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The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Stabilization

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Summary and Recommendations

- It is widely recognized that women and young people are primary victims of conflict. During war, women are subjected to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS by fighting forces, and assume the caretaking role for children and the elderly. They are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, sexual slavery, disease, and forced recruitment into armed groups.
- Yet as the survivors of violent conflict, women also bear the burden of reconstruction. They return to destroyed communities and begin the process of rebuilding infrastructure; restoring and developing traditions, laws, and customs and repairing relationships.
- Despite rapid progress within the U.S. government to recognize the importance of women's inclusion in stabilization and reconstruction operations, no overarching strategy, mandate, or program exists to ensure implementation. Initiatives, funding, and projects remain ad hoc; research and best practices have not been consolidated; and much depends upon the individual knowledge, commitment, and insight of relevant staff at headquarters and in the field.
- The challenge of the Working Group on the Role of Women in Stabilization and Reconstruction Operations and the purpose of this report is to present a comprehensive list of recommendations to the U.S. government, as well as to highlight several critical action areas with the potential to significantly impact the protection and participation of women in postwar situations.
- An ongoing, at-the-ready capability must be institutionalized within the U.S. government to enhance and protect the role of women in stabilization and reconstruction operations. The steps taken prior to an intervention will make all the difference in the success of the mission. The U.S. government should undertake the following necessary actions to make this capability an integral part of the policy process:
 1. Provide specialized training on gender sensitivity to military and police forces and civilian staff in advance of deployment; training courses should be developed immediately and then specialized for a specific conflict as necessary.
 2. Identify, assemble, and disseminate the best practices to enhance the role of women in past stabilization and reconstruction operations so that these become fully integrated into future planning; lessons learned should form the foundation of a course within the standard curriculum of the Foreign Service Institute and other educational and training facilities of the U.S. government.
 3. Require all actors in a given stabilization and reconstruction operation to submit plans to ensure that women are a part of the reconstruction process; report regularly on the assembling of lists of women's organizations and women leaders; and evaluate the attendance of women leaders at all meetings, events, and conferences.
 4. Ensure women's participation and the adoption of a gender perspective in international interventions; ceasefires and peace negotiations; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); and security sector reform. For the survivors of violent conflict, women have not only the right, but the relevant information and knowledge to participate in the design and implementation of programs to re-establish security at regional, national, and international levels. The U.S. government should take the following specific steps:
 - Increase the recruitment of women as military observers, peacekeeping troops, and civilian police

- incorporate gender perspectives explicitly into the mandate of international missions; and ensure gender units are established within the mission and are well resourced.
- Protect women and girls under threat of physical violence by training the military and police to prevent and address gender-based violence, cooperating with local women's groups to provide safe havens for victims, and conducting public information campaigns. Condemn violations of their rights and call all parties to adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law.
 - In those conflicts where DDR is an important element in the stabilization and reconstruction mission, gender experts should be engaged to help design and implement DDR plans.
5. Support the adoption of a quota system to guarantee women's political participation in postwar transition decision-making positions following war, research shows that women are leading efforts to promote good governance by fighting corruption, demanding accountability, and maintaining transparency in activities at national and local levels. Quotas can have the single greatest effect on the constitutional process, the election of local and national legislative bodies, the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, and institution reform. To jump-start women's economic and political decision making, it is necessary for the international community--with the U.S. government in the lead--to impose specific formulas for participation of women and provide the necessary support mechanisms for women, and provide training to build women's capacity, allow them to play significant roles in defining the future of the country.
 6. Engage women in justice and reconciliation efforts following war. This area is of particular concern to women given widespread acts of sexual and gender-based violence committed in wartime. In addition to the need for justice, many women are key actors in conducting healing and reconciliation processes, noting their concern for their children's future as a strong motivating factor. The U.S. government should take the following specific steps:
 - Support women's equal representation in transitional justice processes at all levels: as designers, judges, commissioners, prosecutors, defense attorneys, investigators, witnesses, and observers. Draw on the expertise of women's groups to train international, national, and local staff who will implement transitional justice on gender issues, including rape and sexual assault.
 - After conducting a national review of existing laws, support legislative and policy reforms that guarantee gender, racial, religious, and ethnic equality. Support efforts to implement new laws addressing violence against women and providing them with equality in citizenship, in marriage and divorce, in property rights and inheritance, and in business ownership.
 7. Promote women's socioeconomic development in postwar transitions by including a requirement in contracts with implementing agencies that mandates the participation of women in reconstruction projects. In 2004 the U.S. Department of Defense made the award fee of contractors operating in Iraq conditional upon demonstration of action to include women participants in reconstruction projects. Contracts with implementing agencies can move the peace process forward by addressing historical inequalities.

