Agency and Accountability: Promoting Women's Participation in Peacebuilding

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ABSTRACT

This contribution reviews international policy and practices to engage women in formal peace talks, post-conflict elections, and economic recovery, and finds a combination of factors contributing to poor performance in promoting women's agency. The fact that the privileged category for post-conflict decisions are those groups capable of acting as "spoilers" has tended to exclude women's groups from the categories considered most important to involve in decision making. Exacerbating this exclusion is the reluctance of international decision makers to encourage affirmative action measures in these contexts. This carries through to the minimal-state approach to economic recovery efforts. Provisions are needed to foster and invite women's voice in decision making, and build more active-state approaches to women's livelihood recovery.

KEYWORDS

Affirmative action, agency, community, development, discrimination, interdisciplinary

JEL Codes: D73, D74

INTRODUCTION

Efforts by women, individually and collectively, to exercise agency and to carve out spaces for autonomous action for all women, have faced a formidable array of obstacles – cultural, legal, social, and economic. These have varied between countries and over time. One category of cases – countries rebuilding after civil wars in which state authority suffered complete or near collapse – presents advocates for women's agency with a particularly complex configuration of challenges and opportunities.

Three challenges stand out. The first is the decimation of women's organizations that typically takes place during the particular variety of conflict considered here. When the collapse of women's advocacy coalitions

occurs at the same time that government institutions implode, gender-equality concerns rarely influence post-conflict planning by international bodies or national authorities.

The second challenge is the priority accorded to potential "spoilers" – groups capable of thwarting a peace settlement, particularly through violence, if they perceive the pact's design, or its implementation, as unsatisfactory. Accommodating potential spoilers – in some cases with promises of *de facto* immunity for war crimes against women – can be a crucial means of reaching agreement. Insufficient attention to gender issues by international mediators has led to a persistent neglect of measures that could facilitate women's sustained engagement in post-war reconstruction.

The third challenge relates to political environments in which a critical mass of influential actors collectively conclude that promoting women's capacities to act autonomously might actually exacerbate conflict. This occurs where proposed legal changes to advance women's rights are seen as undermining the traditional practices of one of the warring parties, whether ethnically or ideologically defined. The paradigmatic case for this syndrome has been Afghanistan since 2001, where international actors increasingly fear that efforts to engage women in peacemaking feed grievance and alienation from the state-in-the-making. This can foster ambivalence about supporting women's empowerment.

Helping to balance these daunting challenges are three characteristics of conflict and post-conflict settings that offer rare opportunities for advancing women's agency. The first is the outsize influence of (liberally inclined) external development and security actors, including international organizations, donor governments, and diplomatic "Groups of Friends." Such actors have over the past decade increasingly regarded post-war reconstruction as a chance to "build back better," by (among other things) not reproducing the political and social conditions that contributed to the war's outbreak, severity, or intractability. The widely accepted rubric of "transformative peacebuilding," building a more just, resilient social and political order, has been a useful heading under which gender-equality advocates have sought (and sometimes obtained) admission to post-conflict planning processes.

A second opportunity is offered by the public perception in many post-conflict countries that women were not implicated in either the political maneuvers that triggered the outbreak of armed conflict or the gamesmanship that may have prolonged it. A by-product of women's general exclusion from earlier political orders, such views lend moral authority to women's claims for representation in peace negotiations and post-conflict governance institutions.

Third, opportunities to advance women's autonomous public action can arise from the novel roles they often assume during conflict.

Participating in local dispute-resolution processes, or running a business amidst prolonged insecurity, imparts skills that can be put to later use. Initial forays into the public sphere can, moreover, stimulate a desire among women to take on even more unconventional challenges.

This contribution examines efforts by the United Nations and other international actors to navigate these constraints and opportunities as they seek to fulfill normative commitments to promoting women's participation in all aspects of peacebuilding, a broad concept that encompasses efforts to prevent the outbreak or recurrence of conflict (Rob Jenkins 2013). We focus on three elements of peacebuilding – conflict resolution, post-conflict elections, and economic recovery – arguing that increasing women's "participation" in peacebuilding requires international actors to provide specific resources and opportunities that make the exercise of genuine agency possible – as opposed to highly constrained forms of participation. It also requires the development of mechanisms to hold international actors accountable for the intensity with which they fulfill their commitments in this regard. Furthermore, we distinguish between participation by women's representatives in the pursuit of public interests and duties, and participation by ordinary women in the everyday process of rebuilding the economic, social, and political foundations of peace.

PRECONDITIONS FOR AGENCY: RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the idea of agency has been hotly debated in the social sciences for decades – particularly its relationship with structural constraints (Mike O'Donnell 2010) – our analysis draws on the definition supplied by Naila Kabeer (1999), who sees agency as "the ability to define one's goals and act upon them." Agency "can be exercised by individuals as well as by collectivities" (1999: 438). Kabeer's larger analytical purpose is to provide a more nuanced understanding of "empowerment," defined as the process of increasing people's ability to make choices. Agency, which corresponds to the process by which choice making takes place, is just one of empowerment's three dimensions, the others being "resources" and the achievements produced. Kabeer readily concedes that outcomes do not necessarily imply a lack of choice; they may instead reflect different choices having been made. Her main concern is with "inequalities in people's capacities to make choices" (1999: 438).

We adopt a modified form of Kabeer's framework when analyzing international efforts to promote women's participation in peacebuilding. Rather than seeing resources as a separate element that must be combined with agency (and achievements) in the process of increasing people's capacities to make choices, we regard resources as one of two preconditions for the exercise of agency. The other precondition is something that

Kabeer includes as well – "opportunities" for, among other things, decision making. In the context of gender-responsive peacebuilding, these are best conceived of as "associational resources," which enhance the organizational substance of local and national women's groups, and "agenda-shaping opportunities," which allow gender-equality advocates to influence norms and institutions.

