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Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources

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United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies

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Preface

Women's contributions to war and peace have long been underestimated. In fact, women often contribute to the outbreak of violence and hostilities — in many cases, they are instrumental in inciting men to defend group interests, honour, and collective livelihoods. Women also play a key role in preserving order and normalcy in the midst of chaos and destruction. In times of conflict, when men engage in war and are killed, disappear or take refuge outside their country's borders, it is women who are left with the burden of ensuring family livelihood. Women struggle to protect their families' health and safety — a task which rests on their ability to cope pragmatically with change and adversity.

It is therefore not surprising that women are also a driving force for peace. They are often among the first to call for an end to conflict and to strive for order and rebuilding. In post-war situations, whether in groups or individually, formally or informally, women probably contribute more than government authorities or international aid to reconciliation, reviving local economies and rebuilding social networks.

However, despite their active role in promoting peace, women tend to fade into the background when official peace negotiations begin and the consolidation of peace and rebuilding of the economy becomes a formal exercise. But it is not possible to return to pre-war mores; gender roles and social values have been deeply affected by the experience of war. Thus, the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions is an integral part of the challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies. It is important for policy-makers and operational actors in national governments and aid organizations to understand the complex ways gender and rebuilding interact.

The War-torn Societies Project (WSP) recognizes the value of analysing this interaction. However, as a facilitator of dialogue and consensus building, WSP has not imposed an examination of gender in its country projects. The project has therefore not specifically focused on the issue, although it has been raised and discussed in each country where WSP has been active, as part of consultations in which main actors of rebuilding attempted to define the legacy of war and prioritize strategic areas for rebuilding. In Eritrea in particular, the role of women in rebuilding was identified as a "cross-cutting" issue to be considered within all of the thematic areas selected for study.

As work progressed, the importance of more closely examining the impact of gender roles on post-conflict rebuilding became increasingly obvious, and **Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction** was initiated at the central level in Geneva. The objective was to critically assess the literature available in this field and to assemble a source of experience and knowledge, thus contributing to raising awareness among the many actors involved at different levels in rebuilding war-torn societies. The resulting publication should be of interest to practitioners and scholars alike.

The study is based on data collected by the Geneva WSP staff over a two-year period. The material was analysed and synthesized by Birgitte Sørensen, a Danish anthropologist who was a WSP staff member from 1995 to 1997, and head of the project's research unit for part of that time. Before joining WSP, she carried out field research on refugee displacement and resettlement in Sri Lanka, leading to a Ph.D. in social anthropology from the University of Copenhagen. During her time at WSP, she gave much emphasis to the study of local-level initiatives and understanding the processes of integration and disintegration, not as theoretical concepts but as painful phases of adjustment lived by real people in real situations. Ms. Sørensen is currently an Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen Institute of Anthropology. Christine Knudsen, a WSP research assistant, did much of the ground work for this publication. Shiho Yamagishi worked on the project as a WSP intern.

This study could not have been undertaken without the continued commitment of the many bilateral and multilateral agencies and foundations that support the WSP's work. Particular thanks go to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and to the International Development Research Center (IDRC) of Canada for providing special grants that enabled the completion and publication of this study.

Matthias Stiefel, Director
The War-torn Societies Project

Executive Summary

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources is a review of literature dealing with political, economic and social reconstruction from a gender perspective. One of its objectives is to go beyond conventional images of women as victims of war, and to document the many different ways in which women make a contribution to the rebuilding of countries emerging from armed conflicts. Special attention is given to women's priority concerns, to their resources and capacities, and to structural and situational factors that may reduce their participation in reconstruction processes. A second aim is to shed light on how post-war reconstruction processes influence the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions in the wake of war, and how women's actions shape the construction of post-war social structures.

Following the brief Introduction is a chapter on political reconstruction. It raises questions concerning women's participation in peace-building and democratization. In order to illuminate women's expectations regarding their roles and status in post-war society, the chapter opens with a brief discussion of how and to what extent various liberation movements have addressed women's issues. While some movements considered women's issues to detract attention from the main goal of their struggle, many movements regarded women's liberation as an integral dimension of their overall struggle for social justice. The fact that women's issues were included on the political agendas and that women themselves were mobilized to participate actively in the fighting is demonstrated to have been instrumental in raising women's political awareness and their expectations of state and society today.

The ensuing discussion of women's participation in formal and informal peace-building activities shows that in most cases women are excluded from formal peace negotiations. Such high-level negotiations are identified as male domains, which means that they also employ discourses and practices that are closer to men's reality than to women's. As a result, women also lack direct influence in the identification of reconstruction priorities that are usually part of a peace agreement. Nevertheless, women are demonstrated to play an influential role through their work in grassroots organizations working for peace and reconciliation. From within these organizations, women constantly challenge the authorities and other members of society with demands for peace, non-discrimination, accountability, recognition of human rights, etc. While always positioned on the margins, these organizations show their ability to mobilize large numbers of women, and to translate individual grievances into legitimate social concerns. Moreover, many of them play a significant role in building a new culture of peace at the local level by organizing peace education and community-based reconciliation and social reconstruction activities.

Democratization processes are generally applauded, because they are assumed to guarantee accountability and to grant all citizens the possibility to participate in political life. However, studies on elections and decentralization demonstrate several flaws when it comes to women's position. Many countries emerging from armed conflict have adopted new constitutions that grant women equal political, social and economic rights, and many governments have developed new quota systems to ensure women equal representation in decision-making institutions at all levels. However, the implementation of these laws and good intentions often runs into major obstacles. At the government level the problems include a lack of financial resources and a lack of gender awareness or political will among staff. Other major problems are to be found at the social level, where the new discourse of gender equality may run counter to existing social norms regarding gender roles. The examples discussed show that, in some cases, local authorities and male members of society may discourage or prohibit women from participating in political activities. Moreover, the fact that the division of labour has not changed in favour of women, but rather added to their burden, also poses practical limitations on the possibilities for active involvement of women.

Despite these constraints, women have made remarkable contributions in many countries. In the context of elections women have organized civic education targeting women, and they have convinced women of the importance of their vote. Educated women have organized legal counselling to inform women about their rights and to help them exercise these rights.

Chapter three deals with economic reconstruction and the strategies that women develop to cope with war-induced changes in the economic environment and to meet the growing responsibilities for the survival and well-being of family and relatives. The focus is on the relationship between women's economic activities and their socio-economic position.

The first section of the chapter concentrates on women's involvement in agricultural production, which often constitutes a major source of income. In addition to problems of landmines, a lack of agricultural inputs and farm implements, a shattered infrastructure and the inaccessibility of markets, etc., which equally trouble male farmers, women face a number of particular challenges. First, women often lack legal rights to land and other resources which, in the context of social disintegration where a large number of women become single providers, may reduce their ability to survive on farming alone. In some countries, women are organizing themselves to lobby state and local authorities for increased access to such resources, but in many cases women are forced off the land and are compelled to seek other sources of income. Another problem facing women in agriculture is the dismantling of traditional work groups due to displacement, divorce, death, etc. This has often resulted in the creation of new co-operative associations and voluntary self-help groups which combine old institutions and current social conditions.

When cultivating the family land is no longer an option, some women join the casual agricultural labour force. While this opportunity enables women to employ their skills and to earn an income, recent analyses suggest that this may in fact mean that women come to occupy a marginal position in the new structure of rural social stratification.

Another area which proved to be of great importance to women's livelihoods was the burgeoning informal sector, with petty trade and small-scale businesses as major sources of income. The documentation of women's involvement in this sector showed a great variety in experiences. Some women took up activities in which they had also been involved prior to the war, but many engaged in innovative projects, even when it meant a break with existing social norms, as they took up jobs perceived to be male jobs. Some women established businesses on the basis of local resources and demand, while others established elaborate trading networks which cut across ethnic boundaries and national borders. Again, women's capacity to build and mobilize extensive social networks had a positive impact. But while women generally proved to be eager and capable entrepreneurs, the sustainability of their enterprises was often constrained by a lack of capital and marketing skills, not to mention the fact that the sector itself is highly insecure and fluctuating. Moreover, women's economic success would in some cases result in social stigmatization and exclusion, due to clashes with prevailing norms or jealousy.

Finally, the formal sector is discussed. For various reasons, societies emerging from war usually experience a high unemployment rate, and women are often particularly marginalized with regard to access to formal employment. In some cases this is a result of the fact that women generally have poorer educational qualifications, but research also suggests that discriminatory practices are still frequent. One of the few areas where women seem privileged is the social sector, but because this sector is often exposed to budgetary cuts, women's access to income and status from this field is reduced. Nevertheless, women continue to perform related tasks, but as semi-professionals or even as volunteers.
The fourth chapter focuses on social reconstruction, specifically on the rehabilitation of social services (health care and education) and wider issues of social integration. With regard to the

first aspect, the main questions are whether the social sector recognizes women's particular needs, and whether it seeks to build on women's skills and capacities. The discussion on social integration shifts the focus to how women are positioned in processes of inclusion and exclusion, and to how women's strategies and activities influence social integration.

Studies on the rehabilitation of social services suggest that even though women's needs and rights are increasingly recognized officially, women continue to be discriminated against with regard to access to education for social and cultural reasons. Health care and other social facilities also remain inadequate, with consequences not only for women's health, but also for their ability to participate in political and economic life. The material clearly demonstrates that social issues were generally given high priority by women themselves, and many women in post-conflict societies make a major contribution to their rehabilitation. In rural as well as urban areas, women have re-established primary education for children as a means to build local capacities and influence their socialization, and women are often involved in providing primary health care and socio-economic assistance on a self-help basis to people in crisis. However, as noted above, while such activities are generally welcomed, they are often considered but a natural extension of women's domestic obligations and hence are not remunerated or responded to with offers of training.

In addition to ordinary health care problems, intrastate wars produce a number of specific health problems known as psycho-social traumas. These traumas may stem from experiences of forced displacement, torture, rape, violence, witnessing killings, etc. In some cases, women have been particularly vulnerable to this kind of assault on mind and body. But women have also been very active in addressing the scars that such experiences leave, organizing voluntary organizations which offer medical and psychological treatment. Moreover, they have helped former victims to overcome their distress and reintegrate, by offering skills training and income-generating activities. Another issue which has been addressed by women's organizations is the growth of violence within post-war societies. Through classroom education and workshops, women have sought to raise awareness about violence against women and to change the attitudes that consider such violence acceptable.

As the discussion on social integration points out, there has long been a tendency to focus exclusively on the reintegration of returnees, internally displaced persons and demobilized soldiers, or of persons who have become marked and marginalized due to torture, disability, widowhood, etc. However, to the extent that any post-war society is inevitably undergoing profound changes in its socio-economic and political composition, the issue of integration is relevant to all members of society. This chapter focuses on this aspect from a gender and family perspective, and shows how integration often also has disintegrative aspects. Newly gained economic freedom and independence, long years of separation and exposure to new social environments and attitudes, new perceptions of the role of the family and its members, and forced migration in search of employment, all contribute to continued dismantling of existing social institutions and the establishment of new ones. Social integration, in other words, is not simply about "coming home", but about defining new guiding social values and establishing corresponding relationships and institutions based on a combination of factors including kinship, socio-economic interests, and shared experiences and circumstances.

In the final chapter, conventional conceptualizations of women in conflict and post-conflict situations are examined. The chapter also contains some suggestions for alternative concepts and approaches which appear to be better tools for our understanding of women's situation and thus for the development of programmes that will assist women in their multiple efforts to rebuild their lives.

It is pointed out that our understanding of women's roles in post-war societies and of their contributions to post-war reconstruction must go beyond the universalistic narrative of "women's experience of war". The specificity and diversity of women's experiences must be

acknowledged. Only on this basis can we conduct comparative analyses and begin to develop a deeper general understanding of post-war reconstruction from a gender perspective. Second, the concluding chapter stresses the need to supplement the image of women as vulnerable victims with an image of women as a highly differentiated group of social actors, who possess valuable resources and capacities and who have their own agendas. Women influence the course of things, and their actions are constitutive of post-war societies. The reduction of women to targets and beneficiaries both fails to recognize their contributions and contributes to their marginalization. A third point stressed in the conclusion is the need for gender-specific data and gender-focused analysis. While special attention is given to women throughout the publication, so as to make visible the previously invisible, the aim has been to see women's situation within a gender framework which pays attention to how gender roles and relationships are continuously constructed and contested by different actors, and which recognizes the gender dimension inherent in all aspects of post-war reconstruction. The gender perspective is also relevant for the achievement of sustainable peace. As the analysis strongly suggests, the failure to recognize gender issues may produce new social tensions and contribute to the differentiating struggles over identity, status and power that are so distinctive for societies which have recently achieved peace.

I. Introduction

"A gender neutral discourse may conceal that the post-war period [is] crowded with gendered decisions" (Enloe, 1993: 261).

