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Women's Contributions to Peace Processes: What Does the New Research Tell Us?

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini
Director of the Policy Commission
Women Waging Peace

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Sanam Anderlini: For me, this is really an important place to be speaking about our work, because one of our goals is to make sure that the material we have gets onto reading lists of the kinds of courses that are taught in all the universities you come from -- so that it begins to get into the teaching and into the thinking of people who are studying these issues at a key formative period. At the moment, we're still struggling with people in the policy institutions who think in a very different way, and we're trying to change that mindset after these people have gone through not only academic training, but also professional training. So this is why this audience and the academic community is such an important part of the process for us. I will talk a little bit about what the Policy Commission has been, why we need to expand a little bit more, what we did, and then outline some of the key findings of our reports.

Framing the Research Project

In 2002 Women Waging Peace launched the Policy Commission, which was essentially a three-year field-based research project. The goal was to produce 10-15 stand-alone case studies on women's contributions to peace processes and post conflict reconstruction, drawing on key themes including: conflict prevention, peacemaking, and post conflict reconstruction. We tried to do *quantitative* research where we could, but to be honest with you, it's hard to do quantitative work on what women are doing in peace processes and to know how you would measure impact. We had many meetings to try to figure out how you would do this, and decided that it's beyond our scope right now. Some of our studies, specifically on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration issues, did have a quantitative element, because it was about counting numbers of women or girls that demobilized officially. But most of the others don't have quantitative work – it was mainly qualitative. It became basically a set of 12 stand-alone case studies. Some of them are still coming out. Seven are out and are on our website, three are in production, and the other two are close to the end.

We tried to look at it in terms of diverse regions, diverse types of conflicts, and different phases of conflict. And we wanted it to be pragmatic and operational so it would be useful and beneficial to the international policymakers and practitioners, but also for scholars. We started out by speaking to about sixty to seventy people in the wider community, from academics to policymakers and practitioners. We wanted to see what kind of things they were looking at, what vocabulary they used, and what issues were of importance to them.

One of the things that came out of one of our meetings was we need to provide a context of where women were before the conflict started. Because, very often we started by saying, "In Liberia, this is what women are doing." But it didn't mean much if people did not know *what the situation was for women in Liberia beforehand.* So, you'll see that in a lot of the reports; we've woven in the history of the conflict with discussion of the world of women in that struggle, whether in South Africa or the Israel/Palestine situation.

The other thing we really wanted to understand was what were the blockages we were dealing with? Since this was 2002, we already had Resolution 1325, which talks about women's participation in the peace processes. But really, we weren't seeing any movement on the ground, so we wanted to see what the blockages were. So I had meetings with various people who said, "You know, the women were there but they were a bit useless." "Yes, the women were there at the peace table, but they were the wives of the brothers. They were the sisters. They really had nothing to say." So trying to gauge how people perceived the role of women in the whole peace and security context was important.

Another blockage was the degree to which the "victimhood" lens was what people used to look at women. And then the other part of the problem was that even when people we talked to said, "yes, this is great, and we want to do it," they didn't know *how* to do it. So we needed to be able to answer:
- Where were the models?
- Where could we draw on to say "Women did it in X; what can we do in Y if we wanted to do the same thing?"

So we were dealing with those kinds of challenges, and essentially coming back to the basic problem -- that policy makers wanted us to *prove* that women make a difference. And that problem of proof is still very prevalent, and I'll come to that in a minute.

But first there is a question of whether that's the right approach [arguing for women's participation on the basis that women make a positive difference]? I might argue that it's not; that we have to think about women's participation from a human rights perspective, or a social justice perspective -- that you need to include women in decision-making and in post-conflict reconstruction because it is their right to be there. But, if the people who are making the decisions don't believe that, or don't think about the human rights perspective, you have to make other arguments. I've had discussions at the World Bank where they were saying, "We don't do human rights." Well, the World Bank, of course, *is* meant to "do human rights." The governments that own the World Bank also endorse the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But, somehow, the World Bank *doesn't do human rights*. So they want proof of why women's participation practical for the Bank. *Why do you think having women there is important?* So we have to prove that issue. And it's a reality that the NGO and advocacy world have to deal with, because it is institutions like the World Bank that make the decisions, determine the budgets, determine the programs. Therefore, we have to address those challenges. We can't just say, "You guys are wrong, *this* is the way to do it." If they're wrong and we haven't engaged with them, they're not going to do what we want them to do. So it's really a dilemma, but we have to do it.

