Gender Aspects of Social Exclusion in Post-Conflict Situations

Overcoming Exclusion: An Integrated Approach to Development
ALEX OTIENO

Models of Activism: Bedouin Women’s Struggle for Inclusion in Israel
SARAB ABU-RABIA-QUEDER

Community Mediation as a Tool for Addressing Social Exclusion in Nepal
PAMELA A. DE VOE AND C.J. LARKIN

Addressing Gender-Based Exclusion in Afghanistan Through Home-Based Schooling for Girls
JACKIE KIRK AND REBECCA WINTHROP

Displacement as Exclusion in the Colombian Conflict
FLOR EDILMA OSORIO PÉREZ AND OLGA LUCÍA CASTILLO OSPINA

Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Erosion of Women’s Rights Under International Governance
TAMMY SMITH

IN THE FIELD: Social Exclusion in Post-Conflict Congo
JUDITHE REGISTRE
Critical Half is a bi-annual journal of Women for Women International devoted to the exchange of ideas and insight encountered by practitioners in the field with women, development and post-conflict societies.

Each issue of Critical Half focuses on a particular topic within the field of gender and development. Calls for papers for upcoming issues can be found on our website at www.womenforwomen.org along with additional information, including submission criteria and deadlines.

The contents of Critical Half are copyrighted. This publication may not be reproduced or distributed without written permission. Commercial use of any material contained in this journal is strictly prohibited. For copy permission, notification of address changes or to make comments, please e-mail Rebecca Milner at rmilner@womenforwomen.org.

Copyright © Women for Women International
Reflections from the Board of Editors

The term “social exclusion” broadens the concept of poverty to include people who are systematically disadvantaged, discriminated against and generally left out of society because of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, residence, HIV status, migrant status, caste, age, disability and gender. Too often, it is taken to mean physical exclusion and the importance of the word “social” is forgotten. Although social exclusion may result from or result in physical exclusion, they are not the same thing. For example, a woman included in a meeting may be physically present but nevertheless be treated in a way that leads to her social exclusion. Having multiple “excluding” factors may compound the problems of the socially excluded. A man from an ethnic minority may face discrimination in the workplace, but his wife, because she is a woman as well as from a minority group, may be unable to participate in public life at all. The invisibility of such women, who are out of the public eye, means that their isolation goes unnoticed, their exclusion unheeded.

Much has been done in recent years to address gender inequality and the social exclusion of women. In June 1993, at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, the international community openly acknowledged that international law and the mechanisms established to promote and protect human rights have not properly taken into account the concerns of women. At the Vienna Conference, countries formally recognized the human rights of women as “an inalienable integral and indivisible part of human rights” and expanded the international human rights agenda to include gender-specific violations. Such gains are very fragile; when disaster strikes or conflict comes, such advances can quickly be lost. The underlying structures of society take time to absorb gender transformations and this process can be compromised when the social fabric is disturbed by conflict and war. It is still the case that formal institutions reproduce and contribute to gender inequality through their assumptions, working procedures and activities, which continue to rest on patriarchal norms.

Yet we should not forget that conflict can play a part in transforming societies to the benefit of women. When conflict results in the fall of a regime that excluded women—as was the case in parts of Afghanistan under the Taliban—there is an opportunity for change as more women gain access to education and public life. However, it is easy for the casual observer to misread the signs of exclusion. Why was it that so many Western commentators seemed to expect the women of Afghanistan to cast aside their burkas once the Taliban fell? The burka was seen as a sign of oppression, but in the tumult of post-conflict Afghanistan, the protection of the burka offered women freedom to go out and participate in public life without harassment. We may debate the rights and wrongs of different forms of female dress, especially those imposed by men for their own purposes, but it would be wrong to assume that that it is the clothing that “excludes” women when it is, in fact, the societal or cultural norms that result in women’s social exclusion. We cannot change such norms and values by simply changing clothes.

The 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action has, as its basis, an agenda for empowering women by removing all obstacles to their active participation in public and private life. In addition, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals reflect the outcomes of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Platform and other human rights instruments and agreements on the empowerment of women directly through two goals: the promotion of gender equality through education and improvement in maternal health. In post-conflict Rwanda, for example, serious efforts have been made in the last 10 years to enshrine gender equality in the Constitution and increase the opportunities for women's participation in public life. These efforts depend on peace. Conflict and disorder threaten the gains that have been made in addressing the social exclusion of women and girls in many parts of the world. Too often, post-conflict situations undermine advances in gender equality and result in increased social exclusion for some, if not all, women. Lessons can be learned from countries such as Rwanda to see how the horrors of conflict can give birth to positive and, hopefully, lasting change.

Janet Seeley
School of Development Studies
University of East Anglia, UK
Traditional notions of poverty tend to invoke images of “poorness” as a static state where lines are drawn between those who have and those who don’t. These conventional approaches mostly focus on monetary aspects, often failing to consider the full range of dynamics that shut people out of opportunities to shape their lives and societies. The concept of “social exclusion,” on the other hand, offers a way to understand the connections between the conditions of peoples’ lives, their rights and their economic, political and social status.

Social exclusion also focuses on the processes and systems that affect peoples’ overall status and well-being rather than merely on an end result, such as poverty or wealth. Economic aspects of exclusion can include unemployment or a lack of access to credit, land or markets. On the political side, people might be limited in their opportunities to participate politically or obtain political representation. And the social component of exclusion can be understood as a lack of access to institutions such as schools or political organizations or to skills like literacy or language. The different facets of social exclusion are often intertwined and reinforce one another. The broader perspective offered by the concept of social exclusion helps to explain how people end up in situations where they have limited access to resources for creating change, and how gender-based exclusion is amplified for women in conflict and post-conflict situations.

Having worked with tens of thousands of women during and after conflict, Women for Women International has learned that “socially excluded” is a much more accurate and meaningful way of thinking of them than simply “poor.” This conception aids us in implementing a program that is not based on charity but on attaining rights and opportunities for inclusion. To this end, our program includes an “active citizen” component that seeks to mobilize women to engage in economic, political and social activity. By first establishing a sustainable means to earn an income, women build the stability that helps them become active in other ways, such as through voting, participating in local councils or community groups, learning to read and write and having a stronger voice in their own households. We encourage them at all these levels. As women develop the tools and skills to shape their own lives, their communities and, ultimately, their countries, they move from a place of exclusion to one where they are more fully included in a community that they helped build.

We dedicate this issue of Critical Half to exploring the various manifestations of social exclusion as they relate to the dynamics of gender in conflict and post-conflict countries. Several articles offer specific strategies for building inclusion. We open with Overcoming Exclusion: An Integrated Approach to Development, by Alex Otieno, which provides a comprehensive overview of social exclusion and discusses its implications for development and post-conflict reconstruction. He offers the field of health as a framework for understanding the manifestations of gender-based exclusion in particular. He also discusses the links between the attainment of human rights and strategies designed to reduce exclusion.

Economic aspects of exclusion reinforce other forms of exclusion by making it difficult to obtain access to resources such as adequate healthcare or education. In Models of Activism: Bedouin Women’s Struggle for Inclusion in Israel, Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder describes some of the innovative and entrepreneurial ways that Bedouin women are embracing tradition to provide for women’s economic participation amidst the region’s protracted conflict.

The political aspects of exclusion can be caused by and manifested in the denial of access to political representation or participation, including not being allowed to vote, non-representative leadership or poorly developed civil society networks. Ethnic or gender divisions may also play a role in the political dynamics of exclusion and can translate into unequal legal rights and access to employment. In this light, the economic and political aspects of exclusion are often mutually reinforcing.

In Community Mediation as a Tool for Addressing Social Exclusion in Nepal, Pamela A. De Voe and C.J. Larkin illustrate how community mediation in Nepal offers traditionally undervalued or disenfranchised people and groups access to justice and places them in positions of respect and authority at the local level, thus creating a socio-cultural environment wherein gender and caste relations are improved. In the wake of political unrest, a community mediation program takes significant steps to create local “socio-judiciary” institutions and enhances women’s access to the public sphere.

Social factors are also important aspects of exclusion. Social participation is a critical aspect of life; it
creates important social networks that have particular importance in times of upheaval and rebuilding. The social aspects of exclusion can be based on gender, health-status, ethnicity or caste. People are more economically and politically vulnerable when their access to social networks is limited, which can in turn lead to a denial of access to important economic resources such as land, credit, employment or education.

In *Addressing Gender-Based Exclusion in Afghanistan Through Home-Based Schooling for Girls*, Jackie Kirk and Rebecca Winthrop look at the potential of education for addressing the comprehensive exclusion of women and girls from development and from participation in their communities and societies, highlighting the ways that education enhances the inclusion of women at multiple levels.

War and conflict create unique situations of exclusion, particularly when populations become displaced. Emphasizing that forced displacement places ordinary people in abnormal conditions, in *Displacement as Exclusion in the Colombian Conflict*, Flor Edilma Osorio Pérez and Olga Lucía Castillo Ospina illustrate how in conflict, women bear most of the consequences that lead to exclusion. Yet rather than being merely passive victims, displaced women play an essential role in building social networks, which enable them to survive and assert their skills and capabilities.

International authorities play a significant role in bolstering a country’s institutions and infrastructure after conflict. To this end, they have a responsibility to help foster conditions that lead to gender equality and inclusion. In *Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Erosion of Women’s Rights Under International Governance*, Tammy Smith points out that since the war ended in 1995 in Bosnia, women’s status has declined in perceptible and important ways: domestic violence has increased while women’s ability to hold on to scarce jobs has declined. She argues that even with a proliferation of international interventions in post-war governance over the past decade, it is time to ask some tough questions about the role of international groups in protecting women’s rights and including women in post-war social, political and economic reconstruction.

The final article in *Critical Half* is traditionally a piece from one of our field offices. In her article *Social Exclusion in Post-Conflict Congo*, Judithe Registre, Women for Women International Country Director in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), examines the unique situation of Congolese women, who find themselves socially excluded not only as women but often also as refugees and internally displaced persons and as rape and war survivors. She tells of the work that Women for Women International is doing in the DRC to provide resources for these women to rebuild their economic and emotional lives and allow them to think beyond their current status.

It is our hope that the strategies discussed in this issue of the journal will spark debate and contribute to the efforts to break the cycle of gender-based exclusion. This entails a broad commitment to working toward inclusion through increasing women’s access to economic, political and social opportunities.

I would like to offer my special gratitude for the thoughtful contributions of our Board of Editors, Janet Seeley, Katherine Marshall, Oby Josephine Chinelo Okwuonu, and María Adelaida Farah Quijano. I am also grateful for the hard work and skillful editing of Tobey Goldfarb, Managing Editor; for the guidance offered by Corey Oser and for the work of our copyeditors Barbara Bares and Rebecca Trinite and our designer, Kristin Hager. Finally, I thank Women for Women International’s supporters whose unfailing belief in the inclusion of women in all aspects of society after conflict, makes this publication possible.

---

**Zainab Salbi**  
President and CEO  
Women for Women International
SOCIAL EXCLUSION IS A COMPLEX SOCIAL PHENOMENON with multiple manifestations and consequences. Understanding the concept of social exclusion requires ongoing research and assessment, but it can serve as an important organizing principle for reform and development efforts. Multilevel action by development and social justice stakeholders is needed to alleviate the impacts of social exclusion, to promote gender equity and to improve the quality of life in post-conflict and developing societies.
Overcoming Exclusion: An Integrated Approach to Development

ALEX OTIENO

Introduction

Rooted in the discourse of social reform, “social exclusion” is a compelling new area of research for scholars and advocates of gender equity and social development who seek to explore the causes of poverty. It recognizes that the literal exclusion of a person from society because of a particular characteristic or affiliation is different from marginalization based in law, policy or cultural practices, such as the exclusion of women from political decision-making roles. The concept subsumes structural patterns of socially constructed inequalities, revealing its complexity as an organizing principle for reform. As such, social exclusion is particularly relevant in post-conflict communities engaged in reconstruction where there is the risk of resurrecting exclusion from the pre-conflict era.

