

Critical Reflection

Following the KOFF roundtable on

Promoting Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and Peace Processes

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Fourteen years after UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" was passed, formal peace negotiations remain clearly male-dominated processes of decision-making: Some of the latest figures by UN WOMEN offer a sobering picture of women's participation and gender equality in peace processes: From 1992 to 2011, fewer than 4 per cent of signatories to peace agreements and less than 10 per cent of negotiators at peace tables were women.¹ And out of 585 peace agreements from 1990 to 2010, only 92 contained any references to women². The United Nations (UN) itself, one of the key international governmental players involved in negotiations and facilitating peace processes, has so far had a rather mixed track record in promoting women's rights and gender-awareness in peace processes: Only a few women have been nominated by the UN as chief mediators, and key

UN institutions like the recently established High-Level Independent Panel to re-think peace operations fall short of the objective of equal participation of women³.

In the wake of the 14th anniversary of UNSCR 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS), these critical reflections discuss the main challenges on women's participation in peace processes and potential implications for Swiss actors involved in peacebuilding.

Key challenges for women's participation

A recent GIZ publication in early 2014 highlights the main challenges of women's participation in peace processes⁴. Among them, the following ones were particularly highlighted:

¹ UN Women (2012), "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections Between Presence and Influence" in UN Women Sourcebook on Women, Peace and Security, p. 2-3. www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/media/publications/en/01overview.pdf

² C. Bell and C. O'Rourke (2010), "Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and their Agreements," International and Comparative Law Quarterly, p. 59.

³ UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon appointed fourteen members for this panel out of which eleven are men and three are women. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2014/sgsm16301.doc.htm>. Ironically enough, Ban Ki-Moon announced these nominations on the 31st October 2014, the 14th anniversary of UNSCR 1325.

⁴ C. Reimann (2014), Promoting Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and Peace Processes. GIZ study prepared by the programme Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Rights, Eschborn: GIZ.

The empirical evidence coming from different conflict contexts which have seen different peace processes clearly suggest that “traditional” patriarchal social-cultural stereotypes of women as victims and uncritical advocates for peace are concrete obstacles for women entering the official peace process⁵. These stereotypes go often hand in hand with a strict gender-specific division of labor in the private and public spheres.

Against this background, in many countries such as Afghanistan, Libya or Syria, women’s activists and women rights organisations find it difficult to have access to the public sphere in the form of the official negotiation teams and tracks I decision-makers. The latest efforts in stopping the violence in the Syrian war such as the peace talks “Geneva II” in January 2014 are here a case in point: L. Brahimi, the then in charge United Nations and Arab League Special Envoy to Syria, was called upon by different international and local organisations to include women and ensure women’s participation in these talks⁶. This happened in the light of Syrian women’s activists and women’s rights organisations and their voices having been largely sidelined and ignored by the UN in chief mediators, diplomats and other international organisations. This example and many others reflect the lack of political will and sheer ignorance among some diplomats and international organisations.

Following from that, many official track I mediators and negotiators have only little knowledge of gender equality and women’s rights and how both relate to peace processes and peace negotiations. The training and capacity

building on gender issues and WPS for diplomats and staff of foreign ministries greatly vary from country to country and may range from short optional introductions to the topic to regular and tailor-made capacity building and supervision. In general, how far diplomatic staff engages with gender issues seems down to the personal interest and motivation of the individual staff. “Gender and mediation trainings” organised by UN and other organisations exist – but there are mainly targeted at women’s organisations, women’s activists and female diplomats. How far these trainings have enabled women to have a stronger role and say in peace negotiations is up for debate and needs to be further analysed.

Women’s access to the official peace process is also hampered by a great level of insecurity and personal threats, sometimes death threats or “character assassination”, for women demanding their participation such as in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Additionally, conflict parties and third parties are under heavy stress and international pressure to hammer out a peace deal: This “tyranny of urgency” combined with the highly technical nature of high-level negotiations make it difficult to discuss more complex and less self-evident issues such as women’s rights or gender equality.

Implications for Swiss actors

In the light of these challenges, here are the following implications and potential for Swiss governmental and non-governmental actors engaged in peacebuilding and support for local capacities for peace processes. These implications take into account and are based on

⁵ C. Reimann, op cit.

⁶ See for the petition of one of the leading women’s organization in the field of Peace and Security Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) www.wilpfinternational.org/geneva-ii-petition/.

international lessons learned on women's participation in peace processes ⁷. These implications are all well in line with the official gender policies of the current Swiss government and the updated Swiss National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 of the year 2010⁸.

Peace processes such as in Guatemala showed how important it is to strategically and effectively link women among track I, II and III actors and their strategies – as early as possible in a peace process. Swiss governmental institutions have here an essential facilitation role as they have access to both official mediators and civil society organisations in many conflict countries of concern. Switzerland should continue to offer its “good offices” by ensuring a greater participation of women and nominating more women mediators for participating in formal and informal peace processes.