Hence, the question for us was: *how do we make a compelling case for the inclusion of women and gender perspectives in a broad range of peace processes?*
   (1) *What kind of guidelines and recommendations can we come out with?*
   (2) *Also: Are we strengthening the academic foundations of the work?*

So what did we do? One of the big challenges that we had very early on was to pull together a group of scholars who wrote on women, peace and security, and gender, peace and security (the differences between gender and women is something we'll get to), and people who'd written

about women's agency in peacemaking and in post-conflict issues. But in the studies, the authors kept falling back on 'what happens to women,' and 'women as victims.' It was really difficult, in the first set of our studies, to pull people away from talking about 'this is what happened; this is what happened to women; this is how women were victimized,' and to get them to talk about, 'this is what women did; this is how women survived; this is how women pulled their communities together,' and so forth.

And for me, the 'victim issue' – not that we didn't know that women were victims – was important to 'get over' for two reasons. One was that I think when you're talking about victimhood only, you're taking away the last strands of self-dignity that women have. In the U.S., we don't talk about rape 'victims'; we talk about rape 'survivors' because we don't want to victimize. We talk about their self-dignity. Why don't we do that in other places, when you're talking about women who've been victimized elsewhere? So let's admit that they're victimized, but not focus on that issue solely.

Also, even more importantly, even though they're victimized, they are not passive victims. Despite the fact that they've been raped, they've been displaced, they're sitting in a refugee camp, they are doing things. They're going out and getting wood, they're getting water, they are looking after the kids, and they are looking after the elderly. They are still doing so much, which is about survival, about keeping their lives going and keeping a sense of normality going -- the kind of element that makes peace possible. So, they're not passive at all. And we need to recognize that, and build on it, because it is this what carries the potential for positive change.

The third part of this, which is much more of a strategic issue, was that in the policy world people look for solutions. And in so doing, they want simple messages. So, I remember being at a meeting in 1998 or '99, which was preparing for some big U.N. event, and trying to get across this message of women's involvement in peace. At some point at the meeting, I talked about the fact that *women build peace.* And the way people looked at me, I realized that *that makes sense*. We weren't talking about "gender and security." What does "gender and security" mean, anyway? But we talked about "women building peace." This made sense to everyone. And they were happy to have a way to see something positive among all the horrific things we talked about. So, taking that approach has been really effective in terms of talking to the people who day by day are doing the programmatic work.

One of the things that has been interesting for me is that when we did our reports, we brought them out and said, "Here are the key findings! Here are our recommendations! This is what you can do!" But when I went and talked to UN organizations and USAID, they would still say, "So, what do you think we should do?" And I'd think, "You are the ones who know the system. I'm giving you the findings and recommendations, how much more do you need?" But it was really revealing about how disempowered people feel, because on a daily basis they are just hearing bad news. There isn't that focus on trying to see where the good work is being done, what the positive issues are. So it's been an interesting process to try and get people to think differently about what is possible, and also what they can do about it in their own jobs.

The challenge we did have to face, which I touched on earlier, is the question of how do you

create your advocacy message, with compelling cases and serious research. Because to be sure, it's not all rosy out there, and at some point we compared our efforts with a photograph of a muddy field on which there are only a couple of flowers. What we are doing is focusing on the flowers. In spite of all the muddiness out there, there are flowers and they can grow. But of course you still have to recognize that it's a pretty messy situation out there.

So, creating that balance was important for us. And it surfaced as we did the research. We'd get drafts, and we'd go back to the researchers and wonder, "did the women do this? Are you sure they didn't do X, Y, and Z?" And they would come back and say, "You know, I'm sorry, they didn't." So it was really about balancing that, and then highlighting the points of light. Again, recognizing that despite all that is going on in Cambodia – political violence, corruption, you name it -- you have women's groups who are doing human rights work, who are monitoring, who are, at the very local level, the ones who negotiate with the security forces and the community to crawl up the streets and stop violence. So it's highlighting those, at the same time as recognizing that it's a complex, messy situation out there and it's not all easy.