Given its social reform roots, it is not surprising that social exclusion has emerged as a framework for assessing access to and delivery of social services in developed areas such as the United Kingdom (UK), the European Union and Canada. Its intersection with poverty and deprivation makes it is especially important for program planners and development stakeholders concerned about “loss of rights.” The concept of social exclusion is concerned with diverse issues such as consumption, production, economic opportunity, political engagement and social interaction, which manifest in different ways depending on the state of development of the country under consideration.

A collateral consequence of conflict is that health and welfare services suffer immensely when a country’s infrastructure is strained or compromised. Health data therefore provide a useful framework for linking what may initially seem like three disparate notions: gender, social exclusion and post-conflict situations. This paper offers an overview of social exclusion, particularly the processes that limit access to opportunities, resources and participation in society.

These dimensions of social exclusion lend themselves to qualitative, quantitative, longitudinal or cross-sectional assessment. For the practitioner who is interested in clear-cut answers, the nuances that are inevitably part of the discourse of exclusion can be daunting. However, as discussed below, exclusion has great potential as an organizing principle for action aimed at empowerment and promotion of human rights.

Health as a Framework for Understanding Exclusion

The preamble to the World Health Organization (WHO) Constitution defines health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Health may therefore be viewed as an indicator of inclusion at local, national and global levels. To illustrate, consider that in developing countries, 1 in 16 women will die from pregnancy-related complications compared to 1 in 2,800 in developed countries. In developed countries, pregnancy is far less of a health risk because of advances in medicine and access to healthcare. It can therefore be claimed that women in developing countries are excluded from the benefits of advancements in science and technology that prevent maternal mortality.

Similarly, the WHO’s Global Burden of Disease project has shown that the “importance of indoor air pollution as a public health threat varies drastically according to the level of development.” In high-mortality developing countries, indoor air pollution is still the second biggest environmental contributor to ill health, with only unsafe water and sanitation posing a greater risk. However, indoor air pollution no longer even features among the top 10 risk factors in industrialized countries.

In less industrialized countries, cooking is often done indoors over an open fire with insufficient ventilation. Thus, indoor air pollution poses a public health threat. In many of these communities, food preparation is...
viewed, for the most part, as women’s domain, thereby making women more vulnerable than men to respiratory diseases that result from indoor air pollution. At the same time, men have most of the decision-making responsibility in their families. Because most of the fuel is used by women in their domestic roles, choosing healthier fuel alternatives may not be a high priority for the male decision-maker in the household. What then is needed to reduce women’s risk of respiratory diseases in developing countries? Is it an economic issue? If the women had more money would they spend it on improving ventilation? Is it an education issue? If women learned about the risks of poor ventilation would they take steps to improve it? These are the sorts of questions for which the current social exclusion dialogue provides a forum.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is another glaring example of how gender-based exclusion affects health status and outcomes. Reports from the United Nations (UN) Joint Program on AIDS indicate that women and young girls are especially vulnerable to infection and more likely to be stigmatized when they are sick compared to their male counterparts.9 This is often due to lack of access to health education and resources and social barriers that restrict women’s freedom to make informed choices about birth control and sexual behavior. Other contributing factors such as gender-based violence, controversial cultural practices and limitations on the ability to seek employment outside of the home exacerbate women’s vulnerability to existing health risks.

The root causes of this may be tied to structural violence, which often results in higher rates of disease for poor, low status and marginalized individuals. Structural violence may be defined as “the invisible social machinery of inequality that reproduces social relations of exclusion and marginalization via ideologies, stigmas, and dangerous discourses (such as “youth violence” itself) attendant to race, class, sex, and other invidious distinctions.”10 If structural violence as defined is a cause of social exclusion, it is not hard to understand how war and conflict only aggravate the social machinery of inequality.

National data presented in the WHO’s World Health Report 2000: Assessing the Performance of Health Systems clearly demonstrate the differences in health status by gender and call for further scrutiny of the forces that shape health and illness.11 Although it can be argued that socioeconomic status and cultural practices contribute to these outcomes, such arguments do not address the larger questions pertaining to exclusion and equity such as: Are there specific outreach efforts targeted at excluded women and other marginalized groups? Are services accessible and acceptable to them? Are there legislative and policy initiatives aimed at redressing any gaps in utilization of health services and health outcomes? And, if not, what needs to be done to improve the situation—to move from exclusion to inclusion?

**International Standards**

Health and human rights are inextricably linked. According to Paula Braveman and Sophia Gruskin, “Equity and human rights principles dictate the necessity to strive for equal opportunity for health for groups of people who have suffered marginalization or discrimination…. [A] commitment to achieving greater equity in health…using a human rights framework to consider both poverty and equity—can provide unique, valuable and concrete guidance for actions of national and international organizations in health and development.”12

Numerous international agreements promote women as equal participants and beneficiaries of sustainable development, peace and security, governance and human rights.13 For instance, the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are key organizing principles for monitoring global progress toward reducing poverty by 2015, particularly goal number three: “to promote gender equity and empower women.”14 World leaders from over 180 UN member states agreed on the goals at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. The UN Millennium Project (commissioned in 2002 by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan) is charged with identifying strategies for accomplishing the MDGs.

Since 1990, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has commissioned an annual Human Development Report. The reports use four composite indices for human development—the Human Development Index, the Gender-Related Development Index, the Gender Empowerment Measure and the Human Poverty Index. Each index can be used to gauge some measure of social exclusion or inclusion. The UNDP notion of human development is helping to shift the discourse from an income approach to poverty, where economic indicators are of primary importance, to a capability approach, which considers the value of individual freedoms and choices.

Amartya Sen, Martha Nussbaum and Sabina Alkire are notable proponents of the capability approach. They view capability as the ability to be and to do what one wants and consider the multi-dimensional nature of development and capabilities. This approach provides a mechanism for determining how a group of people, in
this case women, is being excluded from the benefits of development. 15

Moving the Inclusion Agenda Forward

Another issue that touches on the three aspects of exclusion is women’s vulnerability to violence—physical, emotional and structural—and the need to remember marginalized women such as “the prostituted, the battered, the raped, the tortured, the murdered.”16 For example, the disproportionate impact of human trafficking and its effects on girls and women illustrates the need for an inclusive agenda in law enforcement and governmental action aimed at reducing exploitation. The US State Department’s annual reports on human trafficking suggest that underdevelopment, conflict and collapse of government are some of the key factors that facilitate these abominable practices.

Social science researchers have demonstrated the deleterious effects of social exclusion on individual health and community wellbeing.17 Organizations that fund, implement, monitor and assess development and post-conflict reconstruction projects have incorporated exclusion in their discourse. Similarly, governments programs such as the UK’s Social Exclusion Unit and Rwanda’s efforts to have an inclusive parliament suggest that both developed and developing countries have mainstreamed inclusion. Through training, advocacy and networking, groups such as Women’s Campaign International work to remove “the political, social and economic obstacles that limit women’s active involvement in decision-making at all levels.”18

The Challenge Ahead

Although social exclusion is contextual—manifested in various ways in different regions and times and exacerbated by violent conflicts—its impact has been empirically demonstrated to transcend gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. In many countries, cultural and legal constraints support and countenance gender roles and gender-based violence that not only blatantly violate the mandates of international standards but also perpetuate exclusion. Exclusion is exacerbated by war and violent conflict.

Interventions aimed at alleviating its impact are therefore critical to social development. Testing post-conflict development approaches such as community-driven development, demilitarization and demobilization, democratization and social capital for inclusiveness can promote sustainable peace, gender equity and human rights. Reports such as those submitted to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the annual Human Development Reports and WHO’s World Health Reports can be used to monitor progress in a given country toward attainment of MDG number three: “to promote gender equity and empower women.” Funding agencies, advocacy groups and governments can in turn consider these as indicators for action with the understanding that inaction results in lowered quality of life and premature mortality in some cases.

ALEX OTIENO, M.P.H., is a doctoral candidate at Temple University. He teaches Sociology and is a lecturer for the Master’s Program in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at Arcadia University. Mr. Otieno’s research and writing focuses on health policy, service delivery, social capital and advocacy strategies in both the United States and in his native Kenya.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


CRITICAL HALF 11
OVERCOMING EXCLUSION: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT


ENDNOTES

1 Although Rene Lenoir is given credit for coining the term, this definition of social exclusion emerged from scurrying the rapidly growing body of research on the subject, including: Venzani (2004), Labonte (2002, 2004), Galabuzi (2002), Hills, Le Grand and Piachaud (2002), Sen (2002), Shaw, Dorling and Smith (1999) and Phelan (1989). It should be noted that Lenoir's definition included “mentally and physically handicapped, suicidal people, aged invalids, abused children, substance abusers, delinquents, single parents, multi-problem households, marginal, asocial persons and other social misfits” in his definition. (quoted from Sen, Social Exclusion, 1).


4 Research methods have been identified by Gilbert (2001), de Haan (1999) and Silver (1998), among others.

5 To view the text of the World Health Organization's Constitution, see http://www.who.int/governance/en/.

6 WHO, Beyond the Numbers (2004).


8 Ibid.


12 Braveman and Graskin, “Poverty, Equity, Human Rights and Health,” 539, 543.

13 See Article 2 of the WHO Constitution; Article 25, Section 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 3 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the mandate of the UN Division for the Advancement of Women, which strives to stimulate “the mainstreaming of gender perspectives both within and outside the United Nations system.” UN Millennium Development Goals, the entirety of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination illustrate the human rights dimensions of social exclusion.


15 Nussbaum, “Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements,” and Braveman and Graskin, “Poverty, Equity, Human Rights and Health.”

16 Davorkin, Life and Death, 175.


18 Details about the countries where WCI has worked are available on its web site: http://www.womenscampaigninternational.org/programs.htm.
BEDOUIN WOMEN IN THE NEGEV REGION OF SOUTHERN ISRAEL are doubly marginalized: first, as women living in a patriarchal, male-dominated culture; second, as part of an ethnic minority group in the majority Jewish state of Israel. Nevertheless, despite the discrimination they face, Bedouin women are struggling to establish their rights and status in Israel using several models for activism that create autonomy and empowerment within the confines of their sex-segregated society.
Models of Activism: Bedouin Women’s Struggle for Inclusion in Israel

SARAB ABU-RABIA-QUEDER

Introduction

Traditionally, the Bedouin people have lived in nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes, surviving through mostly agrarian means. This lifestyle has meant that the Bedouin people are literally caught in the middle of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Over the last 50 years, this conflict has restricted the movement of everyone in the vicinity. For most Bedouin, this has meant that traditional lifestyle and economic pursuits are no longer viable options.

As a result, Bedouin women are marginalized twice: once, as part of a Bedouin minority separate from the Jewish majority and Arab minority and, again, as females in a male-dominated society. This dual discrimination affects women’s status in all aspects of their lives. This paper examines how socially excluded Bedouin women in Israel are using strategies of power and resistance—models of activism—stemming from Bedouin tradition and Islam to improve their position in society.