Objectives and Focus

As recent accounts and analyses of internal armed conflicts demonstrate, wars affect men and women differently. The differential experience of war has serious consequences for both short-term survival and longer-term recovery and development. However, most writing dealing explicitly with post-conflict recovery and reconstruction adopts a gender-blind approach, which largely disregards these differences.

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction addresses this lacuna by looking at *how post-war reconstruction interrelates with the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions in the wake of war.* This perspective allows us to identify emerging tensions, and synergetic forces which support women in general. As such, this paper aims to contribute to a more dynamic understanding of women's situations in post-war societies and to a better understanding of the contexts that shape the outcomes of interventions.

This paper investigates the position of women in post-war situations throughout the world from three different perspectives which give emphasis to women as war-affected persons, social agents of change, and beneficiaries of assistance respectively:

1. How have armed conflicts influenced women's lives?
2. How have women in different war-affected countries responded to the challenges and changes induced by war?
3. How have external actors attempted to address women's concerns in post-war situations?

The paper is divided into three parts, the first of which consists of this brief introduction. The second part, constituting the body of the paper, consists of three chapters: one on political reconstruction, one on economic reconstruction, and one on social reconstruction, each addressing the three perspectives outlined above, although the focus is on women's roles as constructive agents in the rebuilding process.

The chapter on *political reconstruction* focuses on peace-building activities and processes of democratization. How has gender equality related to other political programmes for change, advocated by various liberation and guerrilla movements? How and to what extent have women contributed to peace-building and reconciliation? To what degree do national agendas for post-war reconstruction reflect gender issues? How are women's rights and entitlements approached by different actors? And what possibilities do women have to shape and participate in political life?

The chapter on *economic reconstruction* looks primarily at developments within agriculture and within the informal and formal economic sectors. The questions it raises include: What strategies have women developed in response to major changes in the economic environment during and especially after war? Have these coping mechanisms been sustainable? How have changes in women's sources of livelihood influenced their self-perception and social position?

In the chapter on *social reconstruction*, the focus is shifted to rehabilitation of the social sector and to the complex processes of social integration. To what extent have efforts to rehabilitate the social sector reflected women's particular needs? What role have women played in re-establishing education and health care services? What contribution have women made to social integration and non-violent co-existence? What are the main impacts of disintegration of social networks and relations, and how have women responded to these?

The concluding chapter sums up lessons regarding women's experiences in post-war situations. One of the main problems appears to be the dominance of gender-blind and gender-biased discourses. These are discussed in terms of their implications for our understanding of women's situation in post-war societies and for the way we address these issues in practice. Finally, suggestions are discussed for more gender-sensitive analytical and operational approaches.

Methodology and Sources

Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction has been prepared solely on the basis of existing written material. It includes both academic sources and documents prepared by international and national relief and development organizations engaged in relevant fields. Only some of the material reviewed has gender analysis of conflict and post-conflict situations as its primary concern. In most cases, gender is not the primary focus, and consequently information on women's experiences and contributions is fragmented and unsystematic, and lacks conceptual and analytical frameworks. However, such material has also been reviewed to the extent that it offers new empirical information or new perspectives. (Note: the names of authors whose work is gender-focused are shown in bold in the text and Bibliography.)

Although the huge amount of material on gender and mainstream development undoubtedly provides many useful insights, this source of information has deliberately been excluded in order to not miss the point that wars create very different contexts and conditions for the construction of women's roles and positions in society. Likewise, the growing body of literature on gender and conflict is only partially reflected here because it often concentrates on the emergency situation, with little or no attention for the post-war situation. It is not always easy or useful to distinguish sharply between conflict and relief situations or between post-conflict reconstruction and mainstream development, as these processes often overlap in both time and space. It is nevertheless necessary to make some conceptual distinctions, to identify and understand the particular predicaments facing women in post-war situations.

The paper targets a broad audience, including researchers, grassroots and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), policy-makers and field staff of international relief and aid organizations, and others interested in issues of gender and post-conflict reconstruction. It is hoped that each group will find useful information, new inspiration and new areas in which they can make a fruitful contribution conceptually, politically, financially or practically.

II. Political Reconstruction

Women's main concerns in relation to post-war political reconstruction can be summarized in the following two questions: *Will the emerging political system recognize and protect women's rights and interests? And will women be enabled to influence and participate in the political process?* Women obviously share many interests and problems with their male fellow citizens, but they also differ on a number of issues. Women's specific concerns are shaped by their social roles as daughters, wives and mothers, by the economic positions and obligations which they have within the family and the community, and by prevailing cultural conceptualizations of gender roles and relationships. In addition, their post-war position will be partly determined by their former positions in the landscapes of conflict, as internally displaced persons, widows, single breadwinners, victims of rape or torture, ex-combatants, refugees, etc. Apart from contributing to the definition of women's specific post-war concerns, these structural and situational factors play a decisive role in defining the motivations as well as the constraints on women's involvement as social actors in the political process toward sustainable peace, which is the focus of this chapter.

Political rebuilding which aims to establish a sound political environment and a genuine political culture is a tremendous challenge to any country that has been torn by violent political conflict. Political reconstruction first of all means reaching an agreement regarding power-sharing and political priorities. In addition, it requires the establishment and development of legitimate, accountable and capable institutions which ensure a minimum degree of security and protection of all citizens' rights. Sustainable peace, however, also hinges on the presence of institutions that are conducive to and supportive of economic and social development on a participatory and equitable basis, regardless of ethnic, religious, cultural, social or other divisions within society which might otherwise generate tensions. And all these factors inevitably influence the situation of women and the space available to them for action and improvement.

While the main responsibility for political reconstruction inevitably rests with national authorities, the sustainability of the process is in many ways dependent on local-level involvement and initiatives. Among the most important are efforts to reconcile prior contentions and to develop new, non-violent means to voice local concerns and settle emerging disputes. But it is also at this level that new relationships of trust and solidarity must emerge.

Based on the assumption that women's current expectations are shaped partly by past experiences, the discussion of women's engagement and role in post-war political life will look first at how and to what degree women's issues have been addressed by the main political actors during conflict, and what the legacy of that attention seems to be. The focus is shifted then to women as active agents of political change. First, women's contributions to formal and informal peace-building and reconciliatory activities, during and immediately after war, are discussed in order to shed light on the concerns they articulate — as citizens and as women. Finally, women's roles and experiences in different aspects of national processes of democratization, decentralization and legal reform are considered. The chapter ends with an introduction to some recent international attempts to address the issues of women's rights and women's participation in decision-making at all levels.

Liberation Movements and Women's Liberation

> "Time and time again, a pattern has emerged where women play a significant role during the armed struggle, but once the revolutionary government is installed,

> women's needs and interests fade from the political agenda, and the political rhetoric fails to give rise to active programs for women's emancipation" (Moore, 1988: 171).

A discussion of women's political rights and roles in post-conflict society cannot be separated from a discussion of their positions before and during the war. Many national liberation movements have, for instance, included *gender equity and women's liberation* in their programme for political change, encouraging women's participation in the struggle and creating expectations of freedom, equality and equity.

Despite obvious differences, the conflicts in **Nicaragua**, **El Salvador** and **Guatemala** were all struggles rooted in increasing economic and social polarization. In these cases, an ideology of social justice and greater gender equity developed which was sufficiently appealing to both men and women to mobilize them to stage an armed social protest. While the achievement of peace has been an important step toward social justice, many women are still active in grassroots political movements, fighting for their political, economic and social rights as women and as citizens. Here they build on the management, co-ordination and negotiation skills they developed within the movements or in exile. Organizing for action has become a forceful strategy that leaves the authorities little opportunity to disregard women's post-war concerns, whether these pertain to human rights, land rights, domestic violence or reproductive health. However, in some sectors of society, more traditional gender roles have been reintroduced and women in public roles experience stigmatization and exclusion (Bennett et al., 1995; Brunt 1997; Marcus 1996c).

Another political movement which strove explicitly for a democratic society with greater gender equity was the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Accounts of the Eritrean struggle for independence agree that women played a major role at all levels within the movement, and that the liberation movement considered the improvement of women's situation an indispensable part of the democratic goal. Consequently, EPLF not only included the gender issue in its rhetoric, but also initiated skills training and educational activities, introduced appropriate technology, widely established primary health care programmes, and adopted new marriage and labour laws in order to overcome traditional gender inequality. The National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) was established in 1979 to organize women in support of the EPLF and the struggle. The union still exists in a restructured form and attempts to preserve earlier advancements and, in particular, to improve women's economic position. But as some observers note, this may not be easy, despite continued official commitment from many sides. As in many other cases, social norms and cultural values still work against women's equality; in addition, many different social groups now compete for their share of resources and tend therefore to be less willing to grant women space. Many observers judge the women to be economically seriously at risk (Iyob, 1997; Klingebiel et al., 1995; Marcus, 1996b; Rentmeesters, 1989; Selassie, 1992; Wilson, 1991).

The case of **Mozambique** resembles that of Eritrea insofar as Frelimo (*Frente de Libertação de Moçambique*, Mozambican Liberation Front) also declared the liberation of women "the fundamental necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a precondition for victory". And as in Eritrea, a women's wing of the movement, the Mozambique Women's Organization, was established to mobilize women in support of the struggle and to protect their specific interests. Moreover, Frelimo ensured that women obtained easier access to education, and made legal and constitutional changes to protect their rights. Despite this early attention to gender, most observers agree that the women's issue was largely abandoned by the main political actors after independence (Chingono, 1996; **Jacobson**, 1995; Urdang, 1989).

A different case is the national resistance war in **Uganda**, where, apparently, women were not invited or encouraged to take part in the war. Rather, according to one observer, women's

participation was a result of their identification with the main objectives of the struggle — human rights, democracy, nationalism. However, after the war gender issues became a priority of the new government, which insisted on, among other things, women's participation in the government, appointing women to several cabinet seats (**Ferris**, 1993).

The cases of **Afghanistan** and **Algeria** present a very different scenario, one largely determined by the opposition between a secular and an Islamic world-view and by a patriarchal social structure. Whereas gender equity was seen as central to the struggle of other movements, Wali (1995: 298) states that in Afghanistan, "any focus on 'women's problems' was seen by both the 'mujahadeen' Resistance Movement and the Communist Soldiers as a diversion of attention from the primary objective of the war". Gender features only marginally on the political agenda for the ongoing conflict in Algeria, and in neither case have women been involved in the war beyond supporting the combatants. But in both cases, as well as in **former Yugoslavia**, women play a critical political role as the embodiment of their nation's cultural heritage and the family's social status. However, unfortunately for women, this has not yet materialized in any serious national commitment to the betterment of their social and economic situation. According to some, the increased politicization of their gender identity has rather resulted in more violations of women's human rights and in restrictions of their social freedom and mobility (Wali, 1995; Rashid, 1996; **War Report**, 1995). In these three cases, many women have experienced a considerable loss of influence, and express concerns about how to regain their pre-war socio-economic status and identity.

In several of the examples discussed here, liberation movements articulated a close link between national liberation and women's liberation, and consequently they granted women new rights and responsibilities which gave them an unprecedented degree of influence and authority in society during war. However, the initial optimism regarding women's future status in society in many instances soon gave way to serious doubts about the long-term positive results. As **Byrne** (1996a: 35) remarks: "Women have often found that fighting for their country's liberation and achieving more prominent public roles is not a guarantee that a real commitment to gender equality will follow victory".

Peace-Building Activities

> "Women and young people are rarely consulted during the political process of peace negotiations, yet they are often the ones who keep their communities alive — emotionally and physically — during the times of war" (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 1995: 3).

The process toward peace often follows two parallel paths. One consists of the formal peace negotiations, conducted by political leaders and in some cases mediated by external parties in an attempt to reach a peace agreement. The other consists of a wide range of informal activities, usually orchestrated by a highly heterogeneous group of voluntary grassroots organizations which seek to draw attention to particular issues in the transition to peace, and thereby influence the formal process.

• Formal negotiations for peace

Formal peace negotiations between representatives of the warring parties constitute an important element in the political rebuilding process, as they serve to define the basic power relations and often identify priorities for immediate post-war political activity. Insofar as female citizens have needs and priorities different from those of their male counterparts, they would themselves be interested in participating in such negotiations to ensure that adequate

attention is given to their views. However, as most observers to formal national peace negotiations have pointed out, the negotiations tend to be male, high-level activities, and women are typically under-represented in the involved international authorities, in negotiation teams representing the warring parties, and in any other institution invited to the negotiation table (**Ferris**, 1993; **Byrne**, 1996b).

Commenting on the peace negotiations in **Israel**, Sharoni (1995: 11) writes: "Among the more general points I addressed were the exclusion of women from the negotiation table and how ironic it was that high-ranking Israeli generals, who spent a good portion of their lives waging war, have now become the ultimate voices of authority of peace while the perspectives and experience of women peace activists have been rendered trivial".

