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**POLICY BRIEF**

## **Of Markets, Men and Women: Gender Relations in Fragile and Conflict Affected Countries**

**Supriti Bezbaruah, PhD<sup>1</sup> and Danura Miriyagalla, PhD<sup>2</sup>**

### **The problem: limited recognition of changes in gender relations due to conflict**

It is estimated that almost 2 billion people live in areas affected by fragility, conflict or violence.<sup>3</sup> It is also acknowledged that women are disproportionately affected by conflict and fragility. Women are often the first targets of violence, or are forcibly displaced. At the same time, the absence of men also leads to a reversal of gender roles and responsibilities, with women becoming heads of households, working on agricultural land or taking up wage work outside the house to earn incomes. Women's increased labour force participation can also increase community and household welfare. Nevertheless, the overall impact on women's empowerment can be mixed,<sup>4</sup> mainly because, despite some changes in gender roles during conflict, "the social foundation for gender relations tends to remain largely unchanged."<sup>5</sup>

Yet, post-conflict reconstruction and recovery policies and private sector development initiatives often do not consider how traditional gender roles and responsibilities are disrupted during conflict. Moreover, interventions by donors and development partners tend to focus on facilitating leadership and economic empowerment of women, with limited participation from men. Local contexts are rarely considered in the design of such projects, and not surprisingly, these interventions result in limited success due to cultural, social and economic factors.

The focus on women's leadership and economic participation, or on post-conflict reconstruction without taking into account the wider social context or gender relations also increases the risk of reduced family and social cohesion as individual gain is promoted without actively seeking to strengthen family

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<sup>1</sup> Supriti Bezbaruah is an Associate Consultant at Apexah Global and independent researcher specialising on gender and employment. She can be contacted on [supriti.bezbaruah@gmail.com](mailto:supriti.bezbaruah@gmail.com).

<sup>2</sup> Danura Miriyagalla is the Strategic Lead of Apexah Global. He is a specialist on the links among investment, employment, health and peace. He can be contacted on [danura@apexah.com](mailto:danura@apexah.com).

<sup>3</sup> Bardasi, E. and Zaidi, D. 2016. Why gender inclusion matters for post-conflict recovery. Blog. IEG (Independent Evaluation Group), World Bank website. Available online: <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/why-gender-inclusion-matters-post-conflict-recovery>

<sup>4</sup> Justino, P. 2012. Women Working For Recovery: The impact of female employment on family and community welfare after conflict. UN Women.

<sup>5</sup> UNDP. 2013. *Livelihoods and Economic Recovery in Crisis Situations*. New York: Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery Livelihoods and Economic Recovery Group, p. 11.

and community bonds. The seriousness of this is further enhanced because community and social cohesion are at the heart of maintaining trust and resilience in fragile contexts.

### **The consequences of ‘gender-neutrality’ in conflict and fragile contexts**

Policy or private sector interventions in conflict and fragile contexts are never ‘gender-neutral.’ There are several ways in which private sector or development initiatives can ignore gender relations.

First, despite gains in labour force participation, women remain vulnerable to gender inequality in conflict and fragile settings, as their increased participation in the public sphere is often without any decline in their caregiving responsibilities.<sup>6</sup> For example, in the post-war situation in El Salvador, many women were excluded from formal jobs in post-war society as they had no support for childcare, and therefore, once the men returned from war, they were marginalised as they were unable to take jobs outside the home.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, during conflict, women often take on responsibilities traditionally held by men, such as becoming the main household provider or working on agricultural land. For instance, in Nepal, the Maoists allowed women to take up traditionally forbidden tasks such as ploughing fields and repairing roofs.<sup>8</sup> However, despite some changes in gender roles, in general, women face greater constraints in accessing and participating in markets due to a combination of unequal access to resources such as land, finance, market information and training; discrimination and the impact of gendered norms on women’s roles and responsibilities. Consequently, in all types of economic engagement, women are mostly segregated to lower paid, lower status work with limited opportunities for skills and capabilities development. Not surprisingly, women are more likely to be in informal and low-wage work. For instance, in several fragile and conflict affected countries, married women cannot open a bank account, get a job or register a business in the same way as married men. There is also greater reliance on customary or personal law, which is usually to the detriment of women.<sup>9</sup>

This is most visible in relation to land ownership rights:<sup>10</sup>

Whereas under most customary law systems they are excluded from owning, renting, or inheriting land, during conflict they are regularly allowed access to land to ensure their and their family’s survival. However, once the men return, they are often inclined to restore the earlier division of tasks and roles, again taking over activities and responsibilities outside the home, and relegating women to the domestic sphere.

Similar examples are found in other conflict affected countries. In Rwanda, for example, a new law was introduced giving women the right to inherit property from their parents/husbands. The law has been difficult to implement at local level because of opposition from traditionalists. Women’s organisations

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<sup>6</sup> Justino, P. 2012. *Women Working For Recovery: The impact of female employment on family and community welfare after conflict*. UN Women.