Introduction

It is widely recognized that women and young people are primary victims of conflict. During war, women are displaced, subjected to sexual violence and HIV/AIDS by fighting forces, and assume the caretaking role for children and the elderly. They are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, sexual slavery, disease, and forced recruitment into armed groups.

Yet as the survivors of violent conflict, women also bear the burden of reconstruction. They return to destroyed communities and begin the process of rebuilding infrastructure; restoring and developing traditions, laws, and customs; and repairing relationships. In government and through civil society, women worldwide are contributing to all pillars of stabilization and reconstruction operations: security, governance, justice and reconciliation, and socioeconomic development. Indeed, their leadership in the transition period can serve as a window of opportunity to empower women, promote gender equality, improve women's position in society, and bring wider benefits to many elements of society. A growing body of research has shown that capitalizing on the activities of women peacebuilders not only advances women's rights, but leads to more effective peace and, ultimately, to a more sustainable peace.

Only recently has the international community begun to recognize these issues and support the efforts of women to build

and further development. In 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325, mandating the participation of women in peace processes—a landmark decision for protecting and supporting women in armed conflict. It calls upon all parties to take action in four areas: (1) to promote the participation of women in decision making and peace processes, (2) to integrate women's perspectives and training in peacekeeping, (3) to protect women in armed conflict, and (4) to mainstream gender issues in reporting systems and programs related to conflict and peacebuilding.

Since the adoption of Resolution 1325, awareness of the importance of including women in peace and reconstruction programs has grown enormously. Yet implementation of its mandate remains sporadic and ad hoc.

As the U.S. government becomes increasingly focused on traditional and new threats to security—ranging from armed conflict to terrorism to HIV/AIDS—the time is at hand to ensure that the role of women in stabilization and reconstruction is a central and integral component of policy, program design, and implementation.

To address the prevention and management of conflict more effectively, the U.S. government has begun to reorganize its conflict management efforts. The Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation (CMM) was established at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in recent years, and in 2004 the administration created the Office of Stabilization and Reconstruction at the Department of State. Both are currently reviewing and developing strategies and policies to prevent and address conflict. These offices have pledged to integrate women, peace, and security into their mandates. Representatives of these offices liaise frequently with the women's offices within their agencies and consult with relevant international and national-level nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to guide the process for implementation of their commitments.

At the policy level as well, the impact of war on women has been granted an unprecedented focus in recent years, in part as a consequence of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and Iraq. In January 2001, the Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001 was enacted by Congress, calling attention to the needs of the civilian population following the overthrow of the Taliban and mandating the provision of education and health care assistance for women and children.¹ In March 2004, a bipartisan group of members of Congress formed the Iraqi Women's Caucus to support women's access to education and training and encourage their participation in the political process and democratic transition. In March 2005, the focus of Congress shifted from specific conflicts to global concern, and the Women and Children in Crisis and Conflict Protection Act of 2005 was drafted and referred to relevant committees.²

The working group on the Role of Women in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations met with the following objectives:

- To illustrate the critical role of women in reconstruction and stabilization operations
- To provide examples of best practices in supporting women
- To identify the existing gaps in U.S. policy and practice
- To offer concrete recommendations to begin to fill the gaps and institutionalize the role of women in reconstruction and stabilization operations within the U.S. government

Structure of the Report

- Part I addresses lessons and recommendations for the critical task of institutionalizing the role of women in reconstruction and stabilization operations across the U.S. government.
- Part II addresses lessons and recommendations for priority tasks for the U.S. government to follow to enhance the role of women in its reconstruction and stabilization operations.
- Part III consists of a full matrix of action steps--generated by those within agencies across the U.S. government, in consultation with civil society representatives during the course of working group sessions.

A companion report, *Charting Progress: The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Stabilization Operations*, forms the basis from which these recommendations were drawn, detailing examples of women's contributions to the four pillars of post-conflict reconstruction as well as best practices of the international community, including the U.S. government, to support their efforts. This second report is forthcoming and will be available both in hard copy and for downloading from the United States Institute of Peace Web site.

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