One often-noted exception to this rule is **Somalia**, where an invitation to participate in an early peace conference in Mogadishu was extended to Somali women, on the recommendation of the Ethiopian President and the Swedish Life and Peace Institute, the main conference facilitators (**Byrne**, 1996c). Women have also been present in later UN-facilitated peace conferences in Somalia and Ethiopia, but, as has been pointed out, their role has generally been restricted to that of observer, which does not allow them to influence the ongoing debate directly (Jama, 1996; **Byrne**, 1996d). Women's presence at some of these official conferences notwithstanding, it is also true that Somali culture and social structure generally preclude women from participating directly in decision-making processes. When at some point it was recommended that all regional representations to the Transitional National Council should include at least one woman, it turned out that many clans would not accept being represented by a woman (Jama, 1996).

A very different example of women's participation in peace negotiations is that of **Palestine**. The Palestinian delegation included several female members, among them the spokesperson Dr. Hanan Mikhail-Ashrawi. According to Sharoni (1995), women's high-level inclusion was a direct result of women's general political mobilization and their explicit demand for inclusion in the process which would determine the structure of future social and political institutions.

The inclusion of several women's organizations in the peace process in **Guatemala** was also rooted in the prior mass political mobilization of women. Women's organizations had already mushroomed during the conflict and many had clear intentions to become involved in the peace process and the shaping of future society. A cross-cultural co-ordinating committee emerged from these grassroots organizations to represent women's interests during the talks. Among the concerns most clearly expressed were issues of civil power, security, and the establishment of a democratic society (Mujeres Construyendo la Paz, 1995a and 1995b). However, as Krznaric (1997) points out in his research on repatriation and reconstruction, what initially appeared as a coherent plea for peace and influence in decision-making became a multi-vocal noise when people became entangled in struggles for land and competition for development resources.

• Work for peace at the grassroots level

When we shift our focus to informal peace-building activities, often initiated at the peak of atrocities and instability, we see a very different picture. Here, women from all walks of life are among the most ardent participants, involved in a wide array of activities. However, as Ferris (1993: 34) tells us, the value of these activities is not always fully recognized: "One problem in analysing women's political actions is that the term 'political' has been largely defined by men. Women's activities in community or church groups, for example, are often labelled 'volunteer', 'charitable', or 'social' even though they have a political impact".

In discussions of women's engagement in peace-building, reference is often made to their nurturing and caring role, which would render their peace activities but a natural extension of their social domestic roles as wives and mothers. However, the history of internal wars also provides us with contrasting evidence about women's active involvement as combatants. **Angola**, **El Salvador**, **Eritrea**, **Kenya**, **Lebanon**, **Liberia**, **Nicaragua**, **Sri Lanka**, **Uganda**, and **Vietnam** all had female fighters, in some cases even holding high-level positions (Kanogo, 1987; Bennett et al., 1995). And in **Rwanda** women shocked the world by actively supporting and participating in the genocide. In still other conflicts, women play roles as mobilizers and support soldiers by providing food, primary health care, etc. As **Ferris** (1993: 6) points out, "most wars have been fought with the acquiescence and support of women".
The reasons women put forth for becoming combatants are as diverse as those of men and include forced recruitment, agreement with the goals of the war, or economic necessity, pointing to both political and socio-economic motives. Women, like men, occupy many different roles in society, all of which are culturally and socially constructed (**Byrne**, 1996a). Thus, when women opt for an active role in peace work or other forms of political action, this too is a choice — a choice which may be motivated by a lack of identification and association with the ongoing conflict or by a personal experience of its socially and economically disruptive consequences and a wish to return to a more stable and less distressing situation (Wallace, 1991).

Summarizing the experiences of women from different battle zones, the editors of **Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect** remark that "many women perceived conflict as something entirely outside their control, a struggle for power at a level beyond their reach. But they recognized the effort that has to be made by every individual to rebuild society after conflict" (Bennett et al., 1995: 16). When women do not identify with the objectives of the war, or feel alienated from the mechanisms of war, its apparent irrationality and its destructive consequences easily overshadow its potential gains, resulting in a wish for its immediate termination and a return to stability.

Reflecting this awareness of the deeply destructive nature of war, the Mothers of Soldiers organization in **Russia** demonstrates in the streets, lobbies among officials of state institutions and employs other peaceful means to recover youths from the Russian army before they are socialized into the army's reputed culture of violence (**Newsheet**). In **Guatemala,** female members of the National Co-ordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA) likewise *campaign against the conscription of young men*, not only to protect them from socialization into army culture, but because the mothers are economically dependent on their sons (**In Brief**, June 1996; Marcus, 1996c).

In recognition of the close relationship between children's socialization and people's responses to emerging conflicts, **Somali** women in Mogadishu have formed NGOs which, among other activities, organize *peace education* for women. In the programme, women are first made aware of the cultural values and norms they convey to children in their everyday interactions, and how these may contribute to discriminatory and violent behaviour. Then they learn alternative forms of socialization that stress equity and social justice and non-violent ways of dealing with tensions and conflicts (Jama, 1996; Warsame, 1996).

The fact that women recognize the connection between the domestic and public domains, or between the "home front" and the "war front" (Nnaemeka, 1997) has been noted by many writers on conflict and gender (Bennett et al., 1995; **Byrne**, 1996b; Jama, 1996). This intimate connection may not only intensify stress, but may also be used actively and strongly by women in their efforts to achieve peace and transformation. "Increasingly, women are realizing that in order to change society, they must begin with the family and the community, for 'women's capacity to challenge the men in their families, their communities, or their political movements will be a key to remaking the world'" (Enloe, quoted in **Ferris**, 1993: 47). Acknowledging women's contributions to peace, a report from the **United Nations**

(1996) thus concludes that "women make an important but often unrecognized contribution as peace educators both in their families and in their societies".

The conviction that peace should be approached at community and family levels is one shared by many women's peace organizations, which use their central positions and extensive social networks creatively to put pressure on husbands and other male relatives to cease fighting and seek political, more peaceful solutions to conflict. The fact that women in many cases have loyalties to different kin groups as a result of local marriage patterns, increases their bargaining power and their ability to bring together warring parties. In **Somalia,** for example, women are reported to have played a significant role in the release of several hostages on that basis. However, as the frequency of illegal detention and rape suggests, such an intermediary position is not without danger (Dirasse, 1995).

In a similar vein, a paper prepared by the United Nations (1992) on Women and the Peace Process concludes that in many cases women play a major role in *shaping public opinion*, for example by organizing demonstrations. Reporting on the case of **Somaliland**, Warsame (1996: 60) remarks that urban women "organise peace demonstrations whenever there is a threat or an actual eruption of hostilities between two clans". Likewise, Power-Stevens (1996b: 95) stresses the active role of women, recounting that Somali women held a demonstration for peace on International Women's Day in March 1995, chanting slogans such as "Somali women want peace not war". And according to Warsame (1996), women on some occasions physically attacked civilian men carrying arms.

Another example of women's mobilization comes from the local office of the global Women in Black movement in **former Yugoslavia**, which has constantly protested against the war., The organization initially was a large, ethnically mixed group, but when inter-ethnic co-operation succumbed to the nationalist discourse, it split into separate groups. In **Mozambique**, women organized demonstrations to protest against the government's failure to end the war. The issue of war and peace was explicitly linked to development and the impact of war on people's livelihoods: demonstrators emphasized the lack of protection for women and the lack of jobs (Chingono, 1996). Reports from **Burma**, **Sierra Leone**, **Sri Lanka**, and a host of other arenas of war show a similar pattern, reminding us how much is at stake for women.

Building on experiences in other parts of the world, a group of rural women united in the Association of the New Filipina (Kabapa) of the Coalition for Peace in the **Philippines** attempted to use *health as an incentive* for peace when they asked the warring parties to lay down weapons while children in the region were vaccinated (Peters, 1996). The strategy to use health initiatives to achieve peace has also been adopted in countries such as **Afghanistan**, **Lebanon**, **the Sudan** and **Uganda**, but the data available do not allow for a gender-based analysis of women's involvement and roles (Peters, 1996).

Focusing on the impact of war on women's health, security and rights, the Mothers for Peace association in **former Yugoslavia** succeeded not only in achieving the demobilization of thousands of young men, but also in *increasing public awareness* of human rights and landmines (Walsh, 1996). And in, for example, **Argentina**, **El Salvador**, **Guatemala** and **Sri Lanka**, where disappearances have commonly accompanied armed violence, women have formed nation-wide NGOs which urge state authorities to *investigate human rights violations* as part of the peace and reconciliation process. Moreover, these organizations address the politically sensitive issue of *impunity*, and assist victims with *compensation* claims (**Byrne**, 1996b; **In Brief**, June 1996; **Ferris**, 1993; Maquin, 1994; Schirmer, 1993; Stephen, 1995). The importance of such activities goes far beyond healing personal wounds by putting an end to painful uncertainty; they may help to restore confidence in authorities and regenerate a sense of community, solidarity and trust (Dirasse, 1995).

Although the above examples of peace activities can be said to have long-term consequences, few of them work directly toward the improvement of women's future status. In that respect, the experience of **Guatemalan** women in exile in neighbouring Mexico is interesting. Not only did they manage to influence quite successfully the conditions for repatriation by becoming represented in the Permanent Commissions and demanding that a *truth commission* be set up to investigate killings and disappearances, they also worked toward securing their *participation in future political institutions* in Guatemala (**In Brief**, June 1996; Byrne, 1996b; Marcus, 1996c; Maquin, 1994).

But even when political activities do not immediately improve women's situation, it is clear that they *generate or reinforce women's awareness of the political dimension of conflicts and of their own political position*, be it as victims of political violence or as a muted political group. The work for peace has also been identified by many women as *a unique opportunity to become organized*, an experience that can prove useful in other aspects of post-war rebuilding. And when such movements focus on women's shared social experiences, they may contribute both to *counteracting dominant stereotypes* of the "ethnic other" which are reinforced by war-time propaganda, and to *generating greater solidarity among women* across other lines of division. This has been true in **Cyprus**, **Israel**, **Sri Lanka**, **former Yugoslavia** and many other countries (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1992; Family Rehabilitation Centre, 1993; Sharoni, 1995; **War Report**, 1995).

While there are obviously many positive results of women's national and local-level work for peace, both for women and for society, it is also important to note its limitations. First of all, women's active efforts to move away from conflict and hatred are, as noted, *seldom matched by an inclusion in formal peace negotiations*. The most serious consequence of women's absence in the official peace process is that they are *deprived of a unique opportunity to include their particular views and concerns in the national political agenda*. Unfortunately there are no in-depth studies yet which indicate what the specific ramifications of women's inclusion or exclusion are.

Women's wish to be included in the peace negotiation process is more than a simple demand for numeric representation proportional to women's presence in a particular society. It is a demand based on the belief that institutions governed by men are unlikely to reflect the specific interests and views of the female population; instead, these institutions may reproduce and even reinforce the marginalized position of women in society. Second, it is a demand reflecting women's increasing awareness of the potential for transformation and reform in periods immediately preceding and following peace. While formal peace processes would undoubtedly benefit from women's participation, this should not divert our attention from the importance of their work at the grassroots level. Instead efforts should be made to find new ways to integrate the work done and the experiences harvested at grassroots level into the main exercise of peace-building

Democratization and Decentralization

> "Women had reservations about the form and content of the transition process, which must be taken seriously if there is to be a sustainable, accountable political context for development" (**Jacobson**, 1995: 35).

Most war-to-peace transitions are governed by an overall agenda for democratization which involves one or more of the following issues: free and fair elections, decentralization of government institutions and mechanisms for increased popular participation in political

decision-making. The issue of democratization resembles that of peace-building in that it is typically considered a male issue, and consequently is treated in gender-neutral terms. But as Baden and Milward (1996) have pointed out, democratization is of great importance to women because it defines the levels of influence and the mechanisms of resource allocation. In fact, many feminist writers see democratization as the most promising mechanism to increase women's influence and inclusion in decision-making processes.

• National elections

Free and fair elections are usually organized and held within a few years of the signing of a peace agreement, to confirm the authority of the transitional government or to elect a new one. In some cases elections also serve to obtain national consensus regarding post-war reconstruction priorities.

One crucial aspect in the discussion of elections from a gender perspective is the right to vote. Most countries now have universal franchise by constitution in national and regional elections. In **Somalia**, for example, women have had the right to vote since the late 1950s, likewise in **Cambodia** women were granted this right in the 1950s (UNHCR, 1994a; Marcus, 1996a). **Sri Lanka** can boast of having granted Sri Lankan women the right to vote in 1931, before most European countries.

For people who have suffered years of hardship during war, the first elections are like a ritual of peace, with a significance beyond showing allegiance to one political party or another. For some people, it is their first opportunity ever to vote by ballot. In other words, elections embody the essence of what it means to be a national citizen. The endless queues at the polls during the first elections in post-war **Eritrea**, **Mozambique** and **Uganda** symbolize the significance of elections.