The other thing was that we did was we knew that women do peace-building work. And women call it peace-building work. They have a different vocabulary than the policy community, but in a way we wanted to set this difference aside. Because what we were trying to do was to talk to the policy community in a language that they understood. (Everyone who is doing this kind of programming on the ground thinks in terms of 'conflict prevention,' 'conflict resolution,' 'negotiation,' or 'the peace table' – that kind of political process. And then, they look at post-settlement issues, they think about 'disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration,' 'governance' issues, 'transitional justice' issues, and then, 'socio-economic' issues. That's how they categorize the work that they do. There was a framework that came out from the Center for Strategic and International Studies that took these forms specifically from post-conflict, but structured them along security issues: disarmament, demobilization, reintegration. These are the three, four, five, six, seven steps that are really key to this. So what we decided to do with the case studis was to say, "Look, you in the UN system at USAID and the World Bank, you have already stated that these steps one, two, three are absolutely pivotal to make this work for you. We are going to show you how women make those things happen. How women contribute precisely to that issue." So, that's how we ended up framing our work. It was an attempt to bridge the work that women do, and bring it into the long-range of the policy community.

We asked three broad questions across our studies. The first one we asked, (of course, when we did our research it was much more detailed), was:
   • How are women contributing to peace processes?
   • What were the specific themes that women were talking about in negotiations?
   • If we look at governance issues from a gender perspective, does it make a difference? Does it improve the process of developing a governance program?

In other words, our question wasn't "how does this make things better for women?", which is what a lot of research aims for. Instead, we were asking, "How are women making it better for governance?" because "good governance" is what the policy community is talking about.

And the third question was the one that asked for the models. Where are the examples? What are the guidelines that we can come out with?

There were other things that we wanted to talk about. For example, people would say to us, "the women who are involved in these kinds of activities are the elite. They don't have a link to the rest of us." So, where possible, we wanted to touch upon this issue and show where the links were between the elite and the grassroots. We also wanted to talk about the different identities of women – women as mothers, women as fighters, women as political actors, women in terms of their ethnicity, and how they engage and don't engage in issues. We didn't want to say that women were natural peacemakers -- because they're not. I believe that gender(ed) roles – what we do in society - drives us in different directions and gives us a space to do the work we do. But I wouldn't say that biologically we're more peaceful, because we know that women fight and we know that women can be as provocative in terms of war as men.

In terms of engaging with the academic and scholarly community, at that point, for me, the real challenge was the question of balancing between victimization and agency – of not moving too far away from victimization, but also making sure we have enough agency. And then there was also that question of how can you, in fact, say that women at the peace table made a difference? It's really difficult to measure that. You're not there; we're not watching it; it's sometimes the kinds of thing that is based on interviews, people's perceptions. But how do you pull that out, and go beyond being anecdotal? And that was the final thing, that the data that we had up until now was anecdotal.

So for my own work I had interviewed women who had been involved in these processes, saying, "What did you do?" A woman might answer, "Well, in Liberia, I did this, this, and this." But this was just *one* woman talking. What we really wanted to do for our case studies was to engage with broader communities -- speak with her male colleagues; talk to the men about what women are doing; talk to the international community; talk to local NGOs; talk to the national government; just get different perspectives on what women are doing. And, again, strategically, talking to men was important. Because if you have men talking about why women are important, they are heard by men here. It was about using different tactics of trying to get that message out.

Also, there were basic principles of research from the feminist community that we wanted to abide by. One, we didn't want to be extractive. We didn't want it to be just going in, doing research, coming out, and that would be the end of it. We wanted to make sure the research went back to the community. For example, with the Rwanda work, my colleague Elizabeth [Powley] who did research there has actually translated some of the case study material into Kinyarwanda and she's taking it back with her to Rwanda. There are Colombia studies that are translated into Spanish. So we are trying to get this material back as much as possible. And certainly the English versions are sent to everybody who was interviewed.