Ethnic Marginality in a Jewish-Majority State

The Bedouins of the Negev are among the Palestinian Arabs who remained in Israel after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. Today, they comprise a minority group among Israeli citizens. From 1948 until the late 1960s, the Negev Bedouins lived under the Israeli military administration, as did all Arabs in Israel. This meant that they were isolated from Arab populations in other parts of Israel and needed special permits to leave their designated areas in search of jobs or education.1

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Israeli government developed plans to resettle the entire Negev Bedouin population into seven urban-style towns. In reality, only 50 percent of the Bedouin population of 120,000 were actually transferred to the planned towns (known as “recognized villages”), while the other half remained, and continue to live, in “unrecognized villages” in the former restricted territory on their own lands. These “unrecognized villages” lack basic services including plumbing, electricity, roads, health clinics and high schools.2

Today, Bedouins have access to very few economic, cultural and social resources. Arab communities tend to be the poorest in Israel; they lack an industrial tax base, depending more heavily on residential property taxes. Arab schools lack sufficient classrooms and existing ones (especially among the Bedouins) are in poor condition, with fewer libraries, sports facilities and laboratories than Jewish schools.3

Gender Marginality in Tribal Bedouin Society

Bedouin women also experience gender discrimination perpetuated by two cultural codes that govern Bedouin life: the sexual code and the collective code. Under the sexual code, perceptions of honor and shame dictate behavior. The Bedouin sexual code affects every aspect of a girl’s upbringing, from childhood to marriage.4 The status of the Bedouin family is determined by its size, which depends on women’s reproductive abilities. As a vehicle of procreation, the Bedouin woman is both marginalized and venerated. Her primary role of reproduction emphasizes her connection to uncontrolled nature, which restricts her ability to be perceived as morally equal to men.5 But this sexuality also makes the woman important; she is highly protected by Bedouin traditional law and any offense against a woman may lead to revenge by her male kin.6

At the same time, the collective code in Bedouin society plays an important role in female marginalization. The Bedouin woman is meant to marry for the sake of the collective rather than for her own personal interests in order to increase the size and power of the group (her extended family).7 The collective code also infiltrates the individual’s life; any person who wants to be honored in his/her group has to obey the group’s codes by uncondi-
tional loyalty to the tribe, and any shameful behavior weakens the power of the group. To prevent this, women are watched constantly and are married only to their relatives.8

In the name of these two codes, many Bedouin women have only restricted access to the public sphere, especially to education and employment. To this day, many girls do not attend school because their families are afraid they will bring shame to the tribe by meeting boys from other tribes.9 Thus, these codes place the Bedouin woman in a paradoxical position: while she has an important role as preserver of the honor of the family and the tribe, she is also extremely marginalized by society.

Economic and Educational Exclusion

When half the Bedouin population of the Negev was displaced from the desert to “recognized villages” in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they benefited from a variety of resources—stores, banks, parks and schools. However, most of these benefits were, for all intents and purposes, denied to the women, owing to their lack of access to, and familiarity with, public life.10

Before the Bedouins were moved to the villages, the Bedouin woman was a partner in the home with responsibilities relatively equal to those of a man. This partnership was evident in the elementary tasks she was responsible for performing, which were critical to the sustenance of the family, like goat milking, preparing food and building the tent. Such activities increased her status as a provider and a producer in the hard life of the desert.11 However, with the transition to the village, her roles were abrogated by modern services. At the same time, she lacked skills to work outside the house and the State did not provide her with an appropriate workplace that respects traditional Bedouin customs. As a consequence, most Bedouin men work outside the village while the women stay at home without any formal employment, left solely with the roles of ‘wife and mother.’12

Education is another area in which Bedouin women are marginalized. The high dropout rates from schools in the Bedouin community are due to the stark difference in financial resources allocated to the Bedouin educational system compared with the Israeli system.13 The situation is even worse in the “unrecognized villages,” which lack high schools, forcing the boys and girls to walk to schools in other villages where they are outsiders and strangers.

A Bedouin girl’s chances of convincing her parents to let her attend school is also made more difficult by a lack of appropriate conditions, such as separate classes for boys and girls, that respect Bedouin cultural norms.

Models for Activism

The relatively recent increased presence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in many marginalized Bedouin communities in Israel has introduced the possibility of change to many underserved groups. As discussed below, these models for activism empower women within their sex-segregated societies through the formation of women’s collectives, networking and the revival of traditional feminine skills.

Reviving Traditional Skills

There has been a revival of women’s collectives by several Bedouin women’s NGOs in four Bedouin villages: Laqyia, Tal-Elsabe, Rahat and Shgeb-Elsalam. With the help of coordinators, treasurers and production and marketing managers, Bedouin women combine their traditional skills and create income-generating opportunities for themselves. These productive women make and market traditional rugs, briefcases and traditional jewelry and in return receive money. This way, they revive tradition as well as return to their productive roles by helping to support their families. Since they contribute to the family income, they empower the whole family when they empower themselves.

This example is one of many feminist initiatives in Middle East and North African countries that, instead of denying tradition, use tradition and traditional tools to promote women’s status and help them move forward. This model creates a new and different feminism: although the women work in the domestic sphere, the results of their labors—their products—reach the public sphere.

By avoiding the overt public sphere, this model of feminism avoids a blatant clash with the traditional roles expected of Bedouin women. It does not violate the traditional prohibition against public appearance or impinge on the traditional values of ‘alb (shame) and honor. Instead, it creates a continuity of feminine tradition while at the same time challenging the status of Bedouin men as the society’s only breadwinners.

Creating Autonomy in a Sex-Segregated Society

Because Bedouin society is segregated and forbids any public contact between men and women, separate spaces are created for women at public and many private events, such as weddings. In light of this fact, Bedouin women have initiated a project to train women to be wedding photographers and disc jockeys (DJs) at women’s sections of these events. This project’s participants are
typically young women between the ages of 18 and 25 who did not have the opportunity to complete high school. Hiring women DJs and photographers who can work only in women’s sections turns the segregated space into a place where women have the authority to do what they wish and decreases the competition for jobs between men and women by creating employment opportunities just for women. Thus, although such single-sex projects can be practiced only in a sex-segregated society, the sex segregation becomes a source of power rather than of oppression.14

Creating Women’s Networks

Historically, women’s collectives in tribal societies have been effective in fighting male domination in both the political and social spheres and in encouraging financial and emotional independence among women.13 For example, in her 1986 study of women in Saudi Arabia, Soraya Al-Torki noted that the very segregation of the sexes that prevented women from gaining access to positions of authority in the wider society created conditions for women to influence male decisions. Through traditional networks of kinship and friendship, women not only controlled information needed for marriage arrangements, they also used this information to further their own interests.16

These activities fostered both personal and public recognition of women’s worth and represented a form of feminism even though the women avoided branding themselves as feminists. Bedouin women today also express their own brand of feminism through their activities and awareness of their inner worth without ever using the title of “feminist” inside their communities. This allows them to challenge the social structure without threatening it and to draw their power from their traditional cultural identity, which they then try to change.

This struggle has many names in the feminist literature of the Middle East. Muna Aimee’s and Hagelan Lucas’ concept of Entryism reflects the belief that Arab women should cooperate with tradition and the community as a tactic to manipulate the social order while changing it.17 Deniz Kandiyoti and Cynthia Nelson referred to this as a sort of bargain with patriarchy; women increase their safety and survival in the face of oppression, a variation on the game’s rules.18 They negotiate their social status with men, resisting traditional limits in a non-aggressive way and following cultural norms (e.g., modest dress) in exchange for cultural inclusion and the opportunity for participation in the public sphere.

Conclusion

The double marginalization of Bedouin women occurs against the backdrop of protracted regional conflict. Even if they are not directly implicated in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, spillover effects from the conflict may have some impact on them and their struggle. For many Bedouin women, this means that even if they are able to navigate the sexual and collective codes that govern their families, culture and communities, the strain that conflict places on resources and infrastructure poses an additional challenge to their empowerment. Undeterred, they continue to work for a better life through the formation of women’s collectives, social networking and the revival of traditional skills.

SARAB ABU-RABIA-QUEDER teaches in the Department of Education at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, where she oversees a program that addresses Arab feminism, feminist methodology and the Bedouin community. She was the first Bedouin Ph.D. student from the Negev region in Israel and specializes in sociological education, the Arab-Bedouin community, gender/feminism and cultural issues in education. She has been active for 10 years with local NGOs to establish programs for promoting Bedouin women’s leadership in the community and in education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Collins, Patricia Hill. “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” in Beyond Methodol-
MODELS OF ACTIVISM: BEDOUIN WOMEN’S STRUGGLE FOR INCLUSION IN ISRAEL

ENDNOTES
3 Ibid.
4 At puberty, the daughter is physically separated from her father; though they continue to occupy the same space, two separate worlds are created. Similarly, girls are not permitted to interact with the male public sphere (Emrys, 1990). The need for modesty is reflected in the concept of tahashum (shamefulness and self-control), which requires modest, traditional dress for women and girls alike. In this context, the veil is meant to defend females from sexual harassment (Abu-Odeh, 1993).
7 Marriages are arranged in accordance with tribal relationships and always take place inside the extended family; the accepted pattern of marriage is to a first cousin to preserve the honor code inside the family (Laffin, 1975).
12 Abu-Lughod, (1998). The marginalization of Bedouin women is apparent in their absence from reported employment statistics. For instance, in 2003, more than 18 percent of women in the Rahat city and 24 percent in the Kseifa village (both located in the Negev) were registered as unemployed. Moreover, the national unemployment rate for Bedouin women in that year (21 percent) was considerably higher than for Bedouin men (9 percent), according to the Statistical Bureau. While these percentages may seem low, they do not reflect the full reality as many Bedouin women, especially women from “unrecognized villages,” are “invisible” and cannot reach the employment offices because of lack of transportation from their villages to the town in which such services are offered. Moreover, because they are not documented, these women are unable to receive unemployment benefits (Statistical Bureau, 1999).
14 Dahbani-Miraglia’s 2003 study of Nigerian women in Africa before colonialism who lived in a segregated sphere far from men shows how these women encouraged the absence of men from home because this left them more autonomy to do what they wanted in their segregated space. When the men were absent, the women were able to be independent and create female networks that allowed them to exercise considerable power and independence within African society.
16 Al-Torki, (1986).
IN NEPAL, COMMUNITY MEDIATION OFFERS those who have been traditionally undervalued or disenfranchised access to justice and propels them into positions of respect and authority at the local level. For women and others who participate as mediators, it provides human rights and leadership training, practical experience in the public arena and a high-profile position within the community. For both mediators and participants, it creates a socio-cultural environment where gender and caste issues are treated equitably. In the wake of political unrest in Nepal and a vacuum created by the termination of local governments, the community mediation program takes significant steps to create local “socio-judiciary” institutions and to enhance women’s access to public life.
Community Mediation as a Tool for Addressing Social Exclusion in Nepal

PAMELA A. DE VOE AND C.J. LARKIN

Introduction

Semi-formal, community conflict resolution programs can create in-roads against women’s exclusion in conflict-ridden communities. Where community norms do not recognize women’s issues, and formal conflict resolution mechanisms (such as the courts) are failing due to inaccessibility or anarchy, community-based mediation programs can reduce violence against women, educate community members about human rights issues and create opportunities for women to gain problem-solving roles of increased prominence. Such semi-formal, localized programs, supported by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), can make incremental changes in the status of women, perhaps more easily than major national, political or legal gains can be made and sustained in times of conflict. Nepal provides a case study of how important community-based programs can be in bringing about such change.

Nepali Women’s Role and Status

Nepal is a multicultural society with more than 60 ethnic groups that are usually categorized into two distinct families: Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan. Although gender relations vary considerably within the various groups, the statistics on the position and status of women in Nepal, whatever their ethnicity, portray a bleak picture. This is true for all major indicators, such as life expectancy, education levels and employment. According to the Asian Development Bank, Nepali women are among the most oppressed and disenfranchised in the world. Their life expectancy is lower than for men, making Nepal only one of three countries worldwide where this is true. In terms of literacy, while both men and women have low literacy rates, women have significantly lower levels of literacy than men.

The reasons for women’s position are multifaceted. Nepal is an agriculturally based nation with concomitant economic underdevelopment, the legal system is highly patriarchal and the socio-cultural environment undervalues women and tolerates gender-based violence. In addition, Nepal is presently immersed in violent civil conflict involving Maoist insurgents and government forces. This conflict has its own detrimental impact on women and their place in society.

