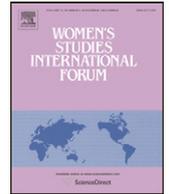


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From the global to the local: Grounding UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in post conflict policy making



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SYNOPSIS

Given that women consistently receive less attention than men in peace building and that gender analysis rarely informs strategies related to conflict transformation, this article examines how a European Union (EU) PEACE III project, titled Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning, addresses this gap. It challenges the hierarchal nature of the dialogue on peace building in a post conflict society and suggests how this can be changed. It shows how activists and policy-makers can become more engaged around UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and argues that if government officials had adopted a more contextualised, bottom-up system of policy making, they could have engendered social transformation within the broader processes of post-conflict transition.¹ The project's findings are framed within the context of the dominant discourses on peace and security and should be relevant to those engaged in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in other post conflict societies.

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Introduction

Whilst the roles of women in conflict may vary, their experiences of conflict and violence often signify that women have different views on what peace means and how peace building should proceed. UNSCR 1325 focuses specifically on prioritising women's participation in the international peace and security agenda, calling for states to (i) increase the number of women involved in decision-making around issues of peacebuilding and conflict transformation; (ii) protect women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, especially from gender-based violence; and (iii) adopt a gender perspective on peace-making, peace keeping and peacebuilding. Adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 laid the basis for a number of reinforcing resolutions (UNSCRs 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122) that seek to further develop both conceptual frameworks and indicators for implementation. A report by UN WOMEN in 2012 on Women's

Participation in Peace Negotiations found that the progress since 2000 in this field remains precarious with only 92 (16%) of 585 peace agreements since 1990 containing at least one reference to women and gender (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2013, p.10).

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement concluded in Northern Ireland in 1998 was one of those peace agreements that did include a reference to women through the following insertion: "The parties affirm their commitment to ... the right of women to full and equal political participation" (Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, s.6, para.1.9). The focus of the 1998 peace agreement in Northern Ireland was on power sharing and the establishment of new institutions and arrangements recognising British and Irish identities. The inclusion of gender specific clauses was considered to be an achievement, reflecting the work of women negotiators directly involved in the negotiations (Mitchell, 1999).

Following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, most political discourse focused on considerations of national/religious identity, decommissioning of weapons and prisoner releases to the extent that gender issues were denigrated to a lower status in the decision making process. The UK

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government, the Northern Ireland Executive and, to a lesser extent, the Irish government ignored the commitment to equality for women in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Peace Agreement. It was not until the mid 2000s that government officials were tasked with bringing forward gender specific policies on issues related to the political conflict in response to advocacy by women's groups in civic society. This task, completed by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, resulted in the publication of the Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy, 2006–2016. The document was the first to acknowledge women's peacebuilding as being an area for action and raised issues of the participation of women in civil society and noted the lack of gender balance in government appointments (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014). Despite this acknowledgment, the implementation of the Gender Strategy has been weakened by the refusal of the United Kingdom government to recognise the application of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security to Northern Ireland. The conflict in Northern Ireland did not fall within the Geneva Conventions as an intra state war and was not regarded by the British government as such.² This refusal to apply UNSCR 1325 to women's peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland remains in place despite criticism of the UK government by the CEDAW Committee.

In contrast to this, the European Union had designated Northern Ireland as a region emerging from conflict and set aside funds from the mid 1990s for PEACE I and PEACE II programmes to support the transition. The project that is reported on here was funded under the PEACE III programme and was implemented over the period 2011 to 2014. There were three phases to the project; the first engaged approximately 800 women, in conferences, seminars and roundtable discussions within Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland; the second involved the commissioning of a baseline study on UNSCR 1325 to disseminate international learning, whilst the third phase engaged policy makers and NGOs involved in decision-making on peace and security issues. The advent of the project provided an assessment of women's experiences in relation to the on-going peace process and an analysis of the commitments in the peace agreement that had specific implications for women. Views were sought from women in a diversity of communities across Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland, the latter having also been impacted by the conflict. The PEACE III project placed an additional emphasis on using the community-based discussions to inform a strategic guide and toolkit developed for policy and decision-makers in the statutory sector. The aim was to frame the project and its findings in the context of UNSCR 1325, designing a particular methodology to meet this challenge.

This article highlights the need for policy makers to listen to women's views of peace and security in order to address the inadequacies of institutionalised security approaches in a post conflict situation. The article outlines how women can contribute to policy making in this area by emphasising the importance of interrelated categories of peace and security: health and education, economic security, safety from intimate partner violence, community development and political stability. Adding a gender frame to peace building and conflict transformation can also assist policy makers in understanding the differing experiences of women and men during conflict and post-conflict.

Methodology adopted

The EU funded Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project operated at a number of levels. At its core was the importance of hearing what women had to say, emphasising the experiences of women living in communities recovering from the worst impact of the conflict. It was also recognised that different voices had to be allowed space for self-expression and that the project had to be as inclusive as practicable of women from both sides of the sectarian divide. The project sought to have a minimum of 45% women from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist backgrounds and 40% of women from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican backgrounds in Northern Ireland, reflecting the political/religious identity within these communities. Particular efforts were also made in Northern Ireland to ensure the inclusion of 15% of minority ethnic women in the project. For the southern Border Counties, participation was set at a minimum of 20% Protestant and at least 65% Catholic which again reflected the religious breakdown of these communities (EU PEACE III, 2012). The project aimed to develop an analysis that accounted for the needs and vulnerabilities of women from different political/religious backgrounds in both jurisdictions as well as the intersections between gender and social relations that included race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability. Participation took the form of a series of local seminars, replicated north and south of Ireland that focused on the main pillars of UNSCR 1325.³ Participants were also invited to join cross-border conferences on each of the pillars; for example women from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland came together to discuss Violence, Community Safety and Security in the post conflict situation. In addition each conference benefitted from the input of women international activists, identified by the Foundations for Peace Network.⁴ Over the three-year project, women from Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Serbia and Palestine added their insights on living in a divided society.

Participation in the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project took place through eight seminars organised across Northern Ireland (the larger number reflecting the disproportionate impact of the conflict), with five seminars in the southern Border Counties and six cross-border conferences. In addition to the formal programme, a specific discussion was held with women from the Roma community in Belfast, whilst women asylum seekers were encouraged to attend discussions in the southern border region. Community-based women were trained as facilitators by the project's partner organisation to encourage effective and inclusive participant engagement at each of the events.

A number of ground rules emerged: (a) the main tenets of UNSCR 1325 would be translated into questions that women could relate to such as 'Have things improved in your life since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998?'; (b) attention would be paid to the sensitivity of the language and terms used during discussions,⁵ (c) sufficient time would be allocated for round table discussions, and (d) there would be a mix of participants at each table during the seminars and conferences to avoid clustering from single identity communities. The main points emerging from these consultations were collated and used to inform the policy briefs prepared for policy-makers and NGOs in order to extend the applicability of UNSCR 1325 to a wider range of stakeholders. The five policy papers focused on

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