External funding for women's organizations has become a widely used method for augmenting the associational resources that promoting women's leadership requires. This is difficult when women's organizations lack the financial management systems to absorb institutional funds, as they often do in war-torn countries.[1] International actors have done little to address this critical capacity gap. They have been similarly unimpressive in the provision of agenda-shaping opportunities. These are among the first things that external actors could reliably deliver, were they so inclined. Yet, governments rarely use their diplomatic clout with warring factions to push for women's representation in peace talks, nor do they exert much pressure on UN mediators to address gender issues related to, for instance, land and inheritance rights or women's participation in elected bodies. International agencies that organize post-conflict donor conferences have, with some exceptions, failed to include women's organizations among the participants or to place gender issues on the agenda.[2] Consequently, this key precondition for women's agency has been in short supply.

While we have adapted Kabeer's conception of agency to different analytical purposes, it is worth noting that the constraints on effective choice she identifies are magnified in conflict and post-conflict situations. One of the constraints Kabeer mentions – a lack of "mobility" – is far more acute in conflict situations. Representatives of women's organizations are sometimes excluded from peace talks because they lack the resources and security arrangements that would permit them to take part. Displaced women are often prevented from returning home at war's end because they lack documentation of their citizenship status or of their stake in family property.

Historically, women's "agency" in the context of war has been subjected to intensely gendered interpretations. Women's "heroic" actions in wartime have been mythologized by nationalists in some cases, and embraced by feminist peace activists in others. Figures such as Florence Nightingale have been appropriated by both camps. Advocacy for increased women's engagement in peace and security work has relied on a gendered construction of women's agency that sees women as natural peacemakers. This stems from one (or both) of two sources: women's assigned social roles and their biological capacity for maternity. This version of women's wartime agency has animated transnational feminist pacifism for over a century (Judith Stiehm 1983). It is also, as Diane Otto (2006) points out,

an essentialist trap: "If women are admitted on the understanding that their special contribution arises from their womanly instincts, it follows that their political agency will be limited to what is made possible by that representation and restricted to 'feminized' tasks involving nurturing and mothering" (139). She and other theorists of gender and international security demonstrate how this pacifist/maternalist – as opposed to equality-based – justification for participation depoliticizes women's agency (Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry 2007; Hilary Charlesworth 2008).

Gender-ascribed roles can be seen in other versions of women's agency, such as those promoted by groups involved in identity-based conflicts. In the various Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, women were valued primarily as custodians of cultural tradition and a racial purity. The key point is that women could not choose the nature of their participation in post-conflict reconstruction. The "women as preservers of the bloodline" variety of agency also increases their vulnerability to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). Encompassing several violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, CRSV has been, since the late 2000s, the subject of high-profile international policy efforts to prevent it as well as to recognize sexual violence as (potentially) a tactic of war (Robert Jenkins and Anne Marie Goetz 2010). The international community's approach to CRSV has nevertheless been criticized for depriving women survivors of agency by grouping them into a victim category that includes children and the severely disabled, who are presumed to require indirect representation (Cynthia Enloe 1990; R. Charli Carpenter 2005). Constraints on women's wartime agency are also in evidence when nationalist hardliners dismiss as deviants (or deride as dupes) those women or women's organizations that depart from conventional roles in their approach to pursuing peace (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 12; Laura Shepherd 2008). Women who have sought to bridge divides in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for instance, have been criticized by their respective groups for becoming overly identified with their adversaries (Tamar S. Hermann 2009: 139).

The remainder of this article analyzes international peacebuilding efforts in the fields of conflict resolution, post-conflict elections, and economic reconstruction. Our central claim is that in all three domains, there are severe, widespread, and persistent shortages of the resources and opportunities necessary for the effective exercise of women's agency. We argue that national and international actors attempting to enhance women's participation in conflict resolution and recovery must focus on augmenting associational resources and agenda-shaping opportunities. This, in turn, will require a more widespread conviction – that is, beyond the core constituency of mainly Western donor countries – that women's political engagement can (and should) represent the diversity of their interests and affiliations, and that women's capacity to choose from an array

of roles, conventional and unconventional, is at the heart of what agency means in conflict and post-conflict situations.

THE UN'S EVOLVIONG WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA

International commitments to promoting women's agency in conflict resolution and peacebuilding are contained in Section E ("Conflict") of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, passed in 2000, and in the six "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) resolutions passed since then, especially UNSCR 2122 (2013). These seek to involve women in conflict prevention, to protect them during and after conflicts, and to secure their full participation in post-conflict reconstruction. An institutional architecture to pursue some of these objectives has gradually emerged, modeled in part on the Security Council's approach to implementing its "Children and Armed Conflict" (CAAC) agenda. The CAAC's relative success has been attributed to its elaborate accountability architecture, which involves multiple channels of reporting as well as links to UN sanctions regimes. Mimicking this structure, Resolution 1889 (2009) created a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) on Sexual Violence in Conflict – a partially independent office authorized to identify those parties to conflict credibly suspected to have engaged in CRSV. The SRSG can launch investigations and urge prosecutions by national and international courts. UN-initiated International Commissions of Inquiry now regularly include gender crimes investigators.

It is, to some extent, not surprising that CRSV should attract more attention and action from the Security Council than women's exclusion from peacebuilding. The former is a legal violation, the latter an institutional failure. Two Council resolutions – 1889 (2009) and 2122 (2013) – were explicitly framed to revive the focus on women's agency, both as leaders and agenda setters, and as individuals making everyday contributions to lasting peace. Resolution 1889, introduced by Vietnam during its October 2009 Security Council presidency, stated that women in conflict situations are "often considered as victims and not as actors in addressing and resolving situations of armed conflict," and went on to stress "the need to focus not only on protection of women but also on their empowerment in peacebuilding" (UNSCR 2009: 11).