It is often assumed that one reason women suffer discrimination is that they do not engage in productive labor and that if they shared the economic burden with men they would be recognized as (more) equal to men. However, in Nepal, women typically work harder and longer than men. Moreover, the agricultural field is being increasingly feminized: rural and hill areas are increasingly dependent on women’s agricultural labor since many men have abandoned their homes either from fear of civil unrest or in search of economic opportunity in urban areas or in India. Nevertheless, women’s work remains undervalued and unremunerated, leaving them in the position of receiving little or no status for their economic contributions to their natal families before they marry and to their husbands’ families after they marry.

Against this traditional backdrop of discrimination, some rural and ethnic minority women look to the Maoists, who are currently challenging the government for political power and authority. The Maoist movement’s expressed philosophy stresses gender equality. Such a stand strikes a chord with many young, oppressed women. Further, in rural Nepal, where anti-government activity is strongest, the police and army, under the guise of an anti-Maoist campaign, allegedly kill innocent men and rape women and girls, thereby creating a heightened anti-government sentiment. The confluence of the apparent Maoist gender sensitivity and anti-government sentiment has resulted in many young women joining the Maoist cause. Interestingly, there is a tradition in Nepal “of armed political activism and struggle by women of ethnic and indigenous groups.” Women fought against the British in 1815 and, more recently, were active in the democracy movement.

In spite of their current involvement in Maoist revo-
volutionary activities, the prospects for change in Nepali women’s status remain questionable. In the past, armed political activism did not lead to greater gender equality. Further, there are at least two issues that suggest that women will not fare any better under a Maoist regime. First, the Maoists suggest that gender equity will come about naturally when their revolutionary war is won. As a result, there is no programmatic schedule for change or even for incorporating gender interests in the struggle. Second, although initially there were women in leadership positions within the Maoist organization, as the movement became more militarized and formalized, women’s roles and leadership positions have diminished. This reversal or containment of gender issues is not unusual and the pull of existing socio-cultural patterns is often stronger than political rhetoric or will.

Gender and Nepal’s Legal System

While women have substantial rights in the folk culture of many of Nepal’s ethnic groups, the country’s legal system is based on Hindu caste traditions and a patriarchal society that creates gender-based inequities. Although Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) prohibits discrimination against women, there are at least 118 areas of Nepali law that do discriminate against them. For example, citizenship passes to children only through the father, rules of inheritance often exclude female children, widows lose property they inherited when their spouses died if they remarry and, in certain criminal cases, women receive more severe sentences than men. Domestic violence is not considered a crime, which gives women little or no legal recourse against violent spouses or relatives. Women’s rights to land are limited. In an agriculturally based society, land ownership is critical in maintaining a livelihood and independence. Without meaningful rights to property, divorce for women becomes almost impossible. As a result, many women continue to live with the horrors of domestic violence.

This mixed legal environment exists in spite of the 1990 Nepali Constitution calling for equality for all citizens. Nepal’s Supreme Court ruled that the principle of equality did not mean that every person should be treated equally before the law. The Court maintained that there should not be discrimination between persons of the same position, but that people could have, and do have, varying positions within society. That is, as Hari Bansh Tripathi noted, “the right to equality is not absolute.” Therefore, while the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens without discrimination, laws supporting those rights have not been passed or upheld by the courts. As a result, another system where women can access justice needs to be put into place. The community mediation program addresses this equal-access-to-justice issue and, at the same time, creates new opportunities for change within Nepal’s socio-cultural environment.

Community Mediation as a Tool for Change

International organizations such as the United Nations, the US Agency for International Development and the Asia Foundation have blended their human rights and social development agendas with the promotion of justice and conflict resolution by providing funding and technical support for community mediation, particularly in Nepal’s rural areas. The NGOs are firmly behind the goals of increasing women’s power and participation in Nepali society. The message is equalitarian, collaborative and tolerant of diversity.

Community mediation is in its nascent stage in Nepal; however, it has strong commitment and support from civil society, including educational and judicial groups. Litigation within the formal, patriarchal legal system is often too expensive, too slow and too geographically remote to be accessible to poor, rural and disenfranchised people. Further, since the legal system relies on written records and documents, those who are not at least semi-literate are at a distinct disadvantage in court. Therefore, community mediation, with its reliance on local, indigenous trained mediators, provides the disenfranchised with an opportunity to address perceived wrongs.

NGOs, such as the Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT), the Mainstreaming Gender Equity Programme (MGEP) and the Kathmandu School of Law (K SOL) have developed programs of conflict resolution that combine mediation of individual disputes with education and raising awareness regarding human rights within the community. The model for most of these programs appears to be a combination of mediation, public meeting and nonbinding arbitration (where a decision or recommendation is made by the neutral(s)). Community mediation in Nepal also recognizes the difference between formal and situational equity. Therefore, community mediation, with its rights-based and community-oriented emphasis, is being used as a technique to bring justice to those not yet adequately served by Nepal’s political, social and judicial system.

CVICT has been engaged in community mediation in rural Nepal for more than four years. It provides that at least 25 percent of the mediation committees must be women. In at least one village, women mediators were found to be more successful than their male counterparts. At the same time, CVICT has found a change in perception of women and their roles. For example, in a CVICT video, “Toward Social Justice,” a female mediator comments on her pleasure in being able to use her new skills to help community members reach a resolu-
The Function of Community Mediation

As noted earlier, although in the past Nepali women have (1) stood with their men to fight against outsiders (and continue to fight according to their consciences today), (2) taken over the care and responsibility of their family farms and (3) joined the money economy by taking on work outside the house, none of these achievements has lead to greater equality or respect. To achieve equality, therefore, Nepali women need to be part of a structural change. Community mediation with its training programs, practical experience in leadership positions and public authority offers one avenue for developing a gender-sensitive, rights-based, structural change at the local level.

The main reason for using the community mediation process in Nepal was that it addressed the prevailing lack of equal access to justice. It has, however, also become an active tool in creating structural change for women in the public arena. Community mediation raises the awareness of discriminatory practices vis-à-vis women in male-female relationships and allows women to take and be seen in high-profile positions, thereby giving them status and prestige traditionally available only to men.

The community mediation approach is relatively new in Nepal. At present, these programs remain vulnerable in rural areas where an unsettled, dangerous environment may interrupt their implementation. To achieve sustainability, these programs should be extended to urban areas where there is relative peace at this time. In this way, women will continue to acquire the skills, prestige and public presence at the grassroots level that is necessary for the development of true gender equality. From the Nepali model, it is apparent that community mediation programs have the potential to be a grassroots tool for human rights education, community harmony and the empowerment of women and other disadvantaged classes of people.
PAMELA A. DE VOE, Ph.D., is an anthropologist who assists ethnic leaders and organizations in her role as Community Connections Manager at the International Institute of St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri. She has studied the adaptation and use of community mediation practices in Nepal extensively. Dr. De Voe received her Ph.D. from the University of Arizona and did a post-doctoral fellowship with the Missouri Institute of Mental Health, Center for Policy Research and Training. Earlier this year she traveled to Thailand as a member of Missouri’s 2005 Global Leadership Education Delegation to examine the role of conflict mediation in fostering peaceful resolution of ethnic, cultural and religious differences in cross-cultural settings and how religious groups and institutions participate in a democratic and secular society.

C.J. LARKIN has a law degree from the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law and a Master’s degree in Political Science from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She is the Director of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Programs, teaches Mediation Theory and Practice and supervises student mediators at Washington University School of Law. She works with the St. Louis immigrant-refugee community in the area of dispute resolution and has traveled to Kathmandu, Nepal, to collaborate on access-to-justice and ADR projects. Ms. Larkin has extensive experience in intercultural conflict resolution leadership training, most recently for the Ethiopian Community Association of Missouri’s Workshop on Conflict and Peacemaking Across Cultures, co-sponsored by the International Institute and Washington University School of Law. In 2004, Ms. Larkin was selected as a cultural competence trainer of Arab, Muslim and Sikh Americans for the United States Department of Justice’s Community Relations Service.

The authors would like to thank the administrators and staff members of the Mainstreaming Gender Equity Programme, the Kathmandu School of Law and the Centre for Victims of Torture for sharing their organizations’ missions, goals and objectives, as well as the analyses of their programs’ implementation process and evaluations. We would also like to thank our many friends and colleagues at Tribhuvan University School of Law and the Development Law Associates in Kathmandu, Nepal, for helping us to better understand Nepali culture and traditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


De Voe, Pamela A. “Nepal: Community Mediation in a Non-Western Setting.” (a status report for ADR Programs, Washington University School of Law, St Louis, Missouri) (2004).


Smith, Steve. “Silences are the Loudest Voices.” http://www.bradford.ac.uk/acad/peace/pulhs/psp2_cr_pdf.


Student Interviews. Healing Classrooms Initiative in IRC Home-Based Schools in Kabul Province (May 2004).


ENDNOTES

1 Poudel, Keshab, “Battle for Recognition.”


3 Ibid. The Asian Development Bank also noted that the gender gap is increasing, not decreasing: for example between 1975 and 1993, life expectancy for men increased by 15 years while life expectancy for women increased by 11 years. Ibid., xiv.

4 Ibid.; “Nepal” in Library of Congress Country Studies. 1991. Available literacy rates vary, from 40 percent of females (Women Awareness Centre Nepal) to 27 percent (Asian Development Bank, 14). Also, within some communities, the rate is crushingly low, for example, among the dalit, women have a seven percent literacy rate.
Unequal access to education is due to many factors: (1) lack of resources for poor families—since females are considered the property of their husband’s family, using a natal family’s limited income to educate their female children is not considered economically sound; (2) girls begin work at a very young age; (3) parents are extremely concerned about their daughters’ virginity, resulting in the girls marrying early and (4) educational opportunities are more difficult logistically in mountainous and rural areas where there are not many schools for the local children.

5 While the accuracy of reported labor force participation is an ongoing issue, according to available figures, women comprise at least 40 percent of the workforce. This does not include women working in family businesses or on the family land (women usually do the farm work), most of which is unremunerated work. An early study (Asian Development Bank, 28-31) suggested that 74 percent of mountain women, 58 percent of hill women and 27 percent of Terai women reported being economically active. The latter figure for Terai women is thought to be underestimated, since an earlier study indicated that they were as active as women in the mountain and hill areas. (See Acharya and Bennett, “An Aggregate Analysis and Summary of 8 Village Statistics,” Asian Development Bank 28).


8 Note Deepak Thapa’s edited volume Understanding the Maoist Movement of Nepal and Li Onesto “Hope in the Himalayas: Women Rebels in Nepal.”


10 See Ibid, 95; Thapa (2003), xv;

11 Note for example, the American, Chinese and Cuban experiences.


16 De Voe, P., “Nepal: Community Mediation in a Non-Western Setting, a status report.”

17 The Centre for Victims of Torture (CVICT) is sponsored by the Department for International Development. CVICT has set up Community Mediation committees in a number of villages in three districts in Central and Eastern Nepal. Mediation teams are made up of men and women. For most women in rural Nepal, this is a new role and a new experience for them as they move beyond the privacy and confines of their homes. The Community Mediation teams consist of trained mediators and local leaders. Although not specifically set up to aid women, at least 25 percent of the Mediation Committees must be women. In at least one village, the women Mediators were found to be more successful than their male counterparts. Given cultural traditions where men are decision-makers who provide answers whereas women tend to be listeners and assistants, this result is not surprising, particularly considering that listening and guidance techniques, not an authoritarian approach, are essential in the mediation process.