However, while constitutions generally recognize women's rights in this respect, women face many other *obstacles* when trying to exercise their right to vote. In **South Africa**, for example, women often faced difficulties because they *were expected not to vote against male relatives and authorities*. In response to this, The National Women's Coalition in South Africa initiated work in 1992 to draft a women's rights charter. A similar situation prevails in **Algeria** where "men have been able to vote on behalf of wives, and since 1970, for all female members of their extended family. The FLN [*Front de Liberation Nationale*, National Liberation Front Islamic] has consistently denied women in Algeria a political voice" (Power-Stevens, 1996a: 76). But male expectations of family consensus in political matters may not be the only obstacle. Women often have *limited political experience* and may consider politics a male domain. When parliamentary elections were finally agreed on in **Sierra Leone** in 1995, a group of women organized themselves as the Women Organized for a Morally Enlightened Nation (WOMEN) to mobilize women to participate in the upcoming elections, knowing that most women would otherwise not participate. Another group, FORUM, originally formed to present Sierra Leone women's views at the Beijing Conference, also took part in this mobilization campaign. On election day, women from these organizations literally went from door to door, ignoring threats to their security, to persuade women to vote. Apart from directly influencing the outcome of the elections, this action also generated a sense of solidarity among women, who were encouraged to organize themselves on a number of issues relating to justice and economic and cultural development (Dunbar, 1997). This may shape their future political and social roles.

A third kind of obstacle relates not only to elections, but to political life as such. Women may face difficulties in finding *time to participate* in regular political meetings, and due to *illiteracy* or a poor command of the national language they also have difficulties comprehending and articulating political goals and programmes. Jacobson's analysis of

women's participation in political affairs preceding elections in **Mozambique** is particularly interesting and useful in this context. She discusses the role played by women's organizations in preparing and disseminating *alternative information pamphlets* which resonated more directly with women's everyday realities. For example, a relatively small organization located in the *bairro* (shanty-town) of Maputo developed a participatory role play that reflected local women's own position, in order to explain to them the relevance of certain political issues to their lives and thereby mobilize them for elections. Women's organizations also made a valuable contribution by *reaching marginalized groups* in society: "Women's organisations of various types were crucial for the success of the civic education programme, because their existing community-based structures provided a way of reaching the non-literate sectors of the urban and rural populations" (**Jacobson**, 1995: 31).

However, as Jacobson notes, despite the tremendous importance of these activities, many of the organizations were marginalized in terms of transportation and funding. Women also faced discrimination in other areas. For example, women's representation in the organizations which supervised the election process in Mozambique was far from proportional, despite their obvious qualifications and interest in the process. Among the reasons for this, Jacobson singles out the focus on education and literacy in Portuguese when recruiting members for the election teams. Women's *under-representation*, she concludes, "might have been countered if the CNE [National Electoral Commission] had decided to promote actively the recruitment of women who had 'equivalent' qualifications — for example, women who had considerable organisational experience through their work with community organisations" (**Jacobson**, 1995: 31). This recommendation stresses a general *tendency to overlook women's particular capacities and resources* in many countries.

Another important issue that influences women's role in elections as well as the political process more generally, is the *right to be voted for*, and thus relates more to inclusion in the established political structure (discussed below). I have already mentioned that some officials in **Somalia** strongly opposed women representing their clan in the Transitional Council, although the country had earlier had female ministers. Women are generally also excluded from the clan-based councils of elders, which in the present situation is a more important organ for political discussions (UNHCR, 1994a; Jama, 1996). In light of the assertion that "Somali women are the most able peacemakers and developers of their country" (UNHCR 1994a: 114), this is a regrettable fact and the demand of some Somali women's organizations that they also be consulted by external actors seems pertinent. Finally, restrictions on women's eligibility has also been noted in **Algeria**, where women were directly prevented from being elected in the free elections of 1990 (Byrne, 1996b). Commenting on women's political visibility in **Cambodia**, UNIFEM remarks that only five per cent of the candidates for the Constituent Assembly elections were women, while the Supreme National Council did not have any female members (in Arnvig, 1994). The experience from **Palestine**, on the other hand, shows that women's role in politics is not an isolated issue, but depends partly on men's interests: "women who held leadership positions in political parties during the 'Intifada' were compelled to step aside when the men returned from jail or exile...only five women gained seats in the newly created 88 member Palestinian Assembly" (**Newsheet**: 7).

• Decentralization of state functions

Democratization usually implies a change from centralized state structures to decentralized state structures with regional and district-level representation, assumed to be better geared to reflect people's perspectives and to respond to their interests. But Baden and Milward (1996: 42) warn that *decentralization* cannot be equated with democracy, increased influence and people-centred development: "decentralisation...brings the danger that power and resources will be captured by local élites or vested interest groups". In other words, decentralization is no guarantee for women's equal participation and representation.

Many of the countries considered in this paper have only recently embarked on this process of transformation, and because of the predominance of gender-neutral discourses and gender-blind analyses, it is difficult to assess the extent to which women have managed to gain a position within the system whence they can make a fruitful contribution.

Among the countries aiming for a democratic system and decentralized decision-making is **Eritrea**. In order to allow the people to exert their influence in matters of direct concern to their livelihood, an administrative system with representation at regional and sub-regional levels was recently implemented. One of the institutions of importance for people's and, in particular, women's participation is the *kebabi* session. The *kebabi* is a group of small villages or settlements joined to form an administrative unit on par with the village unit: "The village session constitutes every village resident, regardless of sex, religion or origin, who resides in the village and has attained the age of eighteen" (Tesfai, 1996: 32). According to the same source, the *kebabi* guarantees women's equal participation, contrary to its predecessor, the *baito*. To further ensure women's representation, it was agreed that women would have a quota of 30 per cent in both regional and sub-regional councils, and the right to contest any or all of the remaining 70 per cent (Tesfai, 1996; Fessehassion, 1989; Marcus, 1996b).

In **South Africa**, the vast majority of top leaders was male throughout the Apartheid era, although the African National Congress (ANC) encouraged gender equality in its organization. In response to this contradiction, women forcefully claimed their representation in governing bodies, demanding that the policy-making councils be one-third female. When this was refused, they walked out of the meeting. In 1994, the situation changed in favour of women when the ANC decided to field a list of candidates that counted one-third women in the first multi-racial elections. As a result of their perseverance, women constituted 15 per cent of the Senate and 24 per cent of the National Assembly in the first parliament of the Government of National Unity (Eddings, 1994; Mabandla, 1995). Later, women also stressed the need to include a gender dimension in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Goldblatt and Meintjes, 1996).

In both **Rwanda** and **Uganda**, the government has developed policies to further integrate women into decision-making at all levels, and women have succeeded in obtaining ministerial-level posts in the new governments (**El-Bushra** and **Mukarubuga**, 1995). On Uganda, Bennett et al. (1995: 92) report that "the government is committed to inclusion of women and recognition of their concerns in the political process at all levels — Uganda has five ministers as of 1994 — but at village level a new order will take time to emerge".

This observation would probably be valid for a number of other countries as well, and reminds us that while it is important to have women in important posts, this is only a first step. For women to become full participants in political life, profound changes in social attitudes are also necessary.

• Constitutional reforms

In addition to creating new administrative and political organizations, many countries emerging from conflict revise the existing constitution to reflect the new political reality, changes in power relationships, and ideological objectives. At the same time, constitutions are a means to harmonize the regulation of areas governed by divergent customary laws. For women, *constitution-making* is a process of uttermost importance, as the lack of *recognition of their rights* in a new constitution will have long-term impacts on their recovery and options for development.

In some countries, women have been actively involved in the constitution-making process. In **Cambodia**, for example, the drafting of the constitution during the UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) period involved a consultative process with women of all socio-economic classes and from all parts of the country. The final constitution basically grants women equal rights (Arnvig, 1994; Byrne, 1996b). Likewise, in **Eritrea** where the government's overall commitment to participatory processes led it to involve the population in a broad public discussion in preparation of the new constitution, special commissions with both male and female members visited all regions to discuss the draft constitution, and even the diaspora was involved in this process.

The importance of constitutions lies not only in their definition of people's political rights as citizens of a country. Constitutions also determine people's economic and social rights, and thus play a central role in empowerment. *Access to and control over resources* is a critical issue, as will be demonstrated in the discussion of economic reconstruction, not least because women's opportunity to improve their overall status within post-war societies hinges on their economic empowerment. In a discussion of famine, Sen (1981) has argued that the loss of *entitlement* rather than absolute food shortage tends to kill. Similarly, it may be argued that restrictions on women's rights and access to resources rather than an actual lack of resources constitute the main constraint for women trying to recover from a damaging war. On the other hand, the fact that many women exercised control over tangible resources during the period of conflict may have given them more political power and status.

When the political leadership of independent **Eritrea** initiated its work on a new constitution, there was a clear continuity with earlier positions on gender equity. A draft text thus stated that "any act that violates the human rights of women or limits or otherwise thwarts their role or participation is prohibited" (Tesfai, 1996: 30). Apart from recognizing women's *basic rights* in general, the constitution also makes a step forward from the existing legislation by granting women rights of access to land. The law moreover prohibits female circumcision, and dowry and brideprice are made illegal, while rights to maternity leave have been extended (**NUEW Fact Sheet**; Iyob, 1997). Despite this government commitment to women's empowerment, many observers note that, for various reasons, many of the rights now granted by law remain unrealized, and women have become increasingly frustrated (Iyob, 1997; Rentmeesters, 1989; Mama, 1992).

In Angola, female members of the ruling party developed a national wing of the ruling party, the so-called Organization of Angolan Women (OMA), to lobby for women's rights. At the same time, women who disagreed with its approach or were disappointed with OMA's achievements, began organizing themselves along professional and business lines, following a general trend for civil society to organize as a political force. In the 1980s, several laws were passed granting equal rights to women in matters of employment, the household, inheritance and public life (Sogge, 1992).

Women in **Guatemala** have also taken action to ensure equal rights. The Ixmucané association, for example, has been campaigning for husbands and wives to have joint title to land, and for widows and other single women to be able to obtain land titles (Byrne, 1996c). In the same region, 8,000 women from **El Salvador** demonstrated in the capital in 1992 to create public awareness of their situation. In addition to land, the agenda also included credit, health, training, and education as priority concerns (Julia, 1995). Legal rights to land have been high on the agenda among women, especially widows, in **Rwanda**, where according to customary law a widow must transfer her land to her deceased husband's family if she has no sons. Widows' groups are said to have sprung up across post-conflict Rwanda to ensure legal entitlements to property (**Newsheet**).

Former Yugoslavia presents a different picture in that women are experiencing a relative decrease in political power and rights. The politicization and manipulation of gender identities

which is part of the nationalist ideology are seen by many women as the main cause of the gradual erosion of their rights (**War Report**, 1995). In a paper on women in Sub-Saharan Africa, Mabeza-Chimedza likewise illustrates how women are being manipulated in the political process. In **Zimbabwe**, for example, many women enjoyed increased participation and influence during the conflict, only to face total marginalization when post-war institutions were being established (Mabeza-Chimedza,1995; Staunton,1990).

While most women's organizations focus on possible gaps in legislation and seek to improve the legal framework, other groups point out that good legislation is not enough, because in many cases women are ignorant of their rights. In order to have any empowering impact, the appropriate laws should be accompanied by activities to enhance women's legal literacy and by the establishment of institutions that provide legal counselling (Dirasse, 1995). To assist those who organize legal literacy courses, women activists from **Palestine** have prepared a handbook in which they have undertaken "a legal analysis of existing laws from a gender perspective and a review of their implementation" (**United Nations Economic and Social Council**, 1996c). Women also took action in this field in **Nicaragua**, where local level Legal Support Groups were established to assist women in learning about their rights. In the Mexican camps, "Mamà Maquin" initiated literacy programmes and legal awareness campaigns in preparation of the refugees' return to **Guatemala**. Furthermore, the current objectives of the NUEW in **Eritrea** give equal emphasis to ensuring that women are granted equal rights in all domains, making women aware of their rights, and supporting their efforts to claim their rights (**NUEW Fact Sheet**).

At another level, several case studies show that even when more gender-sensitive legislation is endorsed, there may be difficulties in translating these into entitlements for women (OXFAM, 1995). One constraint is the lack of willingness and/or capacity of the relevant state institutions. Byrne (1996b), for example, concludes that while women were given more rights in **Cambodia**, interest in and support of women's issues have been declining, rendering women's rights 'paper rights' only. Also with reference to Cambodia, Marcus (1996a: 4) asserts that when the Khmer Rouge were overthrown in 1979, the government expressed sincere intentions to improve women's situation, but that "the case of Cambodia, however, resembles many others where the institutional apparatus is in place, but where lack of money and human resources render it inefficient and there is still a long way to institutionalising gender in practice".