UNSCR 1889 urged member states to support women's engagement in decision making. It called for accelerated investment in women's education, health, livelihood security, and physical security – some of the key resources required for agency. UNSCR 1889 did not, however, call for an accountability system to ensure that these investments are translated into concrete commitments that can be monitored over time. The

resolution instructed the UN system to collect data on the implementation of resolution 1325, including on women's participation in post-conflict planning. UNSCR 1889 also requested the Secretary-General to submit a report on women's participation in peacebuilding. Presented one year later, the core of that Secretary-General's report (S/2010/466) was a UN-wide "Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding," containing seven commitments to advance women's participation in post-conflict decision-making.[3]

A second participation-focused resolution – UNSCR 2122 – was passed in 2013. This resolution called for "more attention on women's leadership" (UNSCR 2013: op 1). It was a reaction to the contrast between the detailed instructions regarding CRSV the Council provides in resolutions that mandate UN peace operations, and the vague recommendations the Council issues regarding women's engagement in agenda-setting forums such as national "political dialogues" and international donor conferences. As with earlier WPS resolutions, UNSCR 2122 contained no strict requirements for UN envoys to ensure women's involvement in peace negotiations. The resolution calls on UN mediators and heads of UN missions to consult regularly with women's organizations and women leaders "from early on in their deployment" (op 7), but does not specify what counts as "early" or "regularly." UN envoys are urged to include gender experts in their mediation teams and to press for women's inclusion in negotiating delegations, but without indicating a funding source or institutional mechanism to ensure that this happens.

International efforts to promote women's participation in peacebuilding have lacked sufficient attention to either of the preconditions for the effective exercise of women's agency: associational resources or agenda-shaping opportunities. The source of these systemic failures is the lack of credible mechanisms for holding states and international entities accountable for the degree to which they use their unique forms of institutional leverage to "open doors" – to peace talks, national dialogues, donor conferences, and constituent assemblies. Nor is there accountability for providing women's organizations the associational resources needed to influence the normative parameters and policy priorities established by such agenda-setting bodies.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

To understand the challenges to the exercise of women's agency in conflict resolution (or peacemaking, as the UN sometimes calls it), six key distinctions must be introduced. First, we must distinguish between the peace negotiations themselves and the content of any agreements produced. Women may be involved in the former and yet have little leverage to press for substantive revision of specific provisions. A second

distinction is between the negotiation of peace agreements (between the parties to a conflict) and the development of multilateral peace-consolidation "frameworks" (typically agreed between fledgling transitional authorities and external actors, such as international organizations and donor countries). Peacebuilding frameworks, such as those produced under the auspices of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, are ostensibly designed to support implementation of peace agreements, but often stray far beyond their mandated terms. A third set of distinctions recognizes the myriad forms that women's engagement in peace processes can take: as delegates of one or more parties to a conflict, as technical specialists within mediation support teams,[4] or as (formal or informal) observers. Women may engage as members of particular ideological communities (where they may advocate for ethnic or other group-defined interests) or as advocates seeking equality of opportunity for all women. Fourth, we must distinguish between peace-agreement provisions that commit vaguely to addressing the condition of women and girls, and those that prescribe specific actions to institutionalize voice for women (and women's interests) in future policymaking. These can include quotas for women's representation in politics or on the commissions responsible for overseeing implementation of peace agreements, or gender-aware provisions in the terms of reference for bodies such as truth commissions.

The fifth distinction concerns the political dynamics surrounding the peace processes that women's organizations seek to influence. Because peace processes are relatively rare, and because conflicts themselves vary greatly in terms of their underlying causes, geographic scope, duration, casualty rates, regional context and other factors, no two peace processes are alike. While the conclusion of a peace agreement is often an effort to seize a window of opportunity provided by a "mutually hurting stalemate" (I. William Zartman 2000), this is not always the case. And while some peace processes are profoundly undemocratic – involving groups whose right to participate rests on their capacity for destruction and disruption – elsewhere, such as in Northern Ireland, the key parties were represented by delegations that could credibly claim democratic legitimacy, and the highly inclusive process involved civil society intensively.[5]

While the number of women in any of the roles mentioned above is important from a democratic-justice perspective, it is the content of the accords that perhaps best represents the degree to which gender issues have permeated peacebuilding practice. The increasing interest internationally in more inclusive forms of conflict resolution has spurred research on the impact of civil-society participation in peace processes. Desirée Nilsson (2012) analyzed 83 peace processes between 1989 and 2004, and found that 34 percent of these (28 cases) included at least one civil-society actor in either the negotiations or in one or more bodies established to implement the resulting agreement. When civil-society actors were included in peace

negotiations, the risk of conflict recurrence was reduced by 64 percent. Laurel Stone (2014) examined 156 cases, and found that where women were included in the peace process, and where gender quotas for elections were recommended in the peace agreement, the chance of achieving a more durable peace rose to 78 percent, up from 61 percent when women were not involved.

An enduring obstacle to involving women's organizations in formal conflict-resolution processes is their lack of perceived legitimacy as actors who can either stop the fighting or build the peace. Mediators often raise the question of the political "standing" of women's organizations when pressed to hold consultations with women's groups. The officials who served as the UN's chief mediator in, respectively, Northern Uganda in 2008 and Syria in 2012, both stated that any women's groups invited to participate must represent the full diversity of women's groups, country-wide. This requirement was not imposed on other conflict-affected constituencies – such as refugees or representatives of children's interests.

The case of Libya illustrates how this call for national representativeness can prevent women from exercising agency at critical junctures in a transition process. In September 2011, in the midst of the destruction wrought by the Libyan civil war, and just a month before former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi was killed by rebels, UN officials and a group of member states convened a "High Level" meeting on Libya on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly in New York. This meeting was designed as a show of international solidarity for the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council (NTC), whose claim to national representativeness was itself dubious. A delegation of women human rights activists from Libya and the Libyan diaspora asked sympathetic governments, UN agencies, and nongovernmental mediation-support groups to facilitate their travel to New York to participate in this crucial meeting, where key parameters of the post-conflict planning process would be determined. A number of (mainly European) UN member-state missions in New York expressed concern privately that the Libyan women activists might, if invited, criticize the NTC. The quasi-public reason provided (by the UN and member-state missions) for not holding even an unofficial "side event" with the women was that their delegation did not represent a cross-section of Libyan political life. Despite overcoming significant financial and logistical obstacles to build a women's network – having obtained the associational resources on which effective autonomy depends – the Libyan women were denied the requisite agenda-shaping opportunities. Many international actors (not just domestic political forces) regarded women as a stakeholder group that possessed neither the standing nor the legitimacy to be a credible interlocutor on post-conflict reconciliation and state-building. A month later, after anti-Gadaffi forces

had taken Tripoli, NTC Chair Mustafa Abdul Jalil announced the new government's intention to annul laws that it considered to violate the tenets of Islam. The immediate relaxation of restrictions on polygamy – widely perceived as a way of rewarding fighters who had ousted Gaddafi – was the first in a series of decisions that eroded women's rights.