18 The Mainstreaming Gender Equity Programme (MGEP), which assumes inequity in power and status between people, is a joint program of the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare and the United Nations. Its main objective is to increase women’s access to justice and to establish women’s rights. Therefore, it (1) provides legal aid to women in four areas (rape, trafficking, domestic violence and abortion) and (2) works to change Nepali law through education and making people more sensitive to women’s issues. While the Community Mediation Program in MGEP was designed at the national level, it is perceived as a grassroots system because it integrates local community members into the Mediation Committees. From the very beginning, the MGEP has involved local representatives from each gender, social class and caste. After doing a baseline survey concerning what cases were registered and comparing that with the number of actual cases of violence against women and lower castes, MGEP worked to get the community to see that there was a problem with violence within their community that was not being addressed in the legal system. Once the community saw the problem, committee members were recruited and trained in community mediation techniques. The committee membership had to be at least one-third women and have representatives from the different castes. It also included individuals who were recognized as leaders in their communities. Finally, there was geographic diversity: the villages were divided into nine wards or sections and at least one person was selected from each section. It is this indigenous group that would then make up the Community Mediation Committee for the village. As a control on political and family bias, MGEP monitors the community mediation sessions and their results. If a bias is observed, the mediator at fault will be retrained on the mediation process. This step was considered essential in implementing the program, since, as one MGEP staff person observed, “To change the mind-set of the people is very hard.”

19 The Kathmandu School of Law was established in 1999 with the community mediation program as part of its program and commitment to community service. Presently, they are working in the village where the school is established and in one neighboring village. Both villages have about 5,000 people. These two villages are considered laboratories for the community mediation program. Of the 12 community mediators in one village, nine are women and three are men. As with MGEP’s program, the villages will be divided into sections with the Mediation Committee reflecting this geographic variance as well as reflecting gender differences. These initial two villages will be models for other villages—demonstrating how the community mediation process works by mediating cases that deal with local violence and environmental issues.

20 The ground rules for mediation sessions are consistent and well established: (1) the party or parties asking for the mediation are called the First Side; (2) those asked to come to the mediation are called the Second Side; (3) a letter goes out to the participants, asking them to come to the Mediation; (4) people are asked not to use abusive language; (5) all present (including villagers who are a part of the audience) get a chance to speak one at a time; (6) the audience is asked to produce a solution to the conflict; (7) the parties consider solutions offered by the villagers/audience and (8) the process may take several days to reach a decision. Also, a conclusion is not forced on the conflicting parties and failure to produce a solution is an option but apparently does not happen often.

21 Personal communication with Indu Pant Ghimire, National Programme Manager, MGEP, April 8, 2005.

22 Ibid.


CRITICAL HALF
THE INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE’S (IRC’s) home-based schools program in Afghanistan provides education to girls who would otherwise not have access to it and elevates the status of women teachers in both the public and private arenas. Based on data collected by the IRC’s “Healing Classrooms Initiative”—an ongoing research initiative of the IRC’s Education Program—on the experiences of girls and women teachers in home-based schools, the girls have hope for a “bright future” and full participation in society and women teachers are viewed as making significant contributions to their communities and to the nation in general.
Introduction

The restrictions imposed by the Taliban regime on Afghan women and girls impacted all spheres of daily life. One of the most detrimental was the ban on women’s access to education. This restriction has had long-term ramifications and is a major factor in the continued social and political marginalization of Afghan women. This article looks at the potential of education for addressing the comprehensive exclusion of women and girls from development and from participation in their communities and society. After a general discussion of the links between lack of education and social exclusion of women, we look in some detail at the home-based schools program of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and at its potential for empowering both girl students and women teachers.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, there have been improvements in women’s access to education. By March 2003, almost 1.4 million girls were enrolled in school, a remarkable tenfold increase since 2001. Young people and their parents, especially in urban areas, have high expectations for education to open up new opportunities and to improve their lives and the importance of education underpins much of the discourse on national development. Education for women and girls is widely regarded as crucial for engaging 100 percent of the nation’s human resources (male and female) in the reconstruction and development efforts. Women’s rights activists view education as a critical force in redressing the widespread social exclusion of women and their limited participation in public and political spheres. Educated women gain awareness, skills and confidence, which enable them to contribute to community development and decision-making and to be respected for doing so. Educated women are better able to obtain jobs outside the home and contribute to family income, which elevates their status and their roles in family decision-making.

The reality, however, is that about 60 percent of school-aged girls remain out of school and the supply of appropriate education is not keeping up with the rising demand. It is clear that it will take many years of targeted efforts to narrow the huge gender disparities in access to education in Afghanistan. The legacy of civil war and the Taliban regime is a devastated education system, which, despite important developments and significant support from the international community, still has very limited reach, especially into rural areas. The number of schools across the country is woefully inadequate for the number of potential students and the teachers are generally under-qualified and under-supported, struggling to manage in difficult conditions.

While school construction, especially for girls, is a priority, the whole education system has to be renovated—curriculum, standardized assessment and evaluation, teacher training and so on. In the interim, the IRC and other non-governmental organizations are providing community- or home-based schooling for children in areas where there are no accessible government schools.

Education and Social Exclusion

March 8th is International Women’s Day and it is celebrated each year around the world with events and activities related to women’s rights, women’s achievements and women’s perspectives. This year, there was much for women activists at events in Kabul to celebrate: the appointment of the first female provincial governor only a few days earlier, the recent appointment of three women cabinet ministers and several deputy ministers and a woman presidential candidate in the October 2004 elections.

These developments are certainly encouraging and point to significant positive shifts in attitudes in Afghanistan toward women’s political participation. However, the realities for most rural women in Afghanistan can be quite different and their limited political participation can be
linked to their educational exclusion. Illiteracy and the lack of education create significant practical and socially constructed barriers to women’s social, cultural and political participation. Overall, figures indicate that 40 percent of voters in the last presidential elections were women, but the figures in many provinces were far lower.4

Literacy levels for Afghan women are approximately 14 percent—about one-third that of Afghan men.5 The percentage of women with access to primary, secondary or tertiary education stands at a mere 27 percent, less than half that of their male counterparts.6 Women make up only 19 percent of higher education students and their curriculum is largely limited to a small number of subject areas, such as education, medicine, language and literature.7

Although the number of women in public offices and activities is growing, there are still very few women participating in community fora and decision-making bodies, such as parent-teacher associations. There are efforts being made, through the countrywide National Solidarity Program for example, to establish women’s community committees,8 but the reality is that most Afghan communities continue to be controlled by men.9

One of the reasons given for women’s non-participation is their lack of education. Not only does this impact the way men think about women, it also contributes to women’s acceptance of the status quo and to their lack of confidence in their own capacity to be involved in making important decisions. In a recent study of gender and decision-making in Afghanistan, men who were asked to explain the reason women rarely participate in decision-making often said that women are “without knowledge”9—referring to the lack of formal education of women while ignoring any other forms of knowledge that women may have.

Limited participation of women is not just evident in the public sphere. Afghan women are also often excluded from family decision-making. For example, women may be excluded from participating in important family decisions regarding the education and marriage of their children because the women lack basic education. They are often considered by male family members as only able to contribute to decisions relating to the tasks and responsibilities of their traditional roles, such as food buying and preparation.10

Home-Based Schooling for Girls

Improving access to education is a means of improving the social, political and economic positions of women in Afghanistan and addresses the gender-based exclusions mentioned above. The government, however, is currently unable to provide access to school for all children; the number of schools does not meet the demand and for many children, especially in rural areas, there is no government school within walking distance. The situation is even more difficult for girls: there are far fewer schools for girls and girls’ parents are often reluctant to allow them to walk as far from home as boys. Another factor is that the closest government school may have only male teachers and male teachers who are unknown to the families. Complementary community-based education is therefore critical to provide access to education for otherwise marginalized children, especially girls.11

The IRC’s Education Program is one such alternative and currently supports home-based schools in different districts in four provinces of Afghanistan where there is limited access to government schools—Kabul, Logar, Paktia and Nangarhar. There are currently 193 such classes, serving a total student population of 5,764, more than 70 percent of whom are girls.

Teachers who are identified and accepted by the community are encouraged to create suitable classroom space in their homes or in a public building such as a mosque. These teachers are generally the most educated men and women in the community (usually with Grade 10 education, but sometimes lower) and are individuals who are considered trustworthy and reliable. Sometimes it is the mullah, other times it is a government schoolteacher who runs a home-based class in the afternoons. There are also Grade 12 students who attend school in the mornings and teach in the afternoons. The teachers run their school for three hours a day, six days a week, delivering the Ministry of Education curriculum.12 Classes are single-sex or co-ed, with male and female teachers. However, given the cultural restrictions for girls on traveling to distant government schools, home-based programs give priority to classes for girls. Similarly, communities give priority to recruiting women teachers because in some communities (but not all) it is understood that parents will send their girls only to classes taught by female teachers who are known and trusted in the community. IRC supports this process, visiting the families of potential women teachers and providing teacher training and regular supervision.

Girls’ Perspectives on Home-Schooling

Girls interviewed as part of the IRC’s Healing Classrooms Initiative believe that going to school is the route to a positive future in which they can complete their studies, go out to work and become active members of
their families and communities in a way that is not possible for girls who do not attend school. Although their home-based schools may not physically resemble traditional schools, the female students perceive these schools as very real and as highly significant in their lives. Although they have some concerns about the sustainability of their schools over time, the students appreciate that their lessons are the same as in the formal schools because they use the same curriculum. An IRC-supported, home-based school may not have all the resources students might like, but students express a genuine appreciation for being able to go to school and to study. “I am very interested to learn new things,” said one 12-year-old girl.

Many of the students made the direct link between going to school and “having a bright future” and becoming someone important like a doctor or a teacher. They identified learning manners, or tarbia, as something particularly good about going to school, but mentioned Pashto, Dari, mathematics, Islamiat, history and geography as well. “Learning to pray” and “learning to write” are what a boy and a girl in one class highlighted—although their classmate found it harder to single out any one thing. She said, “I like everything, reading, being able to write, doing prayers and learning manners.” There are some girls in the communities who are still not able to attend school, usually because of the very conservative views of their parents, and some of the students interviewed talked about how sorry they feel for these girls. One girl explained, “I really like coming to school and am very happy to learn something. In the future I can be part of my country’s future. I feel very sorry for the girls who don’t come—they’re just wasting their time.”

Attending a home-based school is clearly a positive education experience of which the girls are very proud. Even in very poor communities, girls make a specific effort to look like their idea of how a student should look. Positive experiences in a small school, with a familiar and trusted teacher, can build the girls’ and her family’s commitment to continued formal education. Protocols between the IRC and the Afghan Ministry of Education mean that girls who complete the home-based program will be accepted into secondary schools.

In terms of reversing the social exclusion of women and girls, the act of attending school is highly significant. It raises the public profile of girls and their needs and positions them as active members of their communities in a way that will hopefully build their interest and capacity for continued participation in public life.

Women Teachers

Although the primary focus of the education intervention is the girl students, the importance of creating teaching opportunities for women should not be underestimated. Teaching from within the security of their own homes allows women to play an active role in their communities while challenging the norms that exclude women from male-dominated community and development activities.

Although the women teachers have fewer opportunities for outside interaction with community members than do their male counterparts and are not, for example, able to enter the mosque and hear the special words that are said for all teachers during the Friday prayers, as teachers, the women’s contributions to the community are recognized and respected. They describe how they are shown respect and appreciation, especially by parents, and are called nusted by both young and old—a respectful title for a teacher. One woman teacher described how when there are parties and ceremonies in the village and everyone is sitting on the floor, someone will bring her a mattress. This opportunity for community participation can make a significant contribution to the lives of girls, to the community and to the country as a whole, and may be especially satisfying and empowering for women teachers who complete their secondary school studies but may not be allowed to continue to higher education.

The home-based teachers receive no compensation for their work and this can make it difficult for some of them to justify the time and energy they spend in teaching, since it brings no direct monetary benefit to their own families. However, some of the women teachers who participated in IRC—led teacher trainings indicate that those trainings—and especially the seminar on the psychosocial needs of children—help them to be more patient and to talk more with their own children. This is an indication of a small but significant way in which being a teacher can empower a woman within her own family, which is especially important in Afghanistan where women’s participation—or non-participation—in the “private” and “public” domains are linked. A woman’s participation as a teacher may also motivate her daughters to complete their education and to consider engaging in the future in activities in the public domain.

