium in the same location as the donor conference; a shared location will facilitate interaction with senior-level policymakers and delegates.

→ **Recommendation:** House gender symposium participants in the same hotel as donor conference participants; this will maximize the visibility of women and the time available for them to network with donor conference delegates.

→ **Recommendation:** Invite policymakers to address the gender symposium conference and meet with gender symposium participants; this can be done as part of the formal daily program, in the evening, or during breaks in programming.

Key to Success: Create an agenda for the gender symposium that enables participants to identify priorities for investment and attention.

→ **Recommendation:** Begin the gender symposium by allowing participants to analyze and reflect on documents prepared by the international donor community to serve as the foundation for providing post-conflict aid.

→ **Recommendation:** Help symposium participants identify gaps in the existing donor documents. Divide participants into small groups by interest and expertise to analyze different sections of documents (by area of need or proposed investment).

→ **Recommendation:** Following the analysis of donor documents, help participants select a limited set of priorities to emphasize to donors. It is optimal to focus on 10 to 15 key areas.

Key to Success: Help participants develop a written document that reflects group consensus regarding the conclusions and recommendations emerging from the gender symposium and highlighting women's priorities for reconstruction.

→ **Recommendation:** Work with participants to negotiate shared priorities to be presented in writing to donors.

→ **Recommendation:** Help participants develop a polished document that uses the language of the donor community.

→ **Recommendation:** Distribute the written summary of shared conclusions and recommendations widely at the donor conference.

Key to Success: In consultation with participants, select one to three people to speak to donor conference attendees to present the conclusions of the gender symposium.

→ **Recommendation:** Study the donor conference agenda to identify sessions at which it would be appropriate to present the gender symposium conclusions; speak with donor conference organizers to request an opportunity for gender symposium participants to deliver remarks.

→ **Recommendation:** Ensure that speakers reflect the diversity of the nation and participants in the symposium.

- **Recommendation:** Write concise remarks to be read (no longer than five minutes) and distributed in hard copy. The remarks should be derived from the longer documents but should not repeat the longer documents verbatim.
- **Recommendation:** Practice delivery of written remarks with speakers. Replace difficult-to-pronounce words.
- **Recommendation:** Show speakers the venue where they will address the donor conference beforehand so that they are familiar with the space.

Key to Success: Follow up after the gender symposium to disseminate gender symposium conclusions, recommendations, and written remarks.

- **Recommendation:** Advocate for attention to priorities identified at the gender symposium to policymakers within the post-conflict country as well as international policymakers charged with implementing the outcomes from the donor conference.
- **Recommendation:** Organize, or encourage women participants to schedule, a meeting to brief women back home on the conference, related conclusions, and next steps.
- **Recommendation:** Track donor fulfillment of promises and pledges related to women's inclusion and to addressing women's priorities and needs.