The NTC was, in part, an external construction, the result of early support for a particular oppositional grouping. The Security Council sought a rapid conclusion to a conflict that had begun severely to divide its membership, and so turned to interlocutors who, at the time, seemed best positioned to quickly begin exercising something like state authority. This is not unusual in peacebuilding practice. Similar dynamics influenced the emergence of the political leadership of post-conflict Iraq and Afghanistan, to name just two high-profile cases. Certain industrialists, landed interests, or displaced people from particular ethnic groups have had legitimacy conferred on them without any objective representativeness requirement imposed. They are permitted to express agency without the expectation that each assertion of interest will be dismissed if it does not directly embody or contribute to pacific inter-group relations. The absence of women's organizations from the set of externally anointed interlocutors at early stages of conflict resolution or post-conflict planning is not unusual, but has long-term consequences. The denial of agenda-setting opportunities not only undermines women's capacity for political agency directly; it does so indirectly as well, by detracting from women's ability to attract associational resources – another precondition for the exercise of agency.

Recent years have seen a number of efforts to professionalize mediation within the UN. The UN's Department of Political Affairs (DPA) created a Mediation Support Unit to improve the quality of technical support to mediation teams, and since 2011 it has included a gender specialist on its standby team of experts. Yet, DPA still has no standard procedures for ensuring women's inclusion in formal ("Track 1") negotiations, nor in the wide range of informal political dialogues that support conflict-resolution processes. Quotas for women in UN-supported peace talks have periodically been proposed (Lesley Abdela 2005), but have rarely been given serious attention within the UN. A rare exception came in 2012, when the UN's envoy in Yemen successfully negotiated with the transitional government a 30 percent quota in the National Dialogue process.

While women's physical presence in agenda-setting forums can be politically important in its own right, existing research has shown no predictable relationship between women's participation and gender-equality provisions in the resulting peace agreements or their implementation modalities (Christine Bell and Catherine O'Rourke 2010; Sahla Aroussi 2011). The degree of impact depends far more on the form women's engagement takes.

The most effective means of increasing gender-equality content in peace agreements is sustained pressure by women's civil-society organizations, applied directly on both delegations and mediators. Yet, the existence of a strong national women's movement does not on its own guarantee their participation in conflict resolution. Explicit measures to encourage and enable participation are needed. In Colombia, longstanding demands by women's organizations for government assistance to conflict-affected women resulted in the 2011 Law of Victims, which gave displaced women equal rights to restored property and called for reparations for victims of gender-based violence. The strength of the women's movement did not, however, lead to women's inclusion in the government's delegation when peace negotiations with FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) rebels began in 2012. The government's unwillingness to appoint women to its delegation, to institutionalize consultations with women's groups, or to incorporate gender experts into policymaking was surprising insofar as Colombia had just spent two years on the Security Council and was thus fully aware of its responsibilities under UNSCR 1325. Moreover, Norway, one of the facilitators of the Colombian peace talks, was a champion of the WPS agenda in the UN and elsewhere. It took almost a year for the government to include women (two) in its five-person delegation.

Mali is another example of how conflict-resolution processes can sideline even a relatively energetic and engaged women's movement. The organizers of an April 2012 international meeting on the Malian situation – local political leaders and international donor agencies – failed to make space for the leaders of a federation of Malian women's peace organizations. This was despite the federation's exceptional efforts to forefront local peace initiatives and to participate within regional networks of women peacebuilders. The meeting took place just weeks after Mali's double crisis: the March 2012 military coup and the subsequent occupation of northern regions by Tuareg rebels and Al-Qaeda-linked jihadists. President Compaoré of neighboring Burkina Faso, who was the meeting's official host and chair, agreed early to some kind of engagement with civil society. But women civil-society leaders were not invited. Women leaders approached the UN Women in Bamako to help gain access to the meeting. They travelled to Burkina Faso a day after the talks began, and petitioned successfully for a chance to address the meeting. They drew attention to the high levels of sexual violence in towns of northern Mali captured by rebels – a matter not previously on the agenda. Unfortunately, this breakthrough was not sustained: women leaders continued to receive, at best, afterthought invitations to subsequent peace initiatives.

Minimally fulfilling procedural requirements, rather than cultivating the skills and commitment needed to carry out the spirit of an emerging norm, is a common response to increased surveillance of official activities. The

difficulty faced by feminist advocates when monitoring whether officials (political or bureaucratic) are doing more than this minimum is that secrecy is considered essential for effective mediation. Advocates' ability to assess whether officials are exerting "best efforts" is limited. The Secretary-General's "7-Point Action Plan on Gender-Responsive Peacebuilding" commits DPA to ensuring that its mediators regularly consult with women. In 2013, former president of Ireland Mary Robinson became the first woman high-level envoy appointed by the UN, to oversee peace processes in the Great Lakes region. She soon learned that DPA rules did not require the terms of reference for mediators to include an instruction to consult with women. Robinson returned her DPA-drafted terms of reference until they contained the (self-constraining) provision she sought – a positive outcome, but one that fell short of altering department policy. One of Robinson's first actions as chief envoy was to organize a meeting of women leaders from across the Great Lakes region, sending an early and public signal of her commitment to building the agenda-shaping opportunities that are at the heart of agency.