Conclusions

When the IRC education team asked home-based schoolteachers how they thought the lives of the girls who are attending school would be different from those who were not, one teacher replied with great certainty that for the girls who go to school, “their minds will be
different” and they will continue schooling and work outside the home. For those who don’t go to school, she was even more certain that they would just get married—at age 15 or 16—as they would not have been exposed to alternative possibilities, such as employment, and would not have the levels of education required to challenge family and community norms.

At this time of transformation and development in Afghanistan, the quality of education that is provided for girls is critical. If education is to fulfill its potential to contribute to social transformation in Afghanistan, gender concerns—beyond access to education for girls—need to be integrated across the education sector, with particular attention to teacher training and curriculum development.

Education alone cannot address the comprehensive, entrenched exclusion of women from the public domain in Afghanistan. New opportunities to access education, such as the home-based schools, must be linked to concrete strategies to ensure that girls have equal opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills in higher education, in the job market and in political participation at all levels. Women also need to be able to gain status and compensation equal to men for these skills and knowledge. For girls, attending school may be only a first, significant step in a process of increased participation in public and private life.

From the data discussed in this article, we see that home-based schooling for girls in Afghanistan is one way to work against social exclusion of women. This perspective, highlighted through the Healing Classrooms Initiative, is encouraging IRC’s Education Program in Afghanistan to shift from focusing on an access-to-education approach to addressing the strategic gender needs of women and girls. Through staff training and a specific focus on gender issues, gender is being integrated across the program and into the different components of the support for home-based schooling. This includes more focus on the gender implications of different teaching methods and on the gendered nature of psychosocial well-being. More attention is being given to the specific needs and perspectives of women teachers and to the possibilities of including gender-focused and women-specific content within teacher trainings, which would help to further strengthen women’s position in their families and communities. The experiences and results of such a shift would help to inform the approaches to gender equality in education being used by the Afghan Ministry of Education and others.

**Jackie Kirk** serve as a Research Associate of the McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women at McGill University, where her research focuses on education, gender and conflict, with a particular focus on the experiences of adolescent girls and women in schools. She is also an advisor to the Child and Youth Development and Protection Unit of the International Rescue Committee, with a focus on education, teacher development, gender and protection. She holds a Ph.D. in Education from McGill University.

**Rebecca Winthrop** is the Education Technical Advisor at the International Rescue Committee. She supports education programs in crisis and post-conflict contexts in more than 20 countries and leads the organization’s Healing Classrooms Initiative. She is pursuing her doctorate at Teachers College, Columbia University and her research is focused on teacher development for student well-being in crisis contexts.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**ENDNOTES**

1 The IRC is an international NGO with education programming in more than 20 crisis-affected contexts. Since 1997, the IRC has been providing support for education within Afghanistan and facilitating the educational reintegration of returning refugee students and teachers. See www.theirc.org.

2 Data from UNICEF Rapid Assessment of Learning Spaces http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_7982.html.


4 Of voters in the central Daikundi province, 53 percent were women and in Faryab in the north, 52 percent were women. In Nuristan, 50 percent were women, and Herat and Pakhta were only one percentage point behind. However, in Helmand and Ouzguran provinces, turnout by women was only two and seven percent, respectively. Security threats and lack of awareness and education were reported as major barriers (http://www.afg-electionresults.org). Furthermore, even if women did actually place their votes, there are indications that husbands and male family members chose the candidate for them. 
Data from UNICEF, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey.


Ibid.

The National Solidarity Program (NSP), led by the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and supported by many different donors, provides technical assistance and assigns grants to the rural communities for reconstruction and/or development projects that are planned and managed by the communities themselves through a democratic process. Community Development Councils are elected through secret ballot. These councils then lead a participatory process in the community to decide how the grants will be used. By May 2003, NSP implementation was ongoing in 8,268 villages (in 33 of Afghanistan’s 34 provinces) of which 7,348 had elected Community Development Councils (http://www.worldbank.org/af).

Wakefield, Shauna, Gender and Local Level Decision-Making: Findings from a Case Study in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The IRC has supported education for Afghans for many years, starting in 1985 with Afghan refugees in Pakistan. For more information, see their website www.theirc.org.

This curriculum is the same for girls and boys and at Grades 1-3 covers the basic subjects: Dari/Pashto, math, religious education, drawing and sport. At Grades 4-6, additional subjects are added such as science and health, history, geography, geometry and a second language.

For example, one girl said, “Yes, I also like to wear clean clothes and comb my hair and then people know that we are going to school.” She and her classmate don’t wear a specific uniform, but they do keep certain clothes special for school and change out of them once they arrive home after class. Another girl in a class that has adopted a simple uniform explains, “When I come to school people recognize that I am going to school because of my uniform and my clean white chador.” Student Interviews, Healing Classrooms Initiative Assessment in IRC home-based schools in Kabul Province.

Wakefield, Shauna, Gender and Local Level Decision-Making: Findings from a Case Study in Panjao.
“FORCED DISPLACED PEOPLE” ARE NORMAL PEOPLE under abnormal conditions. The Colombian conflict demonstrates that, from a gender perspective, there are specific transformations that displaced people experience during armed conflict; specifically the different impacts on men and women as victims and victimizers and how relationships between genders may be redefined as a result of war, displacement and the need to build a new life in the midst of war.
Displacement as Exclusion in the Colombian Conflict

FLOR EDILMA OSORIO PÉREZ AND OLGA LUCÍA CASTILLO OSPINA

Introduction

In Colombia, more than 3 million people have been forced to abandon their homes, fleeing from an increasingly complex and expanding war. Of this population, 70 percent had rural links by reason of employment, residence and/or land ownership. This has meant both an increase in and an acceleration of rural-urban migration. More than 4 million hectares of rural land have been “abandoned”; 57 percent of these plots are 20 hectares or less, which means that the most affected are the small land-holders. In Colombia, forced displacement, and the resulting marginalization of people, has become a military-political strategy designed to control territories. It is carried out at local and regional levels and is often articulated in economic terms. Forced displacement often excludes people from any sort of formal or familiar economy. For example, when rural people are displaced to urban areas, their income-generating agricultural skills are no longer useful. Thus, poverty and economic exclusion are an effect of forced displacement.

“Forced displaced people” are normal people under abnormal conditions. This paper discusses some of the transformations within gender relationships that displaced people experience during warfare. Specifically, we focus on two distinct “spheres” within which men and women suffer different experiences in the midst of war: (1) as direct and indirect participants in the actual conflict and (2) as individuals attempting to rebuild their lives while the war continues.

Direct and Indirect Participation in Conflict

Warfare is carried out and experienced in different ways by different groups of people—between the victors and the vanquished and between men and women of varying age groups. Considering their traditional public social role of strength, it is usually the men who commit themselves and join both legal and illegal armies, although some women also take on the role of victimizers. Even if some acts of war indiscriminately affect both men and women, men are typically more actively involved and run more risk of political violence, drug trafficking and common delinquency because of pre-assigned roles tied to gender and age.

Effect on Young Men and Women

Young men between the ages of 16 and 30 years of age are most often the direct participants in warfare. A 2003 estimate of the number of people under 18 actively involved in Colombian armed groups is a staggering 11,000, which is usually considered a conservative calculation. The forced recruitment of both young men and women by illegal, armed groups is common and one of the main motives for families to leave their homes.

When examining the population subject to forced displacement, we notice a significant absence of men aged 20 to 45, particularly men aged 25 to 34. The Masculinity Rate (MR), which indicates the number of men to every 100 women, shows that, while for the 10- to 14-year-old age group the rate is 108.9 men for every 100 women, the rate decreases dramatically to 81.7 men when considering men aged 15 to 54. From age 54 onwards—mature and old men—the MR increases again slightly. These are national figures and show the demographic effects that the armed conflict has had on men.

The data for women in the armed conflict differ. Of a total of 537 people killed in massacres in Colombia, 35 were women—that is, 6.5 percent. The death of most women in the armed conflict takes place out of direct combat, mostly as political executions or assassinations. This does not mean, however, that women do not participate actively in hostilities or that they are not victims of war. However, ultimately women are more directly affected by the social exclusion and marginalization of displacement because the male population has suffered more direct casualties of war.
Sexual Violence as a Tool of War

Another gendered aspect of violent conflict is sexual violence, which often occurs as a show of force, intimidation and punishment of women thought to be members of the enemy party. Studies of the Colombian bipartisan violence that shook the country in the 1950s acknowledge the symbolic role of sexual violence as a way to assault fathers and husbands as political enemies and women as both mothers and potential sources of future enemies. Today, women are raped because they are considered “military targets”; raping is direct punishment and a show of power over the population, especially females. Sexual relationships may also have strategic value among the civil population, particularly among women, who are frequently impregnated to control, subordinate and win the favor and trust of the communities. So, in a situation such as this, it is not even a question as to how to elect women leaders or how to increase women’s access to polling stations. In Colombia, women’s political exclusion is a deliberate and dehumanizing tool of war.

Beginning Again in the Midst of War

Undoubtedly, war generates a series of demographic and socio-cultural changes that crisscross established gender practices and relationships. Below are three important areas where these new beginnings redefine the relationships between men and women.

Female Survivors, Heads of Households

Warfare produces changes in the real and symbolic leadership within the household. Real, in the sense that women have to become providers for their families, and symbolic because being a household head is a social category that is acknowledged by other members of the community, by the family and by the woman herself. From June 2003 to December 2004, women’s leadership in displaced families in Colombia rose from 38 to 42.6 percent among the total households registered, while male leadership fell from 62 to 57.4 percent. The main trend is a substantial increase in female household leadership, although some men have also had to take on the leadership of single-parent homes, which radically transforms their relationships with their offspring. In a society in which most conventional families are made up of two parents and their children, families led by a single parent are at a strong disadvantage.

There is a wide spectrum of causes as to why women take on the role of household head, including desertion by or divorce of the male partner, single motherhood occurring before the arrival of the conflict and widowerhood as a direct cause of the conflict. Displaced women are also considered household heads when, although living with their partners, they have to provide for the family due to their partners’ sickness, unemployment, underemployment or sheer reluctance to assume the responsibility to their families that forced displacement entails.

The responsibility to protect and preserve life frequently ends up in women’s hands in the middle of extreme poverty and painful conditions. In many cases, this also means that women have to ask government and other institutions for help. In their identity as “displaced women,” they face a contradiction: they have to demonstrate that their families have been forcibly displaced from their homes in order to qualify for government help, but displacement is considered a social stigma that the women would rather not acknowledge.

The pervasiveness of displacement, however, has forced changes in the programs and policies designed to deal with “household heads” as they existed before the war, resulting in increased recognition and special benefits for “women household heads” and “displaced household heads.” This in turn has helped dispel some of the early stigma attached to those categories that generated distrust, fear and rejection.

Redefining Traditional Family Roles

Forced displacement abruptly compels both men and women to move from rural poverty to urban marginality and abject destitution. Often, only ad hoc jobs having little or nothing to do with the skills acquired through rural subsistence farming are available in the urban centers. In fact, 80.8 percent of the displaced peasants in Colombia now work in activities such as construction, which have no relation to agriculture.

Similarly, displacement from rural areas changes the traditional role of males as providers because women find it easier in urban areas to get unskilled jobs, such as domestic work. The most common jobs of displaced women are continuations of the domestic activities they had in their traditional role in the household. Displaced men and women are forced to work on a daily basis in all sorts of menial jobs, but as far as men are concerned, losing their plot of land means not only the loss of their possessions but also of their working skills and experience, which diminishes their self-esteem.