A second obstacle exists at the local level, where new laws meet with resistance because they contradict customary laws and prevailing social norms (Arnvig, 1994; Baden and Milward, 1996; Iyob, 1997; **NUEW Fact Sheet**; Sogge, 1992). Regarding demobilized female combatants in Eritrea, Klingebiel et al. (1995: 68) quote ILO as having said that: "In principle, the present legislation guarantees equal opportunity and treatment of women and men. In practice, however, socio-cultural norms, customary laws and traditional practices, especially in the rural areas, still restrict women from exercising their rights". Similarly, Kesby (1996: 562) asserts that even though women in Zimbabwe have been granted many new rights in the new constitution, the reassertion of patriarchal power constantly threatens to undermine these rights, and he concludes that: "High hopes for a radical change in women's position have given way to the realisation that social relations generated by patriarchy and capitalism have the power to persist, at least in the medium term, and to metamorphose unpredictably in the future".

International Responses

> "For women, the need today is for linkages with international organizations that will provide a world-wide network of support to give salience and bring pressure to addressing the issues of women" (Julia, 1995: 230).

The reconstruction of political institutions is a highly sensitive process, and most internal actors are alert to interference that may compromise their interests in this initial period of state-building. In other words, external actors who intervene to support women's projects need to be careful about which activities they support, to ensure that the result will indeed be a positive one.

As indicated in the discussion of women's grassroots peace activities, many women's organizations in this field are part of a larger network of organizations which assist each other with ideas for activities, and organizational experiences, as well as awareness-raising at an international level. International networking is described by many organizations as central to their survival. For organizations which directly challenge the authorities, typically human rights organizations, international attention may protect them from harassment and threats.

However, in discussions of assistance from the United Nations and international NGOs, the focus has been on women's roles in *decision-making*, and their contribution to *peace-building, conflict resolution and reconciliation*.

The discussion of women's participation in decision-making in relation to war and peace in fact predates the recent discussion of post-conflict reconstruction. In 1975, the *Nairobi Conference*, which marked the opening of the United Nations Decade for Women, pointed to the need to involve women equally in decision-making. The recommendations of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women stated that: "Governments should be encouraged to increase the participation of women in the peace process at the decision-making level, including them as part of delegations to negotiate international agreements relating to peace and disarmament and establishing a target for the number of women participating in such delegations" (Recommendation XX in United Nations, 1992: 3). However, when the first review of the appraisal and implementation of the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies was conducted in 1990, the disappointing conclusion was that "women are no more prominent among those making decisions on conflict than in the past," and therefore "the United Nations and the international non-governmental organizations concerned should continue to monitor and support women's increased involvement in the peace process" (United Nations, 1992: 3).

At the *Beijing Conference* in 1995, the issue was again raised at the international policy level, when the conference defined it as a strategic objective to "increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision-making levels...and integrate a gender perspective in the resolution of armed or other conflicts...and ensure that bodies are able to address gender issues properly" (United Nations, 1995: 61). One of the important steps taken was to stress that women's involvement in decision-making was not only a question of quotas for women, but a process that also entailed increased gender sensitivity in general, requiring appropriate training and more research on gender issues.

The work on gender differences in political decision-making and conflict resolution is part of a larger United Nations effort to ensure greater gender equality. Since 1989 the *Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)* and the *Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)* have devoted much time to this issue, and in the report of a recent Expert Group Meeting DAW

reiterates the need for external and government actors to pay attention to women's particular needs and capacities in programmes relating to peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction (**United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women**, 1996).

However, the contributions of the United Nations are not confined to international awareness-raising. At a more concrete, practical level, *UNESCO's "Culture of Peace" programme* concentrates on peace-building in specific war-affected countries. Key components of the programme are work with local organizations to collect and document local stories of peace and reconciliation, the training of journalists and female community organizers/leaders, the training of women as peace promoters, the organization of seminars on the culture of peace and conflict resolution, the establishment of community radio stations, etc. The project is based on the assumption that sustainable peace is achieved from the bottom up, and that it is a precondition for development. On the other hand, development is also an integral aspect of peace, and therefore helping people to rebuild their livelihoods is seen as an important part of peace-building. The experiences of the UNESCO project stress that, due to their particular social roles, women are important catalysts for peace in their communities. Thus, many activities also target women, but at the same time women's issues are regarded as an integral part of a national agenda which concerns both men and women (UNESCO, 1994a).

Another important United Nations contribution comes from *UNIFEM* which founded a project called *African Women in Crisis (AFWIC)* in the early 1990s. AFWIC does not focus on armed conflicts exclusively, but where armed conflicts are concerned one of the main objectives of AFWIC is to promote peace and reconciliation initiatives (Dirasse, 1995). The project document states that: "The mission of AFWIC is to promote a development-oriented strategy to the process of disaster mitigation which ensures that women are viewed as both crucial resources and full participants in all efforts to alleviate crisis situations in Africa" (UNIFEM, 1994: 7). AFWIC is based on a recognition of women's own resources to handle crisis, and aims to identify activities that would further support their efforts, such as skills training and mental health counselling, but also gender-sensitive research and efforts to influence disaster plans and manuals to integrate women as resourceful actors.

Building on its experiences in the field, UNIFEM has recently put forward another promising project proposal focusing on support for *women's initiatives for peace-building and governance* (UNIFEM, 1997). The main activities of the programme, which is supposed to run over a four-year period, include supporting women's concrete efforts to build peace and governance, documenting and disseminating information about these efforts to a wider international audience, and building and consolidating international partnerships to support women's peace-building efforts. The countries pre-selected for pilot projects are **Angola**, **Guatemala** and **Sierra Leone**.

The programme is based on an understanding of conflicts as being caused primarily by economic underdevelopment, resource scarcity, widespread poverty and limited access to and participation in processes of political decision-making. As a consequence, the building of peace is seen as an activity in which all affected sectors of society will have to take part. Women are given special attention because they represent a vital resource for sustaining peace efforts from the grassroots level upward. Moreover, women face new challenges and inherit additional responsibilities in the post-conflict period, and finally, the social transformation occurring in the post-conflict context opens up opportunities which should not be missed for women to strengthen and enhance their contributions to democratic governance.

The selection of three countries from different regions is expected to give additional information on how, and to what extent, the duration of a crisis affects the nature of intervention strategies, ways in which specific cultural conditions determine the nature and type of post-conflict interventions, and the level of cohesion among women's groups during the conflict period and the implications this has for post-conflict reconstruction.

The United Nations agencies are, of course, not the only institutions which aim to build on women's capacities and to involve them more in national war-to-peace transition. The Geneva-based *International NGO Working Group on Refugee Women*, for example, recently prepared a proposal for a project called Bangwe and Dialogue (in Kirundi, *bangwe* means stop fighting). It builds on women's cultural role as mediators in conflicts at the household level, where women have long had the authority to step in between two fighting parties and demand that they cease. The project aims to involve and organize young women of different social and ethnic backgrounds from the **Great Lakes Region** in a dialogue on how to build sustainable peace in the region, translating young women's local level experiences into a means for regional peace (Collette, 1997). Similarly, *Synergies Africa* has attempted to involve women who already hold leadership positions in various African countries in work for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Concluding Remarks

This discussion of political reconstruction processes has clearly demonstrated the relevance of a more gender-sensitive analytical approach by emphasizing women's specific experiences and positions on a number of issues which counteract the homogenizing effects of prevailing discourses on war-to-peace transitions and post-war reconstruction.

From a gender perspective it is, first of all, important to recognize that women are not merely victims of war. On the contrary, women have been actively involved in wars at many levels, and this experience has sharpened their political awareness and raised their expectations of state and society. At one level, this has contributed to the mobilization of women in peace-building processes, where they have played a significant role in organizing and informing the grassroots on important issues such as human rights, impunity, and accountability. Moreover, they have also attempted to define alternatives to violent conflict through peace education from a 'domestic' perspective. But the analysis has also confirmed that women rarely are participants at the level of formal negotiations for peace. The material discussed here suggests that their exclusion or marginalization is often related to structural factors. Women generally show a keen interest in the peace process as it will have a direct impact on their lives, but the way in which the 'rituals' of peace are organized and managed often precludes their participation.

Efforts to create democratic institutions and recognize basic human rights are manifold in most post-war countries. From a gender perspective, these efforts have often been welcomed as a step toward greater gender equality, and women have been active in trying to protect this new space by organizing civic education material for women, mobilizing women to take part in elections, demanding equal representation in democratic institutions, etc. But the gap between ideology and practice is often very large. Obstacles to women's gender equality can be identified at many levels, and include a lack of appropriate policies, a lack of human and financial resources to implement policies, and strong social resistance to the transformation of gender roles. But equally important are the economic constraints on women's participation in public affairs. Thus, despite increasing attention to women's political position, they continue to be under-represented in decision-making bodies at all levels, and for various reasons they often cannot exercise established rights. Women increasingly raise their voices on these issues, but as the present discussion also reflects, they do not speak from a shared position.

III. Economic Reconstruction

A recurrent question regarding post-war economic reconstruction, during which most women's responsibilities for their own well-being and for the progress of their households and communities increase, is: *will the emerging economic environment be conducive to women's empowerment, or will it rather reinforce economic marginalization and increase women's vulnerability?* While the question probably resonates among most women in post-war societies, women's economic situations and interests nevertheless vary greatly, as do the economic strategies they employ in order to restore economic livelihoods. Traditional socio-economic rights and obligations, their recent experiences as *de facto* breadwinners or dispossessed persons as a consequence of the dislocations of war, and of course the present conditions under which they live determine women's economic prospects and the role they play in revitalising the economy.

The economic reconstruction of a country emerging from war is crucial and complex, and directly or indirectly shapes women's post-war livelihoods. First, economic reconstruction involves government initiatives to design a new policy framework in which priority areas for growth and development are identified. At the concrete level, economic reconstruction involves the rehabilitation and development of infrastructure and production facilities and the development of a qualified human resource base to match the established priorities. To promote activities in specific areas, the above initiatives are supplemented with inputs of credit, loans and other resources.

While national authorities and external financial institutions play a crucial role in the recovery of economies shattered by war, post-war economic life is also vibrant with individual men and women who develop individual or collective strategies for survival and development, seeking to exploit whatever opportunities, legal or illegal, they can find to escape further poverty and marginalization.

Thus, in addition to reflecting women's struggles to meet increasing responsibilities, women's concerns about their economic prospects also reflect an awareness that economic recovery entails processes of inclusion and exclusion, or stratification and marginalization, which are partly, but not entirely, beyond their control.

In this discussion of economic reconstruction, various fields of economic activity will be treated in turn. As a large proportion of the women with whom we are concerned here are or have been dependent on agricultural production, their experiences in this sector will be considered first. The following two sections discuss non-agricultural activities: women's involvement in the burgeoning informal sector is considered, as well as their participation in the formal sector. The discussion outlines common obstacles to women's economic progress, but overall emphasis is given to *women's constructive role in supporting dependants and in revitalising an economy shattered by war*. Focus is on women's individual economic strategies, but as the discussion will show, women often mobilise existing and establish new networks based on kinship, residence or shared experiences and interests in order to restore their livelihoods.

The discussion looks at women's economic strategies holistically, taking into account the social dimensions of particular economic contexts. Social constructions of gender domains, and ideas about appropriate gender roles, for instance, are considered important in shaping people's attitudes toward various economic options. At the end of the chapter, a selection of recent international projects that aim to understand and facilitate women's economic empowerment in post-crisis situations is considered.

Agricultural Activities

> "The impact of coping is not always positive: some strategies are unsustainable and women in particular are prone to adopt negative strategies because their options are limited" (**In Brief**, November 1996: 2).

In many countries where development has recently been curtailed by armed conflict, agriculture was, and is, the primary form of livelihood and the major source of income for a majority of the population. Consequently, agriculture is often also expected to be the main sector for labour absorption in the post-war period. However, extensive destruction of physical infrastructure, environmental degradation, landmines in agricultural areas, ongoing displacement, lack of farming implements, inefficient administration, and so on, impose serious constraints on economic recovery (**Date-Bah**, 1996).

In addition to these general difficulties, women may be further disadvantaged if customary inheritance and property laws do not guarantee them *legal rights* to land, farming implements and other resources essential for agricultural production (Kesby, 1996). As a consequence they may also have little control over the income they might earn through cultivation (Allen, 1996). Even if they are ensured ownership or access to land, women may no longer have a social network that can be mobilized to cultivate the land, or the cash to hire labourers for the peak season. If unable to cultivate their land, they may be forced to pawn, rent or sell it and search for alternative sources of income, as in **Rwanda** and **Cambodia** (Marcus, 1996a; Utting, 1994).

One option available to women in this situation is to offer themselves as casual labourers to those who possess larger land holdings. Recent research suggests an alarming trend of dispossession, with many women losing access to arable land as a result of their husband's death, divorce or occupation of their land by other people, and the shift to *casual agricultural labour* has become commonplace (Allen, 1996; Marcus, 1996a). Adams and Jackson both note that women have become dominant in poorly paid casual agricultural work in **Zimbabwe**, and that gender has become an important factor in rural social differentiation (Adams, 1991; Jackson, 1996). While casual labour provides women with an income, it may erode their social position and security as it is poorly remunerated, hardly enabling women to make ends meet. Moreover, it provides no long-term assurance of work and income.