POST-CONFLICT ELECTIONS

Among the most contentious elements of peacebuilding are those relating to the design and operation of post-conflict governance institutions such as legislatures, federal systems, and service-delivery bureaucracies. Here, we discuss one of the core activities of post-conflict governance: the design and operation of systems for electing public officeholders. The UN supports post-conflict elections by providing advice and technical expertise on everything from campaign finance, candidate codes of conduct, media-access requirements, voting systems, citizenship requirements for voters and candidates, polling-station administration, counting procedures, and so forth. In recent years the UN has become more assertive when it comes to ensuring the fairness of elections in conflict and post-conflict environments. During the dispute over the outcome of Côte D'Ivoire's 2011 presidential election, for instance, the UN sided with the winner certified by the international community against an incumbent who refused, under force of arms, to cede office.

   International efforts to enhance women's participation in post-conflict elections have been uneven at best, largely because the preconditions for the exercise of agency have not been systematically targeted. Nor have effective accountability systems – to sanction underperformance by national and international actors – been instituted. The UN has created guidelines – managed by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) – to provide security for women during post-conflict elections. Mandate renewals for UN missions often mention the need to address women's security in forthcoming elections so that they can participate as

voters. There is much less consistency in advocating for direct measures to increase the number of women participating in elections as candidates. The UN's focus has been on such relatively uncontroversial actions as civic awareness campaigns and women-only polling stations, mainly because these types of "Temporary Special Measures" (TSMs) tend not to impinge on the interests of powerful domestic political actors. Senior UN officials involved in negotiating post-conflict electoral support have much less incentive to advocate for more intrusive TSMs, notably electoral quotas for women, because of the vehement resistance such proposals typically encounter from national political actors, for whom international commitments to increase the proportion of women in elected office are not a priority. One reason why the UN has downplayed electoral quotas is that TSMs are not specifically mentioned in any of the seven thematic Security Council resolutions on women, peace, and security. The omission is particularly striking given that electoral quotas are among the TSMs that have been internationally endorsed as effective methods for overcoming women's political exclusion. For instance, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)'s General Recommendation 25 (adopted in 2004) stresses the importance of electoral quotas, providing a legal precedent on which the Security Council could have built (UN 2004). The Security Council's reluctance to call for greater attention to TSMs as a matter of policy reflects divisions within the Council over the scope of its mandate on both electoral support generally, and the promotion of gender equality in particular.

Empirical studies suggest that in post-conflict settings, electoral quotas are crucial instruments for achieving international commitments on women's political representation, such as the target established in the Beijing Platform for Action and used as a measure of women's empowerment in MDG Goal 3. One analysis found that, in post-conflict countries without quotas, women on average accounted for just 10 percent of elected legislators or half the current global average of about 20 percent (Rachel Dore-Weeks 2010). In post-conflict countries that implemented gender quotas, women held roughly 30 percent of legislative seats. In post-conflict countries such as Uganda, leaders have used gender quotas to pad national assemblies with uncritical supporters. But in many other countries, women have managed to capitalize on their larger share of seats. Even in Rwanda and Burundi, where the autonomy of women politicians has been questioned, the large presence of women has facilitated passage of legislation to address violence against women and strengthen women's property rights (Aili Mari Tripp 2015).

The Secretary-General's 7-Point Action Plan (2010) committed the UN to providing timely technical assistance on quota-based systems as a routine part of the post-conflict electoral support. Specifically, DPA was charged with ensuring that experts on gender-quota systems were assigned to

the "Technical Assessment Missions" (TAMs) that determine the scope of the UN's post-conflict electoral support package, and that national consultations were held to enable women's civil-society organizations and government officials to assess the merits and shortcomings of competing quota-based systems. Because of the secrecy surrounding the UN's electoral-support planning process, we cannot know whether either of these two responsibilities, which have been dutifully incorporated into the guidelines for conducting electoral needs-assessment missions, are being discharged.

In 2012, DPA revised its guidelines for conducting country electoral needs assessments. DPA's new guidelines are only partially consistent with its commitments under the 7-Point Action Plan. Despite the specific commitment to revising "the terms of reference for assessment missions to ensure the routine provision of an evidence-based analysis of options for temporary special measures, such as statutory quotas" (UN 2010: para. 44), DPA's new guidelines do not specify that gender-quota experts will be included in all assessment missions. How "evidence-based analysis" on women's quotas can be meaningfully provided or considered without experts to present and decode it is not explained. This omission, furthermore, would seem to flout at least the spirit of the provision in the Action Plan requiring that "technical assistance" to "countries emerging from conflict *promotes* women's participation as decision-makers in public institutions, appointed and elected . . . including through . . . quota-based systems" (UN 2010: para. 42).

Another gap between the 7-Point Action Plan and DPA's 2012 guidelines, to say nothing of actual practice, concerns the pledge that UN "technical assistance . . . will involve . . . convening a broad-based national consultation, involving political parties, civil-society groups and women parliamentarians from other post-conflict countries in the region who have participated in quota-based systems, with a view to assessing the desirability of competing approaches" (2010: para. 44). DPA's new guidelines made no mention of this commitment. Arguably, the most consequential aspect of DPA's new guidelines was the decision to subsume electoral quotas under the broader heading of TSMs. This classification allows DPA to claim that it is promoting TSMs when it is merely advancing uncontroversial programs (civic education), rather than measures (electoral quotas for women) that encounter resistance from vested political interests.

If there were one country where robust UN advocacy for women's electoral quotas might have been expected, it is Sierra Leone, which in 2012 held its second post-conflict election. The government's own national peace-consolidation plan – the 2008 "Agenda for Change," which was supposed to guide UN programming – specifically called for "a temporary affirmative action plan that stipulates a 30% quota for women in elective and appointed positions" (Government of Sierra Leone 2008: 95). While

domestic political factors primarily account for the non-passage of the Gender Equality Bill, which would have created such a quota, the lack of vigorous backing from DPA – the UN system-wide "focal point" on elections – deprived civil-society advocates of the kinds of associational resources and agenda-shaping opportunities that, this contribution argues, are preconditions for women's agency (Sabrina Mahtani 2012). The UN took none of the steps indicated in its 7-Point Action Plan to build on this government commitment: no dedicated expertise deployed, no regional counterparts engaged, no national forum convened. While DPA could not reasonably be expected to, on its own, organize public consultations in every country where it provides electoral assistance, it could work more effectively with those UN entities that do possess the capacity to perform this essential function and could display the same level of conviction on this matter that it does on other priority issues.