Ideally, early on and prior to official peace processes, local and international qualified women on track II and III as (future) mediators and negotiators should be identified and supported through tailor-made trainings, supervision and coaching.

A database for female mediators like the one of the US-based NGO “Institute for Inclusive Security” is here a right step into the right direction⁹ - this database offers a rich source of information, for strategic advice and inspiration for similar initiatives. The Swiss governmental

institutions could develop a database on Swiss women's mediators and their specific skills and backgrounds available for governmental institutions as well as for specialised NGOs. The Swiss Expert Pool of the Swiss Foreign Ministry could play here a crucial role setting up and administering this database.

Swiss governmental and NGOs should (continue to) support the documentation of “success stories” and “good practices” on women's participation and “women-men tracks I-III alliances” in peace processes. A particular emphasis should be on new and creative initiatives of peacebuilding by female and male youth next to “traditional” local capacities for peace and conflict resolution initiatives, which promote or respect women's rights and their roles.

Governmental agencies as well as NGOs could more strongly use UNSCR 1325 as a lobbying and advocacy tool in bilateral and multilateral discussions to promote women's increased and active participation in peace negotiations. Both governmental and non-governmental should assess the specific needs of staff and policy-makers on implementing UNSCR 1325 and on all other policy other instruments on “Women, Peace Security”.

Government institutions should (continue to) support regional organisations in their monitoring and implementation capacities of women's participation in peace processes. The current Swiss presidency of the OSCE is here a great window of opportunity for steering debate on women's participation in positively influencing the resolution of political crisis like the one in

⁷ See again C. Reimann, op cit. See also Cordula Reimann (2012), Gender and Peace Mediation. Peace Mediation Essentials. Bern & Zurich: MSP swisspeace/CSS ETH Zurich.

Aula of the Kollegienhaus, Petersplatz 1, Basel
⁹ See www.inclusivesecurity.org/women-waging-peace-network/ or www.inclusivesecurity.org/search-bios/

Ukraine¹⁰. Other regional organisations such as ECOWAS or the African Union have played increasingly important roles in mediation and negotiations and could be further supported in their efforts of gender mainstreaming in general and in increasing women's participation in regional peace conferences and processes.

Governmental institutions should continue to advocate for and support the deployment of gender advisors in regional organisations such as the OSCE and UN to support mediators in securing adequate gender-specific provisions in peace agreements. In this respect, a particular emphasis should be put on allocating and earmarking funds and budget lines for implementing the gender-specific provisions and a gender-specific monitoring of peace agreements and peace processes. Governmental institutions could here support newly set up or existing "national machineries" for women's empowerment or gender equality.

The way forward: Reframing peace negotiations

With its NAP, Switzerland should continue to support and spearhead regional, national and local initiatives for databases and pools for women's mediators and peacebuilding experts, and female and male trainers on mediation and gender. Switzerland as a member state of international and regional organisations such as UN and OSCE should further lead by example and appoint more women as mediators and advisors to mediation and peace processes.

¹⁰ swisspeace is starting a pilot project for a transnational Russian-Ukrainian dialogue, focusing on the peacebuilding role of civil society organizations, strengthening their spaces in building regional networks for women's human rights with a strong focus on knowledge sharing and community building process

While the current peace processes are highly complex political processes of social change, the above analysis also underline that the very nature of track I-dominated peace negotiations have to be seriously rethought and reframed: Peace negotiations should be redefined as the political starting point for a root-and branch transformation of the wider society with the aim of sustainable processes and structures of social and gender justice.

Core is a consultancy and training firm, which specialises in conflict sensitivity, gender, and conflict transformation, and wider processes of social change. It offers strategic advice, coaching and tailor-made trainings for local and international governmental and non-governmental organisations, teams and individuals.

swisspeace

swisspeace is a practice-oriented peace research institute. It carries out research on violent conflicts and their peaceful transformation. The Foundation aims to build up Swiss and international organizations' civilian peacebuilding capacities by providing trainings, space for networking and exchange of experiences. It also shapes political and academic discourses on peace policy issues at the national and international level through publications, workshops and conferences. swisspeace therefore promotes knowledge transfer between researchers and practitioners. swisspeace was founded in 1988 as the Swiss Peace Foundation in order to promote independent peace research in Switzerland. Today the Foundation employs more than 40 staff members. Its most important donors are the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss National Science Foundation and the United Nations.

Center for Peacebuilding (KOFF)

The Center of Peacebuilding (KOFF) of the Swiss Peace Foundation swisspeace was founded in 2001 and is funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and 45 Swiss non-governmental organizations. The center's objective is to strengthen Swiss actors' capacities in civilian peacebuilding by providing information, training and consultancy services. KOFF acts as a networking platform fostering policy dialogue and processes of common learning through roundtables and workshops.

Critical reflections

In its *critical reflection* publications, swisspeace and its guest speakers critically reflect on topics addressed at roundtables. They both make a note of the arguments put forward during the roundtables and carry on the discussion in order to encourage further debates.