When our Director, Swanee Hunt, was in Ramallah in 2003, I heard that she met with the Minister of Social Affairs (and Women's Affairs), who, in the middle of the meeting pulled out our Rwanda study (which she had downloaded) from her desk. So using the internet for dissemination has been really helpful to us.

Also, we wanted to work with local researchers, and that created its own challenges. On one hand, when you work with people who don't have English as their first language, you end up having language issues when their written material comes back to you. So how do we make it into the language that we want? And the language that we wanted was very specific. It wasn't policy-wonk language; it wasn't journalese. It was somewhere in between. It had to be easy to read; I didn't want it to be some heavy material. And that's not easy to get. Even the native speakers don't necessarily write well. So, getting people whose English was a second language – that was an issue.

But the benefits of working with locals were extraordinary. Because, when you have a local talking to a local, the kind of information that they get is very different, especially in places where people have been researched to death. So, say, in Bosnia, we would have this one woman who would go and do interviews. And the Bosnian women would say, "Yes, we tried to do this or that, and it really wasn't that successful." But those same women, when they were talking to a foreigner, would say, "We did this work, it was fabulous, and it was so successful" – because they think that's what foreign interviewers want to hear. I experienced this in my own work in Iran. The level of trust between who is sitting there and asking the questions is significant; why are you asking the questions? Are they saying this or do you have to read between the lines? Where is it that's actually said? So there are extraordinary benefits of working with local researchers.

Finally, I was very concerned about the fact that, again, we were doing this research that is *about* women and *for* women – I wanted it to be written by women experts who are out there from all over the world. Whatever we're doing – I want those names out. Giving them a platform to speak was important, because one of the issues that we face is that the "experts" are always men. So, how do we get women experts? Well, have them as authors of reports, and get them to present, and so forth – that's been an important process for us.

So, that was my summary of our way of framing the research. I won't go into what it's like to trying to do research in a place where war breaks out, or your researcher breaks a leg, or has all her materials stolen, or any other kinds of stories that were inevitable. It was learning process for those of us who were sitting here trying to manage it, but it kind of fell into its own rhythm.

Time is also a factor. Originally we thought it would take three or four months. It actually takes about six to seven months to do a full case study from start to finish. It takes a lot of time for people to do the field research, come back, think about it, shape it, and decide, what it is we want to say? Where does this connect? And so forth. So that was the process.

Research Findings

I'll now touch on some of our general findings. First, we see women's agency emerging in all sorts of conditions. In our case study on Sierra Leone – an extraordinary study – we looked at the disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation process. But we were also looking at how women, and girls specially, had been left out from the official processes because of the way the

international community thinks about combatants. They don't think the women and girls in fighting forces are combatants. So that's one hurdle: how do you get them to think of women and girls as combatants? And then, how do you make sure that women and girls are part of that process? And in the research that was done over a period of time, they interviewed many of these girls who had been abducted and forced into rebel forces, and they had been sex slaves, they had been cooks, they had been medics, they had been messengers, they had been fighters, they had organized camps – they were part and parcel of the way that the RUF in Sierra Leone was working. Again, for me what was interesting was that here you have a thirteen-year-old girl who has been abducted and raped and probably has a couple of kids already herself. And despite these conditions she's in, she doesn't talk about having been raped or any of the other things that have happened to her. Instead, she talks about how she ran the camp, and how she was in charge of such-and-such. In that sense, people want to talk about what they were able to do, as opposed to what happened to them. And that was important.

Another part of that piece which was very important was that it showed us - both in Sierra Leone and in Uganda – that focusing on saying "we need to get the guns off the men and then send the men back to their communities" is problematic. First of all, where are we sending them back to? And secondly, that focus on the men is not necessarily the right approach, because the men are being fed and looked after by the women in these camp environments. So, if you actually try and reach the women and girls and get them out of the system, you're almost pulling the carpet from under their feet. But it's important to recognize that they have a function in that they play a pivotal role in how these rebel movements work. And not only that – how come if you're in the U.S. Army as a medic or a cook you get benefits, but when we're trying to demobilize Iraq or the rebel army, we say "No, no, no, only the ones with the guns"?