In **Rwanda,** dispossession among women survivors has become an acute problem. As the genocide decimated the male population, many women were left behind as single breadwinners without legal rights or access to land. In response to this highly precarious situation, some women have organized themselves and are demanding equal property rights. Others, who have access to land, "have now begun to form groups along the lines of pre-war associations, to help one another with agricultural production, to build houses, and to start up savings and credit schemes to finance income-generating activities" (El-Bushra and Mukarubuga, 1995: 19; see also **Byrne**, 1996b; **Byrne and Baden**, 1995; Chikwendu, 1997).

Self-help organizations that aim primarily to help individuals and families in times of crisis can be found in many countries throughout the world. Recent studies of local-level post-war reconstruction in **Angola**, **Chad**, **Eritrea**, **Ethiopia**, **Liberia** and **Sierra Leone** suggest that they play an important role in post-war situations, in mobilizing resources and re-creating a sense of community, possibly also including marginalized social groups (Richards, 1996; Sogge, 1992; Taylor, 1995, **Tommasoli**, 1995; **Watson**, 1996; Woldemichael and Sørensen, 1995). However, it should be stressed that while self-help organizations are based on social cohesion and solidarity, war also reduces the integrity and capacities of such organizations (Sørensen, 1997). Further, self-help organizations often lack the skills to become efficient intermediaries and managers of large-scale, long-term development projects. However, in

Eritrea, for example, the *adi mahaber* association has responded well in many areas to new requirements, and has proved to be an important mechanism for fund-raising for local development projects (**Tommasoli**, 1995). The association's success is due partly to its skill in reviving social relationships. Now, even if members of a community live in urban areas or abroad, they still contribute financially to development projects in their home villages. As a general word of caution, however, **Tommasoli** (1995: 26) warns that in **Ethiopia** "the grassroots community participation system is still ineffective due to the fact that women do not seem to be fully involved in decision-making processes within their households and communities".

Direct or indirect gender discrimination may result from particular policies and programmes, constraining women's prospects in the agricultural sector. Some development policies favour men in the introduction of new technologies, the provision of access to assets, land, loans, extension services and so on, thus reinforcing men's control over income (Urdang, 1989). This discrimination may be due to a lack of understanding of *local economic relations*, both between and within households. It is often assumed, for example, that the household presents a "natural" economic unit, and that husband and wife both contribute to the household economy. There is ample evidence, however, also from studies of post-war situations, that husbands and wives do not always consider themselves an economic unit (O'Laughlin, 1995). In **Uganda**, for example, women usually tried to avoid pooling resources within the household, because men would waste them on alcohol, and so on. Because land was owned by men, the right to the income from the produce of the fields was heavily contested (Allen, 1996). Regarding **Mozambique**, **Chingono** (1996: 226) states that women rarely relied on their husbands' support in their businesses, instead, "women relied more on the extended family, kin and mutual aid associations, and more often than not their adult children assisted them".

Considering the centrality of women's role in agricultural production, it is surprising that so few documents on post-war economic reconstruction pay attention to women's role in the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector, except as a dimension of the recovery of the household economy. Women's agricultural work is acknowledged in relation to informal sector activities such as petty trade and the establishment of small-scale businesses, an economic activity that seems to have grown drastically in many countries emerging from war (Allen, 1996; Arnvig, 1994; Bascom, 1996; **Chingono**, 1996; Kabera and Muyanja, 1996; Sogge, 1992; **Watson**, 1996).

Informal Sector Activities

> "Some women have attained relative economic and political autonomy from male domination. This has been primarily through entrepreneurial activity in the grassroots war-economy" (**Chingono**, 1996: 209).

Petty trade and *small-scale business* activities often play a central role in the revival of post-war economies. Among the reasons for their relative prominence is the fact that these activities are in principle open to everybody: large investments are not required, unlike in agriculture, they do not require on access to land, which is a scarce resource, they can be carried out at any time and for any length of time, and, finally, the lapse of time between investment and income is considerably shorter than in agriculture. Women in most post-war societies rely heavily on this sector, and they demonstrate a remarkable entrepreneurial spirit and perseverance even under dire circumstances.

In **Somalia**, for example, some nomadic women took over men's traditional role and began frequenting the markets, to sell livestock and milk and to buy other essential consumer items while the war was still raging in northern Somalia. The main cause of this change in roles was

the prevailing security: women apparently had an advantage over men because they possessed a double clan identity. Taking advantage of their mobility, women also became involved in livestock trade, travelling in small groups to other villages and encampments to buy sheep and goats for resale.

While these activities were initially temporary coping strategies, they nevertheless had long-term consequences, as women learned new skills which could be used in post-war times as well. According to Warsame, many men now prefer that women make these s*afar* trading journeys. Somali women slowly expanded their range of activities, which now includes petty trading in the nomadic areas, where they sell sugar, salt, grains, and so on. Warsame also notes that some women have become intermediaries, going to the markets early in the morning to buy livestock that they then sell to livestock exporters, earning a good profit. Demonstrating their understanding of market forces, some women invest in livestock when prices are low, keeping them until the prices rise (Warsame, 1996). Jama (1996: 2) confirms Warsame's observations, stating that "it was the women returnees who quickly set up the market stalls and got them going".

International organizations involved in reconstruction work in Somalia also recognize that the erosion of the nation-state and the involvement of men in warfare, or their flight out of the country, has contributed to the increasing involvement of women in economic activities. A paper published by **UNHCR** (1994a: 115) notes that now, "Women are in control of the 'fabric of society'...and in recent years, women have had a virtual monopoly over barter trade in food, clothing, gold and *qat*...and in Mogadishu they were reportedly the most powerful landlords and moneychangers". These statements may exaggerate the influence of Somali women in a society that is still governed by patriarchal institutions, but they nevertheless suggest that women have achieved important gains that they are unlikely to relinquish in the future (World Bank, 1993).

Turning to another zone of armed conflict, we see that during the Israeli military occupation and the related disengagement from the Israeli economy, women from **Palestine** also turned to the informal economy, where they engaged in so-called *bastat* (peddling) work in addition to agricultural work (Hindiyeh et al., 1994). The politics of the *Intifada*, which stressed self-sufficiency, resulted in increased demand for local products, and thus opened up a new niche for women. Initially, women mainly produced goods, but gradually they also began to market the goods on streets and sidewalks. Depending on the capacities and resources of the individual woman concerned, some specialized in one aspect of the cycle, while others participated in both the production and marketing of a commodity. Some expanded the range of their activities from a single product to a stock of various kinds of merchandise. "Coming to terms with and negotiating these economic inequities has enabled women to learn market concepts such as profit, loss, supply and demand and to take transitional steps into the public sphere of capital" (Hindiyeh et al., 1994: 148). The products that are sold include fruits and vegetables, dairy and canned goods, poultry, ice cream, basic foodstuffs, clothing and shoes, plastic utensils, make-up, and textiles.

Women in **Mozambique** have undergone similar experiences in a very different socio-economic and political environment. "The lack of employment opportunities [due to economic deterioration and discrimination] has driven women into the informal sector" (**Chingono**, 1996: 221). The most common activities include vegetable vending, selling cooked food and brewing and selling beer. Some exploit the geographical diversity of the country by buying vegetables in the green zones around the city and selling them in towns where prices are higher.

In neighbouring **Zimbabwe** as well, state economic failure and rising male unemployment rates put increasing pressure on women. In line with a tradition of labour migration in the region, women entered into informal trade networks that spanned several countries. However,

according to **Cheater and Gaidzanwa** (1996: 191), the fact that women thus transgressed social boundaries meant that female traders were often stigmatized as prostitutes. More importantly, as women became increasingly successful in economic life, male-dominated state institutions adopted regulations and practices that undermined women's entrepreneurial activities and marginalized them as "problem citizens". "Thus, the newly found mobility of women is very threatening to male interest, in opening up possibilities for women to compete in economic and social spaces which were previously the near-exclusive domain of men but are now beyond the male control of the region's state apparatus" (**Cheater and Gaidzanwa**, 1996: 199). In other words, women's economic strategies may indirectly exacerbate gender tensions in different arenas at different levels.

The list of women's activities in various countries reveals an astonishing richness, but it conceals the fact that many more ideas never materialise due to lack of access to credit, lack of business and management skills, or lack of social support mechanisms. Moreover, the description of activities conceals that a particular kind of income-generating activity in one case may represent a continuation of pre-war activities, while in other cases the same activity breaks new ground and perhaps challenges the existing social structure.

While the above kind of activities are all more or less in accordance with women's traditional occupations, some women enter completely *new areas of work*. "In some instances, women have ventured into areas that have been the domain of men such as large-scale entrepreneurial activities, commercial farming, trading and smuggling as well as ownership of small shops" (**Chingono**, 1996: 226).

Describing the post-war situation for women in **Uganda**, Kabera and Muyanja write:

> "Other new developments have included the involvement of women in petty trade and even wholesaling. This has partly been due to the number of families in which all the adult males have been killed, forcing women to find additional sources of income. Other new skills have also been learned in exile. There have been marked improvements in carpentry and building work, and better techniques of poultry farming and fruit growing have been introduced. Maize cultivation has been widely adopted (formerly the crop had hardly been grown in the region but people who had received relief rations had become used to it). Beer brewing using sorghum, millet and bananas has become more common, and women can be seen selling beer at local markets. Trading networks between villages have intensified, and travelling by bicycle over quite long distances has become a normal practice. This has all been the consequence of exposure to ideas from outside the local area" (Kabera and Muyanja, 1996: 103).

Allen likewise notes beer production as an important income-generating activity among women returnees in Uganda. The potential for profit, however, was dependent on whether women possessed their own equipment, whether they had to hire assistants, and in some cases also whether their customers would be willing and able to pay (Allen, 1996). For petty trade an additional determinant would be access to cash, to invest in commodities. Assessing the wider impact of women's economic strategies, Allen stresses that in order to obtain good profits, women often had to walk long distances to good markets, and this meant that they would be away from home for a considerable period of time and thus be unable to perform their domestic tasks.

Another creative example of the role community-based associations may play in post-war recovery comes from **Chad**. Prior to the war, female kin occasionally organized an *azouma* party to raise money for major social events. After the war, female refugees returning to Chad revived this tradition, but turned it into a commercial business. The parties were now organized in public bars and restaurants, open to everyone. The result of this activity was

significant: "Income from the sale of drinks at the party enabled women to accumulate large sums of capital and strengthened ties of female solidarity beyond the immediate kin group" (**Watson**, 1996: 136). This initiative earned the women important sums for social events, but also provided them with capital for small development projects.

Recent studies on post-conflict **Eritrea** suggest that women's coping strategies are often linked to the expansion of economic activity in urban areas, which offer more and better opportunities. Bascom (1996), for example, states that in Eritrea, many women from rural areas have migrated to *urban areas* to sell fruits and vegetables, handicrafts, beer, tea, and so on. They produce some of these items themselves, while others are obtained from wholesalers. Ahmed (1996) notes how a group of Eritrean women pooled their resources to open a fish market in the capital, Asmara. Another new economic opportunity is the raising of poultry, for which there is an increasing demand, especially in urban areas.

In another study on rural Eritrea, many women interviewed expressed a great interest in obtaining assistance for their trading activities, and complained that assistance was often confined to agricultural development (Marcus, 1996b). Similar aspirations were put forward by women in pastoral communities of southern Eritrea, who experienced a dramatic loss of livestock and pastures as a result of the recent war. There, some women now make mats, drinks and various other products from local palm trees, selling their wares with the help of male relatives at local markets. Women also produce handicrafts, such as embroidery, which are bought and resold by middlemen at markets in urban areas. While they were enthusiastic about producing these goods, the women also complained that they needed training to improve their techniques and to gain confidence in marketing, so that they would not have to rely on costly middlemen (Woldemichael and Sørensen, 1995).

Women in **Chad** have also found cross-border trade to be a lucrative occupation, but in contrast to the Eritrean women they personally engage in the trade. Watson's study of female returnees in Chad, for example, showed that they maintained and elaborated on relationships established while in exile: "Women...were able to take advantage of the permeability of national borders in these key frontier zones to trade in Nigerian cloth, cosmetics, whisky and alcohol" (**Watson**, 1996: 136).

Women in **Sierra Leone** crossed not only national borders, but also "enemy lines" in the so-called "attack trade". This was a risky affair that demanded that women constantly negotiate with the belligerent groups and field commanders to obtain their approval and protection. According to Richards (1996: 156), the attack trade not only provides the individual woman and her family with a good income; it also plays a significant role in the economic rehabilitation of the country and the consolidation of peace: "The 'attack trade' may be one of the important processes through which the civil agrarian zones in war-torn Sierra Leone get back on their feet, and extend 'peace from within'".