In the run-up to Liberia's 2011 elections, there were almost no UN-led efforts to make women's electoral quotas a point of national debate. Without such quotas, the result was predictable: the results indeed saw women's representation in parliament drop from 14 percent to 9.6 percent. The lack of attention to women's electoral quotas was perhaps unsurprising, given the management shortcomings subsequently identified in the UN's assistance to Liberia's elections. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the UN's internal watchdog, found in 2011 that the UN "had not developed a clear electoral assistance strategy" (UN OIOS 2011: para. 6) for Liberia; that "there was insufficient electoral assistance management capacity" (para. 6); and that "electoral assistance project management capacity was unsatisfactory" (para. 7). This was consistent with the findings of a 2012 OIOS assessment of the Electoral Assistance Division as a whole, which specifically criticized DPA's failure to share information through the UN coordination forums over which it had convening responsibility. The OIOS assessment found that, from its inception in 2009 through early 2012, no meetings of the DPA-chaired Electoral Assistance Steering Committee – the UN's "senior decision-making body" – were held (UN OIOS 2012: para. 19). The Steering Committee was at that time yet another institution in which women's representatives (in this case, bureaucratic entities, such as UN Women, created in 2011 to advocate on their behalf) were denied a key agenda-shaping opportunity – the chance to influence global policy on the provision of post-conflict electoral assistance.

To arrive at a more comprehensive assessment of whether DPA has fulfilled its commitments under the UN's 7-Point Action Plan would require more information than is in the public domain. DPA has claimed that it has engaged substantially on gender quotas in its post-conflict electoral planning,[6] but does not make public, even upon request, the supporting documentation that would allow civil society and other actors to verify the nature of the assistance provided in country-specific situations.

Country needs assessment reports produced by the TAMs, for instance, are confidential.[7] A glimpse into DPA's working methods was provided, however, by a leaked 2013 TAM report for Madagascar (UN 2012). It revealed that, instead of equipping itself with relevant expertise, or conducting a thorough national consultation, the assessment mission's analysis drew selectively on comments supplied by the facilitator of an unconnected gender workshop that, by chance, had recently been held in the country. Such *ad hoc* information cannot substitute for a structured assessment of gender issues, and is inconsistent with commitments specified in the UN's 7-Point Action Plan. Unsurprisingly, building consensus for gender quotas was left out of the UN's work plan for supporting Madagascar's elections.

The UN's inconsistent support for electoral quotas was perhaps most evident during the process of formulating a new Libyan constitution in May 2013. The drafting body omitted affirmative measures for women's representation. The UN Electoral Support Team (UNEST) issued a statement expressing unease at the draft's potential to "unnecessarily exclude some categories of the population without clear justification." UNEST's statement included a paragraph on the need for special measures to enable "the fair representation of women," pointing out that failing to do so would contravene various "international conventions, to which Libya is committed."[8] UNEST circulated talking points for UN officials to help them counter objections from Libyan officials and other quota opponents. Though too little, too late, this forceful advocacy on the merits of gender quotas in Libya highlights just how little pressure has been exerted by the UN in other places – like Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. It, furthermore, demonstrates that the claim made by DPA and other parts of the UN – that they have no standing to press sovereign governments to adopt quotas for women – is no longer true, if indeed it ever was.

According to the Libyan Women's Platform for Peace, a civil-society coalition, the UN's advocacy for gender quotas in Libya was short lived (Libyan Women's Platform for Peace 2015). Women's organizations had cited CEDAW when calling on the SRSG to support their demand for an increase in the proportion of seats reserved for women in the constituent assembly – from 10 percent (six of sixty seats) to 25 percent (fifteen of sixty). The response of the SRSG for Libya was to tell women activists in Libya that their appeal to the UN on the basis of CEDAW was hopeless. He called CEDAW "*wala'ishi*" ("nothing"), because governments could not be sued for ignoring it (Matthew Russell Lee 2013). The SRSG also stated that Libyan women's demands for improved electoral representation had been advanced in a less-than-effective manner, and that UN advocacy could not substitute for such shortcomings (Lee 2013).

The UN's inconsistent action on electoral quotas for women could also be seen in its approach to Mali. Malian women had from the outset attempted to engage in the internationally supported political-dialogue process to address the crises of early 2012. Yet, during the UN-assisted preparations for the 2013 election, gender-quota proposals received no serious attention by the government or its international partners. No such provisions were included in the electoral system ultimately adopted. Women won fourteen of 147 seats in Mali's national assembly – fewer than they had won in 2007, before the recent wave of women's peace activism.

Proposals for gender quotas are sometimes seen as a way of advancing the fortunes of certain parties – for instance, those with higher numbers of professionally trained women. Elsewhere, gender quotas are regarded as the imposition of a Western feminist (or national elite) preoccupation of no relevance to "grassroots" women. Advocates for quotas are thus caught in a classic "Catch-22" of political agency: lacking adequate opportunities for regular consultations – often denied due to perceptions that women lack "standing" – women's organizations remain unable to advocate for reforms that would recognize their status as bona fide stakeholders. In countries such as Libya, where civil society had been suppressed for decades prior to the civil war, women's movements were thus denied the opportunity to develop and demonstrate credibility and effectiveness as political agents.

ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION

Re-establishing economic activity after conflict, and laying the basis for a longer-term pattern of development that can address some of the causes of conflict, is a key peacebuilding priority (UN 2009). Insights concerning women's contribution to economic life, and constraints preventing them from sharing equitably in the benefits of development, have been adopted selectivity by international actors. Both bilateral and multilateral donors have done far less than they might have to advance a transformative agenda in terms of women's potential roles in development. As in the field of conflict resolution, the international community has not focused on the preconditions for the exercise of agency – resources and opportunities. Where women's agency has been recognized, it is typically in the service of a radically stripped down vision of the state's role in promoting development in post-conflict countries. Two examples help to illustrate these problems.