It also opened up a debate with the World Bank because the World Bank would say, "We go and do DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) and it's very short term, we work with the government, it's all about bringing them into these camp areas, getting the guns, giving them some sort of package – money or whatever it is, sending them back into the communities." Our response was, "If you don't look at the rehabilitation process properly, why do you think these guys will stay wherever they're going?" And that was the other part; look at who is doing rehabilitation work. It's the women, it's the wives, it's the mothers, it's the sisters, and it's the homes that these people are coming back into. So why not support them? They're doing it either individually, or informally in groups, or as NGOs. But they're really effective because they know what needs are there. And instead of spending millions – and I'm not kidding, millions and millions -- on the government, which was a party to the conflict in the first place and thus may not be trusted, look at who's doing this work and try to channel money that way.

In the case of El Salvador, for example, it was a very tough case again, because when they went and did the research the El Salvador conflict was almost ten years old, and these women kept saying "we really didn't do much for rehabilitation because our communities were all destroyed. We just all ended up coming back together. And, yes, I used to be a commander, but now I'm at home cooking tortillas and not really doing much." So this was the data that was coming back, and we were looking at it, and at some point thought, "surely, the fact that they came home, they went back and set up homes, set up some sort of environment, and let the men go out, must have an effect." It did not make a difference to the women how the rehabilitation process worked;

they went back to normalizing life. So we went back to do the research. And sure enough, after rounds of interviews, the women were saying, "You know, it was really important because we were all so traumatized. And it took five years to stop having the nightmares. And it took five years to just calm down, and think that life was just going back to… So actually being at home was important." But they didn't see that as something that they had contributed.

As part of the El Salvador process, what we found was that not only had women been critical in making the rehabilitation stick, but in the communities where international aid had gone in, they had given support to women, so that there was child care and other kinds of benefits. But childcare was a key part of it and the women went out and did so much development work because they had social capital. They had been part of this massive social movement; they were trained as nurses and radio operators and all sort of other skills. All of it was getting lost because nobody was really tapping into it. And in the communities where it was tapped into, they had actually progressed much better. They were much better off than in places where that kind of support hadn't come in. So we saw these kinds of differences.

Q: Did any of your studies look at gender justice issues?

SA: Actually, two of them. One was on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, and one was on the International Tribunal in Yugoslavia. One of the questions we had for our researcher on the TRC was about something that we had come across on previous papers: there was talk about how women had been objects in the TRC. They were brought in as mothers and wives, to talk about their sons – they weren't really talking about themselves, and they hadn't talked about themselves – and how, again, women were sidelined effectively. And then at some point they had a special hearing for women, which was kind of an add-on.

But when we were talking to our researcher, who had been on the committee for the TRC itself, I said to her, "You know, we keep hearing about mothers coming forward and talking about their sons – or women coming forward as wives. What about fathers? Why don't we hear about men as fathers?" So we started looking at it in terms of the question of why women had come forward. In the interviews it turned out that black women and white women talked about how they ***deliberately*** – very consciously – came forward to talk about their sons or to talk about husbands and to talk about the men folk who had died, because they wanted to create a sense of empathy with the other side. We have quotes from the white women saying, "I came in, I wanted to talk about my son because I wanted other white mothers to understand what I went through, and to reach out and to humanize this process – to recognize that this is reconciliation. It was that we were hurt, white people were hurt, my son was important." So women like her weren't just objects who were brought in and told to talk about it. They knew exactly what they were doing when they were talking about their sons and husbands and so forth.

And one of the things regarding the fathers was that, in South Africa, 'men don't cry.' Men don't show emotion in public – the same in a lot of places – whereas the women are allowed to. For women it is okay to cry and be emotional. It was almost as if the women were being put forward as some sort of 'emotional platform' on which other people were allowed to convey feelings. So it wasn't just a passive presence, it was rather the opposite – a very active presence with regard to how they engaged in these issues.

Another thing that we were finding – actually, when we were talking about witnesses in the ICTY – the Yugoslav tribunals – the case study showed that they brought women to talk about gender-based violence because of the rape that had gone on. But then they found out that the women actually knew a lot more than the men, because very often when armed groups came into communities and villages, when they rounded up the men to take them away or they blindfolded them or they put them head-down on the ground, they didn't do that to the women. So the women watched and saw who was taken, where and what happened, and who was leading, and so forth. So they were much better witnesses. And over the time at the ICTY, they were drawing more on women as witnesses.