A war economy is typically characterized by a certain measure of *illegal economic activity* that serves to meet the demand for certain consumer items unavailable at the market, and to raise money for consumption, saving or investment, in production or some other activity. In most cases, the practices of the war economy spill over into the peace period. In many cases, criminal activities can be associated with men, but it is should be stressed that, with pressures increasing on all fronts, women may also be forced into illegal activities. Examples have already been given of women engaging in smuggling.

While prostitution may not necessarily be illegal according to national legislation, it is often considered debased, and prostitutes risk social stigmatization and marginalization. Prostitution nevertheless constitutes a growing source of income in many areas during conflict, when families are separated for shorter or longer periods, and the level of everyday stress increases. A study of the peace-keeping operation in **Cambodia** has shown that the

arrival of international staff may be a further boost to this particular kind of income-generating activity (Utting, 1994). Pointing more specifically to the post-war period, Watson's (1996) account from **Chad** furthermore documents that the social and economic difficulties confronting young women when they try to (re)build their livelihood and settle down in the rural areas lead many to migrate to the nearest town, where prostitution may be a welcome source of income. Further, if a country earns part of its foreign currency from tourism, women may end up in the sex-tourism business (**Chingono**, 1996).

As is the case for other occupations considered unusual for women, prostitution may result in women's status and position being contested, with harassment and exclusion the outcome. However, as several cases demonstrate, women's new roles in society may also result in a transformation of values and norms. Activities for which women used to be condemned and which were previously considered humiliating, are now accepted, if reluctantly (Kibreab, 1995; **Watson**, 1996).

While the above discussion of women's explorations of income-generating activities in the informal sector clearly illustrates the expansion of this area, it has not fully demonstrated that most women must derive their income from several sources to be able to provide for their dependants. This is a well-known survival strategy among poorer sections of any population, but one that also has disadvantages, as the following quotation illustrates:

> "In the dry season, I sell bili-bili [local alcoholic drink] and fried doughnuts and rent out my grinding machine. That's how I am able to feed my children. When we arrived, village development groups were already in existence and, as they only admit single women, I joined one. We have a collective field of cotton. Work on this field takes up a lot of time and prevents us from giving serious attention to our own fields. What I wish for now is to have a pair of oxen and a plough" (Watson, 1996: 123).

This strategy not only presents women with difficult choices that may endanger their livelihoods, but also may lead to women becoming overburdened.

Formal Sector Employment

> "Even if a woman would like to engage in a non-traditional sector she has to be aware that in a lot of areas she will have even more problems finding a job afterwards than her male training colleagues" (Klingebiel et al., 1995: 71).

For most people, employment in the formal sector is attractive, because it ensures a regular income and thus some security in a highly unstable socio-economic situation. However, the options are generally very few. Many private sector factories and businesses close down during the war. And while the informal economy may resume almost immediately, investments in larger enterprises are usually delayed, as investors wait for political stability, favourable policies and the establishment of administrative structures. In the state administration, the opportunities for professionals and civil servants are also drastically reduced due to budgetary cuts and institutional breakdown. From a gender perspective, a discussion of formal sector employment is closely linked to questions about access to education and skills training on the one hand, and the political manipulation of gender roles in response to national economic priorities on the other.

In illustration of this point, we see that in some countries the post-war need for human resource development is so strong that women are encouraged to take up employment even when this contradicts existing gender roles; whereas in other countries a high rate of male unemployment due to demobilization, economic decline and restructuring leads to the *exclusion of women from employment* in the formal sector, regardless of their qualifications. Documentation of the post-war situation in **Angola**, **Mozambique**, **former Yugoslavia**, **Zimbabwe** and many other places sadly indicates that women generally face far more difficulties entering the formal sector than men do (Barron, 1996; **Cheater and Gaidzanwa**, 1996; ILO, 1995a; Sogge, 1992; **War Report**, 1995). An ILO assessment of efforts to reintegrate women in **Namibia** confirmed this trend when it stated that "the process of reintegration (after war) has been less than successful in that the majority of those repatriated are still battling to enter the labour market, and an estimated 50-60% remain unemployed more than two years after their return" (**Date-Bah**, 1996: 10).

In the case of **El Salvador,** Julia reports that despite many improvements in women's situation during the war, women were nevertheless excluded from formal employment in post-war society when the men returned. Julia quotes one woman: "During the war, when we were able to work, we felt secure; now they [men] are the ones who work, and we depend on them because they are the ones who earn a living to support the family; so they dominate, and we are demeaned" (Julia, 1995: 234). When asked about the reason for their economic marginalization, the women unanimously answered that it was due to the many children. With little support from the family and the social sector, women assume the entire *responsibility for parenting* and thus cannot take jobs outside the home.

This problem has also been noted in **Eritrea**, where efforts to integrate demobilized female combatants have partly failed because of the lack of childcare facilities (Abreha, 1996; Klingebiel et al., 1995). Another problem facing many women is their lack of appropriate *qualifications* as a result of the differential access to education and training.

Further, studies on **Angola**, **Eritrea**, and **Namibia** show that even when women have the same level of education as men, they may have difficulties in entering the formal sector (Ahmed, 1996; ILO, 1991; Sogge, 1992). This may be due to a combination of factors including the social conceptualization of women's proper role, a contracted labour market and a growing male labour force in the wake of demobilization, and increased competition on the labour market due to repatriation and resettlement. Such attitudes may translate into employers explicitly or implicitly preferring male employees, women's restricted access to skills training and to credit or loans for self-employment (Abreha, 1996; Ahmed, 1996; **Kasmann and Körner**, 1996; War-torn Societies Project, 1995). But women's self-perception may also be a hindrance, as the following observation on **Palestine** indicates:

> "Although what women do clearly leads to increasing the family's income, women's self-perception continues to be that they are dependent on men. At the same time, men continue to consider women unemployed, viewing any work that they perform as no more than an extension of their domestic (unpaid) labor" (Hindiyeh et al., 1994: 161; see also Madzokere, 1993).

A particularly worrying example of gender differentiation in the economic sphere comes from **Afghanistan**, where the *Taliban* movement has issued strict orders that under no circumstances are women allowed to work, and where educational institutions are now closed to girls. In a country with a large number of widows and families whose only breadwinners are women, such a law has a tremendous socio-economic impact (**Newsheet**). Fearing the ramifications of this *restriction on women's activities*, the Afghan Women's Network has demanded the right to security, employment outside the home and equal access to education for Afghan women, thus linking the issue of women's needs to the broader notion of human

rights (**Newsheet**). Similar conditions can be witnessed in other communities, where traditional culture confines women's economic activities to the domestic sphere or to semi-professional white-collar jobs (Semyonov, 1994). Further, when women are conceived of as protectors and representatives of the national culture, conflicts in the name of culture and religion may result in the reinforcement of such images, and thus in the withdrawal of women from the public labour market, as can be observed in **Afghanistan**, **Algeria** and **former Yugoslavia** (Power-Stevens, 1996a; **War Report**, 1995).

Accounts from various post-conflict societies suggest that women typically find it difficult to adjust to post-war society, because it often dismisses the experiences and skills they have gained and disapproves of their new self-awareness. In **Eritrea**, as in many other countries, women performed important tasks during the combat years, as barefoot doctors, dentists, administrators, mechanics, teachers, etc., and they now expect to continue in these positions (**Newsheet**; **NUEW Fact Sheet**). While some governments have adopted supportive policies, social attitudes have not always changed in favour of women, and women who transgress social boundaries are easily stigmatized.

Another common reason for women's economic marginalization in post-war society is *budgetary cuts in the social sector* in response to financial deficits. As the social sector constitutes a major field of employment for women, such cuts cause women to lose an important source of income and a rare entry point to the formal economy (Brunt, 1997).

However, despite these obstacles, some women manage to enter the public or private sector and put the skills they have gained to an advantage. An interesting example of self-employment is given in Klingebiel's report on the reintegration of ex-combatants in **Eritrea**, where six female fighters formed the Eritrean Veteran Women Fighters' Trading and Investment Share Company. At the time of the study, the company counted "600 female fighters and ex-fighters who own shares worth a total of around 1 million Birr some of which they intend to invest in a hotel project in Tesseney, Eritrea" (Klingebiel et al., 1995: 70). Although the project is more ambitious than most, it faces many of the same problems, including lack of adequate training in management and other business skills. Such inadequacies are often the major cause of lack of success. For example, Brunt describes how The Institute for Social Security and Welfare in **Nicaragua** initiated a small bakery project in an attempt to assist impoverished rural women. Due to a lack of organizational and administrative skills, the women were unable to meet the requirements for accountability and transparency (Brunt, 1997: 10).

Post-war situations may also offer *new areas of employment* for women. One example is the international relief and development organizations that have become an attractive alternative source of income for the well-educated. The international attention to post-war reconstruction has also created new jobs indirectly, because many organizations favour a policy of channelling resources through local NGOs. Traditional self-help groups, community-based organizations, tribal organizations, and so on, transform themselves into NGOs, and previously unorganized groups of citizens now come together to obtain access to resources earmarked for local development projects (Taylor, 1995; Le Moal, 1997). The size of this new field relies partly on the history of state-civil society relations, and on the current space for action granted these organizations by the state. But even in countries with little experience of civil society organization, NGOs are now mushrooming in response to local needs and external priorities. One example is **former Yugoslavia**, where new NGOs emerge all the time, with women being particularly adept at adjusting to this new source of funding and employment (Le Moal, 1997). However, the large demand for skilled labourers in the emergency and immediate post-war period is likely to decrease with the return to mainstream development work, in which case women may again face marginalization. The demand for NGOs as relief and development actors is also likely to decrease, as government institutions

resume full capacity and new policies are effectuated, reducing the number of jobs in this sector.

In some countries, economic recovery may also introduce new areas of economic activity, which could mean more long-term employment opportunities for women. In **Cambodia**, for example, where women constitute 60 to 65 per cent of the labour force, a new tourism industry is planned, which would increase women's employment opportunities considerably. Tourism is also considered promising for women in **Guatemala**, and its partial recovery has already provided many women with an income from the production and sale of crafts (Marcus, 1996c). Many more countries with a war-shattered economy consider developing the tourism industry.

International Responses

Programmes of economic reconstruction, in particular projects offering skills training and income-generating activities, constitute a major area of activity for many international organizations, within the United Nations system, among bilateral donors, and within the NGO community. Many stress the importance of granting women equal access to resources.

Women's strategies for economic recovery are not limited to the post-war situation. Many case studies show that women often direct their activities toward both immediate survival and long-term recovery, and development (**Watson**, 1996). Likewise, some projects aim to bridge the gap between war and peace by already building women's capacities during conflict, in anticipation of peace and post-war repatriation and integration. In the Khmer border camps in **Thailand**, the United Nations attempted to build on such "preparing ourselves for repatriation"-initiatives among refugees, and supported a project defined and implemented by a refugee women's group known as the Khmer Women's Association. The project provided skills training, adult literacy programmes, childcare support, and an array of social and psychological support services based on traditional concepts and medicine (Rogge, 1994: 44). However, as Madzokere's (1993) and Chingono's (1996) studies on **Mozambique** suggest, women may not always be interested in or be in a position to make use of these newly acquired skills on their return. Arnvig's (1994) study on **Cambodia** furthermore stresses that the possibilities to learn new and relevant skills while in exile is not only dependent on refugees' attitudes and the projects of external agencies, but also on the policy of the country of asylum, a point that is reinforced by **Watson's** (1996) and Kibreab's (1996) studies.

The attempt to link the refugee situation with the repatriation and resettlement phase is also explicit in *UNHCR's* so-called *People-Oriented Planning* approach, which was adopted in the late 1980s. While the emphasis is on improving the protection and support of refugees in exile, the approach also attempts to identify and address post-repatriation needs early, thus improving the refugees' chances of post-war reintegration (**UNHCR**, 1992 and 1994b).

Furthermore, it is important for women's reintegration that they can be registered as individuals with the same entitlements as male returnees (Kibreab, 1996; **Watson**, 1996). Another more precarious conclusion emerging from studies is that because women increasingly rely on petty trade and small-scale businesses, they should not only be allowed to bring back tools and commodities from exile, but should also be allowed to trade in relief items provided by aid agencies if they judge that they will gain more from this (**Kasmann and Körner**, 1996). This should also be seen in light of their limited access to cash in a society returning to or reinforcing a market economy.

In the above examples, the overall emphasis was on female refugees and returnees, and while much writing on conflict and post-conflict assistance adopts a homogenizing approach to this group, most programmes and projects reflect a growing heterogeneity within the group and

provide special assistance to female demobilized fighters, female-headed households, widows, etc., all of whom qualify as particularly vulnerable (**Date-Bah**, 1996; ILO, 1994; 1995c, Kingma and Sayers, 1995; Klingebiel et al., 1995; Sørensen, 1996). The available studies do not allow for a comparative analysis of different approaches, although this would undoubtedly be of great value for future programming. An evaluation of some United Nations-supported projects to support women's economic recovery in **Bosnia-Herzegovina** does note, however, that targeting particular groups may reinforce tensions and increase jealousy at different levels (Le Moal, 1997).