The first concerns the UN system's foot-dragging in fulfilling the mandate of the 2010 7-Point Action Plan, which commits UN entities to dedicating at least 15 percent of funds in post-conflict settings to projects focused on empowering women or promoting gender equality. In 2010, only 5 percent of UN-administered peacebuilding funds were spent on such projects. The rationale for the 15 percent gender-focused spending

commitment was that women's structural subordination, including the persistent undersupply of the preconditions for effective agency, was magnified by the effects of conflict. To date, no UN entity has fulfilled this commitment, although the UN Peacebuilding Fund reached a high of 10.3 percent in 2012.[9] No major UN department or agency has formulated a credible plan for achieving the 15 percent target. DPA and DPKO unilaterally exempted their field operations from this requirement.

Most UN entities lack effective methods for tracking gender-disaggregated expenditure. Project-scoring systems using a "Gender Marker" have remained at the experimental stage for years. Different entities use different approaches. Gender scores for proposed projects are decided by field officers with little or no oversight. A 2013 reassessment of the gender-marker scores given to projects in six post-conflict countries found substantial "grade inflation" (Sudarsana Kundu 2013). The study found that one-third of projects in South Sudan that received the highest grade of 3 (gender equality was the "principal" objective) displayed the characteristics of a grade 2 (gender equality was a "significant" objective). The lack of transparency and oversight in the scoring process is replicated in the procedures for reporting agency performance. Because the underlying information that would allow claims to be questioned is closely held, and because collegial norms and a culture of bureaucratic back-scratching discourage persistent inquiry, senior officials can trumpet their purported achievements without fear of having their claims subjected to serious scrutiny.

The second example in the area of economic recovery concerns the availability of food (Emmy Simmons 2013). Access to nutrition is both a human right and an essential means of reducing the likelihood of conflict recurrence. The idea of "food security" as a core dimension of "human security" is nothing new (Michael Carolan 2012). Nor is the notion that women – as agricultural producers and managers of household budgets – are critical contributors to the food economy in post-conflict settings (Susan McKay 2004). What is striking is how successfully donors and international organizations have recruited gender-equality advocates to a market-centered approach to restoring the farming economy. This is consistent with the wider discourse on women's engagement in post-conflict economic recovery, where a highly circumscribed role for government is now the default setting. The dynamics involved also mirror claims that certain aspects of feminism in the field of development have tended to bolster neoliberalism (Nancy Fraser 2009: 56).[10]

The state's role in enhancing women's contributions to both national and household food security in post-conflict settings is now typically reduced to three main elements. These were crystallized at a July 2011 seminar, attended by member-state diplomats, UN officials, and CSOs, held at the International Peace Institute (IPI) in New York.[11] The first is physical

security for women. When living in constant fear of gender-based violence, women – even in "post-war" settings – are less able to tend their fields or travel to markets. Second, the state must supply basic infrastructure – especially rural "feeder roads" that link remote areas, where women farmers reside, to market centers. Third, post-war states must ensure property rights for women. Where women are excluded by law or custom from owning land (for instance, where widows cannot inherit title from spouses killed in conflict), they cannot obtain formal-sector credit to purchase seeds, fertilizer, and other inputs. When insecure property rights make women vulnerable to arbitrary dispossession, they have little incentive to invest in land improvements or tools to increase agricultural productivity.

Physical security, basic infrastructure, and property rights are of course essential – both for peacebuilding in general and as instruments for increasing women's capacity to contribute to food security in particular. But to confine post-conflict states to these three functions, as policy frameworks often do, is to accept a stripped-down, neoliberal vision of government. That World Bank officials would adopt such an impoverished approach to the public sector in post-conflict countries is no surprise (Roland Paris 2004; Jeong Ho-Won 2005). But one expects a more ambitious agenda from gender-equality advocates, particularly when seeking to shape food and agricultural policies in post-conflict environments. Yet, at the 2011 seminar at IPI, women's rights campaigners repeatedly embraced this limited agenda, stressing that women's innate entrepreneurial talents would be unleashed in ways that would intensify agricultural production. Conceding such a large share of the economic-policy space is not uncommon among activists, who often feel compelled to advocate a "realistic" agenda, thereby lending legitimacy to the highly circumscribed policy framework that has long been pursued in international post-conflict economic reconstruction (Michael Pugh 2005: 35–7).

Some observers have perceived increased receptivity in the policy community for more active state approaches to the food economy in post-conflict countries. According to one UN peacebuilding official who took part in the IPI seminar, even the World Bank has begun to reassess its antipathy to state involvement in agriculture. The Bank's 2011 *World Development Report* (*WDR*; World Bank 2011b) on "Conflict, Security, and Development" was cited as an indication of a new approach. However, a close reading of the *WDR* does not offer much encouragement. While recognizing the contribution of food insecurity to conflict, the report prescribes actions consistent with a minimalist vision of the state. It notes that "countries with weak institutional capacity were more likely to suffer violent social unrest during the food shocks of 2008–09" (World Bank 2011: 8), but does not recommend strengthening the capacities necessary for more robust intervention in the food economy. The *WDR* refers to food "price shocks" as "beyond the control of the state" (World Bank 2011: 81).

There is some truth to this, but if supported by their international donors, even post-conflict governments can adopt policies and build institutions to insulate people from the worst effects of price volatility. Instead of advocating the creation of such systems, the Bank focuses on a familiar recipe: sound macroeconomic policy, improved market information, and increased foreign investment in the agricultural sector. This limited focus in post-conflict economic reconstruction has been the subject of detailed country-specific critiques for the past decade and a half (Graciana del Castillo 2001).