Another problem is the shortage of food available for displaced urban families. Given that most displaced people formerly worked in agricultural activities, they generally did not experience food shortages before they were displaced. This new problem places additional stress on both men and women, but on women in particular...
because they are more vulnerable due to the risks and nutritional demands of pregnancy. Displaced children may also be severely affected.

Beyond their own personal needs and safety, women's main concerns are for the present and future lives of their children. Displaced women feel intense loss, such as the loss of their loved ones and of their meager family patrimony. This feeling, in turn, compromises their feeling of power and control over their own futures.

Organizations of Displaced Groups

Displaced people often form new social networks. Some have even managed to create second-tier organizations at regional or national levels. According to some non-governmental organizations, in Colombia there are nearly 240 organizations constituted by displaced populations, at least 70 of them organized at regional and national levels.

Many of these organizations seek immediate solutions to basic problems, such as providing soup kitchens, neighbor care for children with parents at work or care for the sick. Groups may also be involved in managing and creating means to generate income, improving housing conditions and promoting the education of children, as well as other goals. Organizations of displaced groups often participate in larger networks and in the search for alternatives to end the armed conflict.

In these organizations, women play an essential role both as leaders and members, resulting in their greater visibility and social prominence. Women also find they can construct some niches of power for themselves in the groups, rediscover their potential and reassert their skills and capabilities beyond the family circle.

Conclusion

 Armed conflict affects all levels of society, having wide economic, political and social effects as well as personal consequences. War impacts males and females in different ways. In terms of the demographics of war-related deaths, the national figures regarding the Colombian conflict show strong gender and age differentials. Men between 25 and 34 years of age are the most vulnerable group, which has resulted in an increase in female heads of households.

The socio-cultural and demographic changes brought by war are significant for the individuals involved and for the country as a whole. In Colombia, the uncertainty and misery of the continuing conflict, which is not likely to end in the near future, makes the long-term effects of the war on the “forced displaced people,” many of whom are both women and new household heads, difficult to assess. Unless something is done, displaced people continue to be forced to find ways for themselves and their families to survive under conditions for which they are unprepared and ill-suited, and poverty and the economic consequences of social exclusion will certainly increase. While it is encouraging to see displaced women and men making efforts to start their lives again from scratch in the midst of the ongoing conflict, it is undeniably only the beginning of what will be a long and uphill battle.

FLOR EDILMA OSORIO PÉREZ, Social Worker, M.Sc. in Rural Development, and Ph.D. in Latin American Studies from Tolouse University (France), is Head of the Rural and Regional Development Department at Javeriana University, Bogotá, Colombia. She is a member of the research group “Conflict, Region and Rural Societies” at the same University. One of her research topics is forced migration with an emphasis on gender perspective.

OLGA LUCÍA CASTILLO OSPINA, Sociologist, M.Sc. Non-Parametric Statistics, and Ph.D. in Development Studies at Cardiff University (UK), is a Lecturer in the Rural and Regional Development Department at Javeriana University, Bogotá, Colombia. She is leader of the research group “Institutionalism and Rural Development” and a member of the research group “Conflict, Region and Rural Societies” at the same University. One of her research topics is Theories and Practices of Development in Armed Conflict context.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


DISPLACEMENT AS EXCLUSION IN THE COLOMBIAN CONFLICT


ENDNOTES
1 Figures obtained by the Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento between 1985 and 2003.
4 Mesa Mujer y Conflicto Armado (2003).
5 Figures obtained with data from the Register of the Sección de Movilidad Humana del Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social, Bogotá, Colombia.
6 Between October 2000 and March 2001, one woman was killed for political reasons, three went missing each month, and one was killed in combat every 25 days. Comisión Colombiana de Juristas (1996 and 2001) Informe Anual, Bogotá, Colombia.
11 Cfr. Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social records.
13 Cfr. Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social records.
15 Cfr. Secretariado Nacional de Pastoral Social records.
IN THE DECADE SINCE THE END OF THE WAR IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, international authorities have played a prominent role in the governance of the region. During that time, the rights and status of Bosnian women have deteriorated. Although Bosnian women enjoyed significant gender equality before the outbreak of hostilities in 1991, post-war decision-making by the international community has largely ignored women’s rights and needs. It is time to compile a statistical record of Bosnian women’s inequality in areas such as employment and property rights and to hold international authorities accountable.
Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Erosion of Women’s Rights Under International Governance

TAMMY SMITH

Introduction

From the spring of 1991 to late autumn 1995, the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereinafter Bosnia) endured a war that killed approximately 200,000 citizens and displaced more than 50 percent of the area’s 4.4 million inhabitants. Since the war ended in 1995, Bosnian women—who enjoyed a high degree of formal equality within the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—have witnessed a gradual erosion of their rights and status. Bosnian women’s status has declined in perceptible and important ways: local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) report that domestic violence has increased, while women’s ability to hold onto scarce jobs has declined. There has also been a drop in women’s participation in public and political life.

The post-war erosion of women’s rights is especially perplexing in Bosnia, given the domination of international agencies over Bosnian governing institutions. This trend is even more worrisome if one considers that international bodies have increasingly engaged in post-conflict governance around the globe since the beginning of Bosnian peace implementation in early 1996. Given the proliferation of international interventions in post-war governance over the past decade, it is time to ask some tough questions about the role of international actors in securing women’s rights and status in post-war social, political and economic reconstruction.

With a decade of work toward peace implementation since the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in December 1995, Bosnia provides ten years in which to view the international community’s performance. This article seeks to be a springboard for a long-overdue discussion of post-war governance and how international actors may contribute to the social exclusion of women in post-conflict societies, focusing on the gender inequalities produced by bureaucratic structures and legal mechanisms in states under international authority—with a specific focus on women’s employment, the monitoring and reporting of human rights violations and the drafting of new legislation.

Women’s Employment

A household survey conducted in post-war Bosnia by the European Commission and the World Bank indicated that women have lower employment rates and are paid 20 to 50 percent lower wages than their male counterparts. As early as 1996, the Human Rights Department of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Human Rights Coordination Center (HRCC), organized by the Office of the High Representative (OHR), began monitoring discriminatory employment practices in Bosnia, focusing almost exclusively on ethnic and religious minorities. One exception was a 1999 OSCE report on employment discrimination, which did include a gender analysis and warned of two practices that negatively impacted women: (1) women were fired or laid-off to give jobs to returning soldiers, disabled war veterans and families of deceased soldiers and (2) employers were legally able to force women to retire at an earlier age than men.

Despite this report and the above-cited survey by the World Bank and the European Commission, subsequent OSCE projects designed to support fair employment practices continued to focus on discrimination against ethnic minorities and linked the employment issue to minority returns. Moreover, even though leaflets outlining employees’ rights distributed by OSCE briefly mentioned gender discrimination, a recent caption on a 2005 OSCE press release left no doubt about the identity of the program’s intended beneficiaries: “Fair employment means jobs for everyone, regardless of ethnicity and religion.”

Gender Omitted From Human Rights Priorities

From the outset of the Bosnia missions in 1996, both the HRCC and the OSCE defined human rights exclu-
Legislation Insensitive to Gender

The lack of attention by the international community to the protection of women’s rights has produced not only gaps in monitoring and reporting gender-based human rights violations but also deficiencies in drafting new domestic legislation. Bosnia’s Federation Entity Criminal Code for example, drafted by international lawyers, initially did not recognize the concept of rape within marriage, even though NGOs and local police reports showed that domestic violence had been rising steadily since 1995 as traumatized, demobilized soldiers returned home. When the Code was amended to address this shortcoming, instead of defining rape as the lack of consent by the victim, the new provision defined rape in terms of the perceived force used by the perpetrator. Responsibility for these kinds of omissions is difficult to track, moreover, since the international community does not readily publicize its role in the drafting process and refers to the law as a domestic product and obligation after its adoption or imposition.

As a result of deficiencies in the laws drafted by international lawyers, women also face uphill challenges in exercising their rights to property in Bosnia. With respect to the privatization of socially owned apartments (i.e., those owned by the state), the new Federation Entity laws enable state employees or retirees to receive vouchers, based on the number of years they worked, toward the purchase of an apartment to which they have an occupancy right. Although spouses may combine their years of employment when calculating the total value of their voucher, and a surviving spouse may claim the working years of a deceased spouse, a surviving spouse may not combine his or her years of employment with those of a deceased spouse. As a consequence, war widows—with their longer life spans and lower rates of death during the war—are disproportionately disadvantaged, a problem noted by the Ombudsmen Institution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.11 Emblematic of the continuing lack of regard for the unequal gender impact of this legislation, the OSCE’s Property Law Implementation Program, which meticulously records statistics on property claims on a monthly basis disaggregated by ethnicity, has never included a statistical breakdown by gender despite the Ombudsmen’s conclusions.

Holding the International Community Accountable

Without questioning the need to hold states in transition accountable to their obligations under international covenants and treaties, it is naive and irresponsible to ignore the dominant role of international agencies in post-war decision-making. As we have seen in Bosnia, by failing to hold the international community accountable, we pave the way for establishing governance structures insensitive to gender inequalities. Once established, such bureaucratic and legal systems are difficult to change.

Although the international community in Bosnia has made some progress with respect to the protection of women’s rights, these gains have been made primarily through the initiatives of a handful of dynamic individuals—notably Madeline Reese at the United Nations (UN) High Commission for Human Rights and Maryann Rukavina at the OSCE—who pushed programs and internal policies supporting Bosnian women’s empowerment and human rights protections within their own organizations and spearheaded the establishment of the Gender Coordination Group (GCG). Their work, together with others on the GCG, has yielded policies at the UN for addressing the needs of trafficked women and put pressure on the OHR to consider gender equality. Meanwhile, gender quota provisions pushed by the GCG and reluctantly incorporated into the revised Bosnian election law by an OSCE-led drafting committee in 1999, produced a record number of women elected to post-war regional and federal parliaments in 2000.12 This supports the claim that the international community has a role in reducing women’s political exclusion in post-conflict Bosnia.

Subsequent actions on the part of these same organizations, while commendable, have demonstrated how fleeting change can be when it is tied to individual initia-
tives. With the departure of Ms. Rukavina, for example, the OSCE discontinued her Women in Politics program, which had been one of the international community’s only effective assistance efforts supporting women’s political mobilization and capacity building. Since the program’s dismemberment, women political candidates have failed to match their record-setting 2000 electoral performance. On the human rights side, the dissolution of the OHR Human Rights Office, which had belatedly recognized the importance of gender equality in 2001, resulted in the erosion of that commitment less than a year later as the OHR’s program merged with OSCE’s Human Rights Department. Meanwhile, the UN continues to struggle with devising appropriate responses to its own employees’ engagement in the trafficking of women and has been implicated in a difficult battle over the alleged wrongful dismissal of a whistleblower. Such backsliding emphasizes the need for overall systemic change within institutions toward a commitment to gender equality rather than individual agencies’ periodic acquiescence to the demands of a few determined women.

The need for systemic change is also clear when one looks beyond Bosnia’s borders to international efforts in places such as Kosovo. Facing similar challenges to postwar governance, including rising rates of violence against women and women’s unemployment, members of the international community have repeated many of the same mistakes with respect to protection of women’s rights and status. Not one woman, for example, was appointed to the authority regarding the implementation of the OSCE’s program. Meanwhile, the UN continues to struggle with devising appropriate responses to its own employees’ engagement in the trafficking of women and has been implicated in a difficult battle over the alleged wrongful dismissal of a whistleblower. Such backsliding emphasizes the need for overall systemic change within institutions toward a commitment to gender equality rather than individual agencies’ periodic acquiescence to the demands of a few determined women.

