

# Crisis Prevention and Recovery



## CRISIS: THE GENDER DIMENSION

In October 2002, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, recognizing the critical role of women in peace-building as well as in conflict prevention and resolution. Resolution 1325 calls for women's full and equal participation in key institutions and decision-making bodies. It is evidence of a significant shift in the discourse on women in conflict situations. The static image of women as helpless victims of war is giving way to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of not only the challenges women face, but also the active role they play in crisis situations.

Nevertheless, gender mainstreaming is still the exception rather than the rule along the prevention-to-relief-to-rehabilitation continuum. Experts and practitioners working on gender equality and the empowerment of women in special development situations in Africa, the Balkans, Latin America and Afghanistan have noted common themes: that gender issues remain underestimated and marginalized in international peace operations, relief efforts and integration programmes; that women are largely absent from decision-making on issues of war and peace; and that transition-to-recovery programmes generally fail to address the distinct and reoccurring challenges women and girls face in post-conflict environments.<sup>1</sup>

Failing to analyse the gender dimensions of conflict and take concrete action to address them before, during and after a crisis is not a theoretical exercise. It is a tangible problem with grim consequences for women and girls. The use of sexual violence to terrorize whole ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda and Somalia is a striking contemporary example of how very real gender issues are in shaping the impact of conflict and crisis. Moreover, evidence suggests that conflicts increase the risk and impact of HIV/AIDS by dislocating communities and bringing fighters into contact with civilians in situations where women and youths are highly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. Combatants, especially child soldiers, are also susceptible to violent and high-risk behaviour.<sup>2</sup>

## PROTECTING VULNERABILITIES,

## BUILDING ON STRENGTHS

Key areas for mainstreaming gender in conflict or potential conflict situations include:

- Using engendered early warning indicators to anticipate conflicts. One such indicator is increased sexual violence against women of a certain ethnic group, which both terrorizes women and demoralizes and symbolically defeats men. Another is the imprisonment,



disappearance or killing of men, a tactic to pre-empt opponents from building a strong resistance force, as seen in the Balkans.

- Keeping gender in mind, even at the height of a crisis. In crisis mode, it is sometimes difficult for emergency workers to remember that gender issues can be critical to survival. But separate spaces for women and children in evacuation centres, supplies for menstruation, and the physical layout of camps all are important. There should be separate sanitation facilities for women and men, for example, and these facilities need to be located and designed in a way that promotes women's safety and protects them from opportunistic rape.

- Taking care not to undermine women's traditional sources of power, such as the management of food and the household. Food distribution schemes that target men as heads-of-household do just that. Equally critical is accounting for women's true care-taking responsibilities. A woman may have among her dependents orphaned children she is caring for in addition to her own. Not counting these children as family members in food distribution schemes can put women under pressure to exchange sex for food.

Despite profound hardships, conflict and post-conflict situations can provide women opportunities for enhancing their public role. With the collapse of the traditional order and the absence of men, women are able to and must often assume visible leadership responsibilities.

UNDP has an important role to play in addressing the gender dimensions of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. Attention must be given to early-warning protection and assistance, women's role in peace processes, and their full participation in post-crisis reconstruction. Support to women's organizations is a particularly strategic area of intervention. UNDP's commitment to implementation of Resolution 1325 focuses particularly on the integration of gender concerns in its post-conflict interventions and transition to recovery programmes.

## UNDP IN ACTION: BURUNDI

The inclusion of women in the Burundi peace process in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, is a compelling example of how women are gaining greater access to the peace table. Emilliene Minani is the chairperson of the Burundi Women Refugee Network. She and six of her colleagues were granted observer status to the peace talks held among Burundi's 19 political parties, allowing them to witness the initial proceedings. When formal negotiations began, however, the women were barred from entering the negotiating room.

Determined to be heard, Minani and her peers adopted a less than formal tactic: They intercepted political party leaders in the hallways of government buildings, urging them to integrate women's perspectives into the official peace plans. "Burundian women have continuously demanded inclusion in this process," says Minani. "We have been fighting for our right to be included, irrespective of our ethnicity, political affiliations and geographic diversities. We want to make sure that the rights of all Burundian women are protected in all political, social and economic spheres."

The women's vision was partially realized when, under chief negotiator Nelson Mandela, each party named two women delegates to attend the All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference, organized by UNIFEM and the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation of Tanzania. The conference yielded a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening protection for women and girls. These included establishing mechanisms to punish rape and sexual violence as war crimes, legalizing a woman's right to inherit land and property, and guaranteeing girls access to education. Many of the women's recommendations were adopted in the peace accord.

*Source: Adapted from an article in UNDP's CHOICES magazine, December 2002.*

## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

*Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations*, a UNDP manual, is available at <http://www.undp.org/gender/docs/gendermanualfinalBCPR.pdf>

1 October 2002 workshop on 'Gender Challenges in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries', organized by UNDP in partnership with UNIFEM.

2 See the final report of 'Preventing and Coping with HIV/AIDS in Post-Conflict Societies: Gender-Based Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa', a symposium hosted by the Tulane University Payson Center.