Even so, the prevailing international policy environment makes "active-state" approaches to food security highly unfashionable. Few national policy documents (whether government- or donor-produced) even consider, let alone advocate, designating state entities as buyers of last resort for key food crops, a mechanism that can reduce price volatility and spur longer-term investments by small and marginal farmers. State involvement in distributing agricultural inputs is similarly absent from the policy agenda. There is little discussion of developing a network of government-licensed shops to ensure the continuous availability of food grains at affordable prices to voucher holders. The idea of state support for the promotion of agricultural cooperatives – to, among other things, spread risk and increase producer leverage – is beyond the political pale.[12] For WPS advocates to neglect "active-state" approaches to food security in their campaigns for gender-responsive peacebuilding is, however, a missed opportunity. It means not only foregoing potentially effective methods for enhancing food availability, and reducing the horizontal inequalities that can fuel conflict, but also overlooking mechanisms that could advance gender equality in post-conflict reconstruction more generally. For instance, regulations governing the establishment of agricultural cooperatives could specify quotas for women in their management. Women's economic engagement could thus have a multiplier effect on women's empowerment – beyond the potential effects on food production – by contributing to greater opportunities for women's civic engagement in countries emerging from conflict. Likewise, regulations governing the establishment of state-subsidized food outlets could specify gender parity in the distribution of licenses to operate them, or require that food vouchers be distributed to women household members.

There are of course legitimate reasons for skepticism about greater state involvement in the food economy, given the potential for well-intentioned policies to generate inefficiency and corruption. But there are cases where active-state approaches to food security have benefited marginal farmers and poor consumers. For all its flaws, Egypt's food-subsidy system widened access to essential commodities. Minimum support prices and export controls in India – combined with state-assisted dissemination of green-revolution technologies – increased food production dramatically, despite

imposing very real social and environmental costs. Adapting such policies to post-conflict countries, and designing them in a more gender-responsive fashion, will be hugely difficult. But that is insufficient grounds for taking them off the table entirely.

Another reason why active-state approaches to gender and food security are absent from the peacebuilding discourse is the fear of unrealistic expectations. Almost every discussion of peacebuilding features at least one impassioned plea for realistic "sequencing": the international community should first consolidate states, and only once this has been achieved should a wider array of state functions even be considered. This logic has undeniable appeal. But it is striking how little consideration is given to the possibility that a more active role for the state in the food economy – beyond the minimalist agenda of providing physical security, basic infrastructure and property rights – might itself help to consolidate state authority, to strengthen the social contract between citizens and the state by making the government a visible guarantor of adequate nutrition. Food vouchers for state-issued identity cardholders could allow public authorities to reach places they otherwise do not. Building women's engagement into the design of such systems sends a strong signal that gender equality is central to the state-building project. This is the kind of agenda-shaping opportunity at the sectoral level that is needed to make women's agency meaningful.

The neglect of active-state approaches to gender and food security in post-conflict settings, which reflects the proliferation of market-centered ideologies over the past four decades, is, ironically, reinforced by another, less obvious ideological influence: the desire of gender-equality activists to emphasize women's role as agents of change. Given the longstanding tendency to characterize women as "victims" (of war, of development, of patriarchy), stressing instead women's potential as promoters of peace, of more inclusive politics, of sustainable development, is understandable. In the context of discussions on food security and peacebuilding, this tendency is manifested in the conviction that women's innate capacities as farmers, innovators, and household managers can work wonders – if only given the opportunities and resources that a market-based agricultural economy theoretically could offer. In so doing, WPS advocates risk reinforcing an impoverished conception of the state's role in the food economy, and passing up unique opportunities to enhance women's ability to exercise agency in the larger process of reconstituting the state.

CONCLUSION

We have focused on three dimensions of peacebuilding: conflict resolution, post-conflict elections, and economic reconstruction. In assessing the UN's work in these areas, we find that the war-related damage to women's

organizations necessitates targeted measures to promote the preconditions for the exercise of women's agency. Doing so requires international actors to extend particular types of resources and opportunities – those that will enable women's organizations to formulate collective goals, while providing them access to agenda-shaping forums.

At the root of the problem is a shortage of agreed methods for promoting women's participation and weak (or token) accountability systems to ensure that resources were provided and opportunities created for the expression of women's collective agency. Our analysis of the actual practice of conflict mediation, post-conflict electoral assistance and support to economic reconstruction reveals that structured access for women's organizations to the most consequential conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes is still rare, although bureaucratic skill at compliance with the letter of mandates can provide a misleading impression of inclusion.

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NOTES

[1] See World Bank (2011a) for a review of post-conflict resource constraints.

[2] A more positive recent example was the 2011 conference for South Sudan; see UN Women and Inclusive Security (2012).

[3] One of us (Jenkins), while serving as an external consultant, was the lead author of the *Report of the Secretary-General on Women's Participation in Peacebuilding* (2010), while the other (Goetz) was at the time a UN official managing analytical inputs to the study.

[4] See Pablo Castillo-Diaz and Simon Tordjman (2012: 5–10) for a description of nine different forms of participation by women in peace processes.

[5] Inclusive and representative peace negotiations, such as the 1998 Stormont process for Northern Ireland, the 1996 Guatemala peace process, or the 1994 South Africa constitutional process, are unusual. They often take a long time, and are more likely to be found in very long-lasting conflicts.

[6] This information was outlined in a document circulated in June 2013 by DPA (United Nations 2013).

[7] An email request by one of the authors (Jenkins) to a DPA official to consult a past TAM report was politely declined on the grounds that such documents remained classified (personal communication, June 12–13, 2013).

[8] United Nations Support Mission in Libya 2013; cited in Vanessa Farr (2013).

[9] The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) achieved an overall 10.3 percent spend on "gender marker 3" projects in 2012 (projects with gender equality as principal objective). In 2014, however, gender marker 3 projects fell to 5.4 percent of PBF expenditure (Sarah Douglas and Cecile Mazzacurati forthcoming: 6).

[10] As Fraser (2009: 112) put it: "the feminist critique of bureaucratic paternalism has been recuperated by neoliberalism. A perspective aimed originally at transforming state power into a vehicle of citizen empowerment and social justice is now used to legitimate marketization and state retrenchment."

[11] Titled "Women, Food Security and Peacebuilding," co-sponsored by UN Women and the Peacebuilding Support Office, May 19, 2011.

[12] The potential for new forms of economic organization to assist women in reviving post-conflict agricultural economies has been noted as far back as the 1990s, even before the advent of the "post-Washington Consensus" (Birgitte Sorensen 1998).

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