The need for systemic change is also clear when one looks beyond Bosnia’s borders to international efforts in places such as Kosovo. Facing similar challenges to postwar governance, including rising rates of violence against women and women’s unemployment, members of the international community have repeated many of the same mistakes with respect to protection of women’s rights and status. Not one woman, for example, was appointed to the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to the Interim Administrative Council, a quasi-governing body comprised of ethnic Serbs, Albanian Kosovars and an UNMIK representative. Although UNMIK established an Office of Gender Affairs, the Swedish NGO “Kvinna till Kvinnan” notes that the gender office is organizationally detached from the rest of the mission, yielding two negative outcomes: through its organizational isolation it has weakened efforts at overall gender-sensitive programming while fostering a notion among UNMIK’s predominantly male senior staff that UNMIK is meeting its obligations simply by establishing the office. The result has been a repetition of many of the problems already seen in Bosnia, including the exclusion of women’s rights from human rights monitoring, disappointingly low numbers of women elected to public office and the early drafting of laws without gender provisions. Strikingly, an International Helsinki Federation report in 2000 noted that within international agencies themselves, few women are in leadership positions, a condition that sends a negative message to local Kosovar authorities regarding the importance of women’s inclusion. In the end, it is difficult to make or judge quantitative assertions about women’s declining status in Bosnia since no office—governmental or international—systematically collects and publishes statistics that are disaggregated based on gender for important issues such as labor participation, property ownership, access to credit, educational attainment or violent crime. Bosnia has never submitted a report under the 1985 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Bosnia is the only former-Yugoslav republic for which UN Development Program statistics are not available. Neither the World Bank, International Labor Organization nor UN Development Fund for Women provides statistics on Bosnian women’s post-war status. Anecdotal evidence and occasional in-depth reports suggest that women’s status has worsened in many areas. As recognized at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, however, without a statistical record it is difficult to argue the presence of widespread inequality and the need for structural change. In their 2004 CEDAW shadow report, Bosnian NGOs took the Bosnian government to task for not collecting gender-disaggregated statistics.

However, holding Bosnian officials accountable only addresses part of the deficiencies in the system. To ensure that durable state institutions and laws established in the early years of post-war governance adequately address gender equality, international actors need to be held to the same standards they themselves set for states under their authority.

TAMMY SMITH was a Senior Human Rights analyst in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe from 1996-1998, where she produced a weekly report of human rights trends throughout the country. In 1998, as the OSCE Governance Program Coordinator, Ms. Smith designed and implemented good governance programs, including “Women in Governance” and a program aimed at improving municipal governance. She left Bosnia in 1999 to begin doctoral study in Sociology at Columbia University but has returned to Bosnia twice to conduct evaluations for the OSCE. She is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at Columbia University.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bosnia and Herzegovina Shadow Report to the UN CEDAW Committee “Violence Against Women,” (January 2004).


POST-WAR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: THE EROSION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS UNDER INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE


Human Rights/Rule of Law Department, Office of High Representative. “Gender Equality,” (May 1, 2001).


OSCE Mission to Bosnia. “OSCE to Distribute Leaflets on Labour Relations – Know Your Rights to Protect Your Rights.”


Endnotes

4 The December 1997 Peace Implementation Council conference gave the OHR the power to remove public officials who violate the Peace Agreement and the discretion to impose laws. The OSCE and the related Election Appeals Sub-Commission in the past have possessed the power to defer elections and strike electoral candidates from voting lists, while the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina can remove officials related to policing.
5 The full text of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina can be viewed at http://www.ohr.int/dpa.
7 This discriminatory practice also has implications for gender discrimination in the voucher program for the sale of socially owned property.
12 It should be noted that many of the successes women have achieved within international agencies has come through international actors’ cooperation with and support from local women organized in grassroots NGOs. Balkan women, for example, demanded and won representation in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe even though women’s voices were initially excluded from the organizing “tables.” OSCE’s incorporation of gender quotas into the Bosnian election laws was accomplished through the combined efforts of the Women in Politics program and locally mobilized women.
16 For more information and full coverage of the Conference, see http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing.
SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN POST-CONFLICT CONGO

JUDITHE REGISTRE

Introduction

The term “social exclusion,” defined by scholars as stigmatizing a group or category of people by marginalizing them in their society, is multidimensional and dynamic in how it impacts the lives of actual people. Although poverty is part of social exclusion, the concept is much broader than that. Within the context of post-conflict countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), social exclusion plays itself out in a number of ways, touching on a wide array of gender, ethnic, security and economic issues. It can result from economic, political, cultural or even interpersonal inequities. In conflict and post-conflict countries, it becomes all too clear that these circumstances often lead to violence, ranging from domestic violence to armed warfare.

Social exclusion occurs when people’s access and right to participate in public and community life are restricted. The development community has identified this as a key problem because restricted access to public and community life eclipses choice. When choice is denied, none of the other good things needed for development can happen—“democracy,” “empowerment,” “active citizenship”—if people, particularly women, are denied the opportunity to choose change.

Before the 1996 conflict in the DRC to oust President Mobutu from power erupted, there was a social malaise in the country due to social and political repression by the Mobutu government. Under Mobutu, it was not safe to question the circumstances of your reality, no matter how dire. To do so would only have made things worse for you and your family.

After Mobutu was removed from power, the active repression was alleviated, but the social malaise that had caused the nation’s collective consciousness to atrophy remained. Add to that the devastating strain that conflict places on a country’s economy, resources and social services and you have a very complicated situation, one in which reconstruction often takes a backseat to survival.

Addressing Social Exclusion in the DRC

When addressing the problems of social exclusion, the DRC presents many challenges. Academically, the term can be used to analyze some of the challenges citizens—women and children especially—face in conflict and post-conflict countries. But it is important to keep in mind that the case study for any academic theory involves real people. In Congo, government institutions are staffed by some of these real people—many still recovering from the repression of the Mobutu regime—without critical resources and experience. So, unfortunately, in many ways the system itself continues to perpetuate old mechanisms of social exclusion.

Congo’s history is replete with corruption and exploitation. These characteristics remain central parts of the society today. There are no policies in place to meet people’s basic needs. In the rare instances where the policies do exist, they cannot be implemented unless the persons responsible for doing so stand to realize some personal gain. This has created a void that has been passed from generation to generation limiting the country’s and its people’s potential. Today, the DRC’s political system and lack of any real infrastructure creates social exclusion by mismanaging natural resources, limiting communication and limiting access to education, all of which reinforce poverty. Although the country is rich in natural resources—diamonds, copper, zinc, gold and silver to name a few—it has a per-capita GDP of only $700, making its people among the poorest in the world. The government is unable to leverage its natural wealth to create jobs or provide social services.

Another obstacle in addressing social exclusion is that marginalized and excluded groups may appear to tacitly accept their exclusion. While such tacit acceptance may seem passive and self-defeating, it is in fact the result of the exclusion of those groups from access to the economic, social and political tools of em-
powerment. As in many societies, social exclusion in Congo has its roots in inequality between members of the community.

**Exclusion of Women**

In the DRC, women as a group are perceived as weak and unimportant in the management of the community. Women are believed to be by nature intellectually and morally inferior to men and unable to make decisions regarding the life of the community. As a result, women are caught in a “Catch 22” of exclusion. Because of perceived weak intellectual and moral capacity, women are excluded both from community decision-making and from access to education because why would one need education if one can not participate in community decision-making? This is precisely why women for Women International’s work in the DRC is so important. Our programs help women to break the cycle of exclusion by creating new social networks. Information is a source of power, particularly for women and girls. In the past, limits on women’s access to information limited their power. Our work with women at the grassroots level removes those old limits and changes perceptions of inequality.

Empowering socially excluded women in a setting such as Congo, where rape and gender-based violence and the resulting social stigma were used as weapons throughout the conflict, must recognize the additional trauma that this inflicts on women. Women are left psychologically and emotionally destroyed and physically torn apart, with the result that many isolate themselves out of shame, fear and very real post-traumatic stress. The long-term health consequences for women are both physical and emotional and, if not addressed, can hinder a woman’s ability to take care of herself and her children. Unfortunately, due to the cruelty of war and other social ills, women in the DRC, as a group, find themselves with multiple memberships in the different clubs of the socially excluded.

**Other Excluded Groups**

Traditional Congolese societies function as relationships between the weak and the powerful—exploiters and exploitees, masters and subjects—in brief, those who lead and those who follow. For example, the pygmy people of Congo suffer physically from the rest of the population by their small, short stature. In addition, their nomadic way of living is used to deny them access to and recognition in society. As nomadic people, they are absent from the social structure that would serve to justify their full participation in the life of the community.

Internally displaced persons and refugees are also a category of people in Congolese society with significant challenges. Their social exclusion arises from their status as guests or strangers in the community. The war in Congo has forced the displacement of numerous people into communities where they are often not welcome because the communities’ fragile social and economic resources are already at or perilously close to their breaking point. Most communities are unable to absorb any more people, thus further ostracizing those who have already been forced from their homes by violence and insecurity.

This situation is particularly difficult for refugees from neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Burundi, some whom have been living in Congo for 20 years unable either to return to their countries of origin or be integrated into Congolese society. Having lived in exile for so long, many of these refugees remain deeply attached to the romantic idea of their place of origin, even though the home they left behind may no longer exist. Nearly two decades of living in limbo has caused the refugees’ fear to grow so intense that even when the government of their country of origin tells them that it is safe to return, they are unable to make the voyage home. And even for those people who are willing to return, the physical and financial cost of such a trip often makes it impossible. For persons displaced by conflict, their social exclusion affects them at the core of their identity and sense of belonging to a community.

Despite ostensible cultural standards of hospitality to make guests feel at home, a stranger remains a stranger in the DRC where tribalism is the organizing principle. Tribalism is a simple refusal to accept “the other”—to reject all that is not part of your own ethnic group or with which you are familiar. These are acts that reinforce differences and social exclusion in society and especially affect women, who are a majority of the world’s displaced.

**Women for Women International in the DRC**

Since opening the DRC office in 2004, Women for Women International has aimed to create a space where women who are socially excluded have the opportunity to identify and discuss the factors that have kept them from being capable and active members of their society. Working with all types of marginalized women, especially emotionally excluded women who have been raped, violated, rejected and left to die a silent death, Women for Women International has worked toward social inclusion by training women to participate in governance, decision-making and resource allocation. After a year...
of operation, we witnessed the first group of graduates from the program in September 2005 put into practice all they learned.

These women have expressed a need and desire for additional involvement in our program, out of fear that they may lose all they have learned if they do not have a space for continued learning. They pledged to create an environment where they can continue to grow; a space that will allow them to think beyond their current status as survivors. They are a testament to the enormous challenges facing women in Congo, where a social structure that would allow the growth of all its citizens is limited by a state unable to provide for their basic needs and a society that restricts opportunity. Although history has demonstrated that the Congolese people are resilient, they need an enabling environment where their entrepreneurial and other skills can be fully developed and applied. If that space is created, women will take full advantage of it.

The women who have participated in the Women for Women International program have demonstrated what can be achieved in terms of social mobility with very limited resources under very difficult circumstances using their sponsorship funds. The program has given them a desire to be more and to do more. Despite their social exclusion, women must be involved in changing their situation and these women are doing just that.

In Congo, this is critical given that the political and social systems reinforce social exclusion. Therefore, it is important to continue to support the type of initiatives we implement at Women for Women International. Supporting those who are socially excluded to challenge their exclusion and unfair social status is fundamental to achieving inclusion of those excluded. Only with the active involvement of the excluded working to expand the inclusiveness of their societies will progress and change happen and peace be sustained.

ENDNOTES
ABOUT
WOMEN FOR WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

Women for Women International provides women survivors of war, civil strife, and other conflicts with tools and resources to move from crisis and poverty into a civil society that promotes and protects peace, stability, and self-sufficiency. It provides services to socially excluded program participants aimed at addressing their short-term economic needs while enhancing and building their capacity to create long-term economic solutions. In the process, intensive training in women’s economic, political, and social roles and value in society is incorporated. This strategy stems from Women for Women International’s conviction that economic solutions are not sustainable if they are not paired with active participation in social and political discourse. The organization has program offices in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, and Rwanda.