<sup>7</sup> Sorensen, B. 1998. *Women and Post-conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources*. *WSP Occasional Paper no.3*, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Bouta, T., Frerks, G. and Bannon, I. 2005. *Gender Conflict and Development*. Washington D.C. : World Bank, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> IEG. n.d. *IEG Insights: Women in Fragile and Conflict Affected States*. Available online: <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/ieg-insights-women-fragile-and-conflict-affected-states>

<sup>10</sup> Bouta, T., Frerks, G. and Bannon, I. 2005. *Gender Conflict and Development*. Washington D.C. : World Bank, p. 92.

suggest that unless both women and men are educated and sensitised on this issue, the implementation of the law will be ineffective.<sup>11</sup>

Policy interventions often also fail to acknowledge the emasculation of male ex-combatants in post-conflict situations. For example, the conflict in Northern Uganda ruptured traditional social relations within communities, with women taking on greater roles in the public sphere. After the war, when men returned, the reversal of household roles affected men's perceptions of masculinity and were perceived as a loss of male status, manifesting itself in different ways, most notably in terms of increased gender based violence. This in turn affects the Peace Recovery Development Plan.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the sustainability of interventions is undermined due to the lack of engagement of the wider society and community. To illustrate, the Project on Ensuring the Inclusion of Women in Nepal's Emerging Democracy, while successful at educating women about political processes and mobilising women's participation in peace and electoral processes did not lead to broad-based social transformation. Despite local campaigns by women's groups on gender-based violence, gender discrimination continued primarily because the project failed to include men and the wider community, and consider the broader social context. It also failed to acknowledge that educating women was not sufficient for changing gender relations when household gender relations were still unequal and did not give women the space or opportunity to facilitate discussions on violence and peace.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Solution**

The lesson from these examples is evident: for any initiatives to succeed in developing market opportunities for women and men, both men and women have to be actively involved in the conversation. Thus, for market-based initiatives, it would be important to start with the fostering of a climate of entrepreneurship amongst both women and men. This must go hand-in-hand with recognition of changing gender roles and the different skills and needs of men and women. For women, initiatives such as micro-credit programmes or market-based skills training need to go beyond an objective of addressing women's economic needs, to include an understanding of how these initiatives would affect women's social roles and linked to this, the welfare of families and communities.

Men and women should be encouraged to have joint ownership of businesses in a manner that builds upon their individual strengths and enables them to complement their skills towards the success of the business. Where traditional masculinities may have been threatened due to altered gender roles, it is essential to define new roles and responsibilities that encourage alternative versions of male identity.<sup>14</sup> This would reduce the potential negative gender impacts such as gender based violence.

The focus on building market-driven initiatives must be accompanied by an awareness of the wider social context. Efforts must be made to ensure that men and women participate jointly in defining new roles and responsibilities within households and business. This will help build collaboration between different household members, and reduce intra-household gender conflict.

Supporting women and men jointly through training, coaching and mentoring are ways that will allow more women to take on leadership opportunities in businesses. Crucially, this should not increase

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<sup>11</sup> Bouta, T., Frerks, G. and Bannon, I. 2005. *Gender Conflict and Development*. Washington D.C. : World Bank,

<sup>12</sup> Esuruku, R.S., 2011. Beyond Masculinity: Gender, Conflict & Post-Conflict Reconstruction in Northern Uganda. *Journal of Science and Sustainable Development*, no. 4, November, pp. 25-40; Mwiine, A.A. 2015. Interrogating the Changing Masculinities & the Post Conflict Recovery Process in Northern Uganda. Powerpoint Presentation. 2<sup>nd</sup> CHUSS lunchtime seminar. Available online:

<sup>13</sup> Ramnarain, S. 2016. The gender dilemmas of community-based peacebuilding: a case study from post-conflict Nepal. *SouthAsia @LSE*. Available online: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/southasia/2016/11/28/the-gender-dilemmas-of-community-based-peacebuilding-a-case-study-from-post-conflict-nepal/>

<sup>14</sup> Bouta, T., Frerks, G. and Bannon, I. 2005. *Gender Conflict and Development*. Washington D.C. : World Bank, p.96.

women's household responsibilities. In order to ease women's household burdens, while being sensitive to prevailing social and gender norms, men can be encouraged to take on more household responsibilities. Furthermore, these measures create greater social cohesion, and help build social capital. This will improve resilience within communities that have significant social vulnerabilities in fragile contexts due to external factors that are beyond their control. Critical in all these initiatives is an appreciation for large contextual differences and a deep understanding of how communities need to remain cohesive. With such initiatives, not only will gender inequalities in markets be reduced, coping strategies will be more sustainable.

### **Guiding Principles and Practices**

Market-based initiatives should incorporate certain gender-based guiding principles and practices such as:

- Gender tools, from gender budgeting to gender analysis, need to inform all aspects of the programme
- While participation of both men and women should be integral to any initiatives, effort needs to be made to ensure that women's voices, and the voices of the most vulnerable are heard.
- Gender identities that are affected by the intersection of a range of other cross-cutting identities, such as race, ethnicity, religion and class need to be recognised.
- Gender needs to be mainstreamed across all interventions due to its complexity rather than separating it out to be addressed as a stand-alone programme.
- All stakeholders must demonstrate or be aware of the commitment to gender, and include women's organisations in different stages of decision-making.
- The multiplicity of women's roles – as ex-combatants, war-widows, entrepreneurs, caregivers, household heads, workers – should be recognised and integrated into the design of any interventions.

By following these guidelines, and through the joint participation of men and women, conflict and fragile situations can also provide opportunities for a positive transformation in gender relations.