In terms setting up structures, whether it was the TRC or the ICTY, when there were women involved in the planning of those structures – as lawyers, or judges, etc. – they made a difference in terms of how cases were looked at, and what issues were focused on. And for example, at the ICTY, one of the things that actually triggered the whole process was when news came out about the rape camps. And so the rape and gender-based violence issues became part and parcel of the legislative agenda. New laws came out which fed into the International Criminal Court and are also feeding into the other international courts. And again, they had women experts, women lawyers, gender experts who were constantly processing this.

On governance issues, there are perceptions that women are trusted more. In Cambodia it's come out; in Rwanda it's come out. In the case study that we did on South Africa, the South Africans

placed human security at the center of a normative framework for their national security. So here was a state undergoing transformation from a heavy-duty police state into a democratic one. And they were trying to figure out, what to do? How do we shape our notions of national security? They came up with a human security paradigm, which was something women really related to, because they went out and they talked to women. Then they did a huge national dialogue around "what does security mean?" What was coming through constantly was that people related security to having water, to being able to walk down the streets safely, to not being poor, to development issues. And that became a frame through which they looked at their security issues. What we tried to do in the case study was to say that we have women in government who pushed this agenda, which links to the women in academia, to the grassroots, and how they're constantly working together -- because that's the perspective that they come from and the challenges that they face. Not that the men don't support this, but at the end of the day, when South African's government pushes to buying "X million dollars worth of arms," it's the women parliamentarians who stand up and say, "Hang on a second. Do we really need that? You know, that could go for education." They have a track record on the human security issues.

Quickly, on the outputs…. You'll see that the case studies have summaries, with key findings and recommendations. Additionally, we, along with International Alert, created a Toolkit. In the process of doing the case studies, we found that there was a lot of literature and a lot of data that we were gathering that wasn't necessarily going to end up in the case studies as such. And we decided early on that we wanted to do a toolkit that would pull all this material

together for the activists on the ground – a toolkit that would tell them that the international community talks about "disarmament, demobilization and reintegration"; that this is what these policy words mean; this is who does it; these are the policies; this is how women are affected; this is how women contributed; this is what you can do; and these are what your rights are. It kind of expanded and expanded and expanded in terms of themes, and basically somebody described it as a cookbook. But, essentially, this was the basis of the Toolkit [*Inclusive Security, Sustainable Peace: A Toolkit for Advocacy and Action*]. It's on the web [http://www.huntalternatives.org/pages/87_inclusive_security_toolkit.cfm]. You can download it chapter-by-chapter, even section-by-section. And though we were looking at it with an eye to the activists on the ground, very early on we found that policymakers here found it really useful as well. And so it has become a guide which people are looking at and know about.   In fact, we've used it in trainings with Angolan women, with Sudanese women, with Iraqi women – and it's out there for people to use. We also think it's useful for academic purposes because of the useful data that's in there.

This was three years of work. We still have of work to do; a lot of the synthesis work is going to be coming out as articles, and we're trying to write for mainstream journals. But we hope we've fulfilled our goal of expanding the field, and I hope that this is of use when you all go back to what you do, and if you want to do your research – there's still an awful lot that can be done. So enjoy what we have and – send us more. Thank you.

Biography

Sanam Naraghi Anderlini joined Women Waging Peace as the Director of the Policy Commission in 2002 to develop and produce a series of field-based case studies on women's contributions to peace processes. Previously she was the Senior Policy Advisor at International Alert advocating for a UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. She has written numerous pieces on the role of women in peace processes including *Women at the Peace Table: Making a Difference* for UNIFEM, the UN Development Fund for Women, and *Women's Leadership, Gender, and Peace* for the Ford Foundation. Prior to her work on women and peace building, she was the managing editor at the *Forum on Early Warning and Early Response*, a conflict early warning network. In 1996, she co-authored *Civil Wars, Civil Peace: An Introduction to Conflict Resolution*. Sanam Naraghi Anderlini holds an MPhil in Social Anthropology from Cambridge University.