Another point emerging from the same evaluation concerns the relevance and objectives of income-generating activities. Building on experiences from the Grameen Bank, the *Women for Women* project gives loans and training to vulnerable women in Sarajevo's suburbs. According to the report, women had little experience in this kind of economic arrangement, stressing that although there is often a need for seed capital, it was not available to the extent necessary for independent economic recovery. Similarly, Sørensen (1996) observes that one of the problems faced by women participating in *ACORD's savings and credit schemes* in **Eritrea** was a lack of understanding of the principles of these loans and credit systems, and, perhaps more importantly, a lack of ideas as to how these funds could be invested. People are rarely accustomed to thinking about their economic situation in terms of projects, and this may make it difficult for them to qualify for available resources without assistance. ACORD's ongoing projects combining credit with training in business skills, a revolving fund to target the least bankable ex-fighters, and the involvement of female barefoot bankers to counsel and encourage women to participate, are an interesting and promising response.

Training is a component common to most programmes and in addition to vocational skills includes business and management skills. However, as studies of demobilized female soldiers reveal, these women encounter discrimination with regard to access to training (Date-Bah, 1996; ILO, 1995c; Kasmann and Körner, 1996; Staunton, 1990).

A survey of training programmes and income-generating activities targeting women, or groups of women, reveals a number of pitfalls, but also some promising approaches. One challenge is to make the training course accessible to women. Women's other obligations and social norms defining their mobility are important considerations. Mention has already been made of the importance of providing childcare facilities. Another effort may be the distribution of labour-saving devices such as grinding mills, etc. In **Chad**, the *UNDP* and *UNIFEM*, together with their local counterparts, addressed this need. But instead of merely providing these facilities, they initiated a training programme to teach women how to manufacture and repair these devices (**Watson**, 1996). With regard to the cultural aspect, **Christensen's** (1990) and Moghadam's (1994) studies of women in **Afghanistan** suggest ways in which existing cultural norms may be combined with a demand to increasingly involve women in the economic reconstruction process, for example in home-based micro-enterprises and cottage industries.

In designing training and income-generating activities another major challenge is to ensure their relevance and sustainability, and not only their cultural appropriateness. A study by **UNHCR** (1991) emphasizes that if such programs focus on marginal activities for which there is no sustainable market, the projects will neither lead to self-sufficiency nor reduce women's vulnerability. Market analyses must be incorporated in the planning process for training and income-generating activities. But even when training is relevant, this does not automatically result in employment: "Experiences show that the mere 'training centres' do generally not lead to employment or income for participants" (**Kasmann and Körner**, 1996: 25). Part of the answer to this dilemma lies in rebuilding the administrative structure and establishing some kind of labour office, with information about employers' needs and human resources.

Most projects for women's economic recovery concentrate on agricultural and informal sectors. One exception is a project by CARE in **Chad**, where in the reconstruction of village water supplies and sanitation, women were involved as rural *animatrices*, dispensing information on domestic hygiene. The activity builds on work women did in this sector while in exile; their skills were further extended by training in midwifery and veterinary medicine (**Watson**, 1996: 112).

Despite these initiatives to improve the conditions for women's economic integration and increase the chances that they will be able to fulfil the daunting responsibilities facing them, there is a remarkable lack of involvement of women in state-level decision-making about economic rehabilitation strategies, and little explicit consideration of women's interests and needs. The description of the reconstruction plan for **Palestine** indicates this:

> "Women were not listed as components in the major programmes of national economic reconstruction. The household and, in consequence, women's multiple roles in it were considered important in the social welfare system only in the sense that they would have to absorb shocks and ensure service that could not be provided by the Authority" (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1996c).

According to **Chingono** (1996), this may mean that even when women achieve significant results in the informal sector, for example, this may not improve their overall situation in the long-term.

Apart from pointing again to the issue of decision-making, this also stresses the importance of a so-called enabling environment. Few programmes address these larger frameworks for women's economic development, one exception being the *ILO Action Programme for Skills and Entrepreneurship Training for Countries Emerging from Armed Conflict*. The programme's main objectives are to promote and strengthen the capacity of national and other institutions in tackling the employment and special needs of women as an integral part of post-war reintegration and reconstruction efforts. Advocacy and awareness-raising in relation to the needs of women and other disadvantaged war-affected groups are core activities (**Date-Bah**, 1996). But as an assessment of another of ILO's programmes in **Cambodia** showed, awareness-raising is only a first step. Additional efforts are required to ensure women's equal representation in decision-making bodies.

Concluding Remarks

As the discussion of women's economic activities during and immediately after conflicts has clearly shown, women are economic actors, and important ones, too. As individuals and participants in self-help groups and extended networks, they not only make a contribution to the economic recovery of their families, but also play a major role in revitalising the economic sphere at large. However, the value and wider consequences of their activities cannot be established on the basis of available literature. This is due partly to the lack of a coherent and consistent analytical framework that conceptualizes women as economic actors beyond the domestic sphere, and which situates economic activities in a wider social and cultural context.

Despite the need for more and better documentation and analysis, this review has also produced more substantive insights.

First, documentation of women's economic strategies in war-affected countries challenges the notion of women as farmers. This is not to deny that many women still earn a living by farming, nor to divert our attention from the continuing need for economic, technical and legal assistance in this field. But it is important to acknowledge that in still unstable

economies, the burgeoning informal sector, which links local, national and regional areas, plays an increasingly important role in women's lives as the primary source of income or as a supplement to farm incomes. The literature moreover suggests that women are generally marginalized in formal sector training and employment, either because they lack formal qualifications or because they lack social support to assist with domestic tasks. Another reason may be that male employment is given higher priority. Thus, while a consensus is emerging that women are important contributors in economic recovery, the developments in the agricultural, informal and formal sectors suggest that women may not be able to extend gains obtained during conflict into post-war empowerment; instead, they face further marginalization which may result in increased tensions within and between households.

As analyses of internal conflicts have often pointed out, one of the most devastating impacts of war, with long-term consequences, is the disintegration of social relations and networks that support economic activities and provide a central basis for the formation of social identities. The discussion of women's roles in economic reconstruction has shed new light on this by highlighting how women create new relationships and networks to strengthen their economic and social positions. Organizing has in a sense become a strategy in itself, which regroups people around alternative social positions. Women's organizations span a wide range, from self-help groups and community-based interest groups based on traditional social institutions to co-operative associations and NGOs developed in the wider context of a market economy and the modern state.

The social domain also proved important, to understand the sustainability and status of women's economic initiatives, as these are judged and responded to according to social attitudes prevailing among other local actors, especially male authorities. While some men accept and even encourage women's engagement in the new economic activities, many others reject the implicit challenge of social structures and norms, and in most cases of male authority.

In other words, to make a useful contribution to local-level economic recovery and to women's economic empowerment in particular, a gender-sensitive analysis of local economic practices, which takes into account divergent interpretations and interests, is imperative. The lack of such an analysis may lead to marginalization and tensions, if not outright conflicts.

IV. Social Reconstruction

At the social level, post-war societies face two separate challenges. One is the rehabilitation of a partially damaged or totally collapsed social sector, the other is the facilitation of a long-term process of social integration. With regard to the first aspect, the main questions that women raise are: *Will the social sector address women's particular needs and concerns in an appropriate and adequate manner? And, will women's capacities and skills be recognized and incorporated into the provision of social services?* In that sense, women's interest in the reconstruction of social services can be directly linked to the issue of social integration, as it reflects a broader process of social negotiations and transformations of social identities, roles and relationships. For women this leads to the question: *Will social reconstruction generate socio-economic relationships that are advantageous to women?*

As modern intrastate armed conflicts often target social sector institutions directly and aim at massive social dislocation and disintegration, the tasks of social reconstruction are immense and complex. At one level, social reconstruction requires the allocation of resources to rehabilitate the social infrastructure and institutions to provide populations with health care, education and other services. This is a precondition not only for people's survival, but also for enabling them to contribute to the overall rebuilding process. At another level, social reconstruction touches on some of the most painful aspects of war, which have to do with the experience of loss and uncertainty in material, psychological, cultural and social terms. Social reconstruction is expected to heal the psychological wounds, and to generate an inclusive social environment with a minimum of stigmatization, marginalization, or exclusion, where respect, trust, confidence and solidarity will take root and reduce the risks for renewed violent conflict.

Government institutions obviously have a central role to play in this process, as they influence definitions of entitlement and rights, and redistribution of resources. But the role of society should not be overlooked, for it is in everyday social interaction that past tensions are eventually reconciled, and new identities and positions negotiated and constructed. In other words, it is through both government policy and social practice that the structures of post-war society eventually emerge.

In addition to identifying how war-induced social deconstruction influences women's lives, the present chapter looks at *women's active roles in recovering social service institutions and in reviving and reshaping the social structures of society*. The chapter first considers ways in which women attempt to ameliorate the problems of destroyed education and health care facilities, and how they respond to post-war psycho-social distress and the growth of violence in society by reviving social networks and organising locally run organisations. The focus is then shifted to a broader discussion of social integration. Rather than concentrating on the reintegration of specific groups such as returnees, demobilized soldiers, and so on, the chapter discusses social integration at large, demonstrating how gender and other social categories are continuously contested. Finally, it is argued that social reconstruction may result in both integration and disintegration. While some people find renewed strength and security in pre-war social institutions and personal relationships, others choose or are forced by circumstances to dismantle these and develop new ones. It is in this sense that the post-war situation may constitute a window of opportunity for social change.

Rehabilitation of Social Services

> "Local social institutions and healers...provide both meaningful interpretations of people's suffering and particular mechanisms for managing it" (Gibbs, 1997: 228).

As observers and analysts of current internal armed conflicts have remarked, *social services* are often severely damaged and their capacity reduced in such wars. One reason is the reallocation of funds from social budgets to the military domain, where expenditures are increasing. Another reason is the dispersion and enforced withdrawal of professionals due to flight, harassment, military conscription, and so on (Arnvig, 1994; Macrae, 1997). Finally, the social system is hit by direct attacks of belligerent groups who seek to punish and victimize population groups, force them to leave an area or to influence their political convictions. As women often carry the main responsibility for the well-being and development of their families and communities, they are particularly affected by such strategies. For the same reason, they are also very active in restoring social services, both during and after conflict, not least in situations where conflict has dissolved the central government. Women thus make a significant, albeit undervalued, contribution to the health situation of their communities and to local capacity-building for present and future purposes. Moreover, their activities may play a valuable role in overcoming past tensions and reviving a sense of community by addressing needs shared by all members of a community. A report by the United Nations (1995: 61) states that "during times of armed conflict and the collapse of communities, the role of women is crucial. They often work to preserve social order in the midst of armed and other conflicts".

Likewise, pointing to the fact that, despite great internal differences, women as a category share certain experiences and interests which may generate a level of solidarity and mobilise them as rebuilders, **Watson** (1996: 113-14) notes that:

> "[Women] displayed courage, fortitude and great resiliency in seeking to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives — some attempting to reactivate distant ties of kinship to help them through the most difficult period of adjustment, others reaching out to other women to create new forms of female solidarity and still others resolutely drawing on their inner resources and demonstrating their capacity to go it alone".

• Education

Reports from **Mozambique**, **Uganda** and elsewhere recount how female (and male) teachers try to continue children's primary education in refugee camps and welfare camps for internally displaced people, or in their place of residence (Allen, 1996; personal communication from Josefa Marrato, anthropologist, Mozambique). As Power-Stevens (1996a) concludes for **Algeria**, and Taylor (1995) for **Liberia**, children's and adults' education is also a field of activity for innumerable women's grassroots organizations. Their efforts are seriously constrained by the lack of shelter and other basic facilities such as books, paper, pencils, blackboards, furniture, and so on. And while teachers may sometimes succeed in mobilizing some support locally, it is far from sufficient to enable them to provide effective education on a continuing basis.

Conversations with women show that education features high on their agendas for post-conflict reconstruction. Education is seen as a means to *build human capacity* and improve the chances of employment after a conflict has been settled. This is highly valued, even though girls and women are often denied education for social or political reasons. While such discrimination may be rooted in pre-war society, diminishing resources and ideological interpretations of conflicts usually reinforce these (Arnvig, 1994; Madzokere, 1993; Marcus, 1996a; Moghadam, 1994).

In highly politicized and polarized societies, which often have high rates of violence, education may also be regarded as an important means of *socialization*, offering alternatives to prevailing norms of violence and debasing actions. Women's self-help groups, for example in **Somalia** and **Rwanda**, have recognized this potential and now work to increase women's

awareness of their indirect roles in conflict and the possibilities to bring about change (Jama, 1996; Byrne, 1996d). In **Uganda**, a group of women organized a local support group, the Gulu Support the Children Organization, which aimed primarily to help children who had been withdrawn from school to participate in the armed struggle but who wished to escape from warfare and continue their education (Kristeligt Dagblad, in Danish newspaper, November 1997).

• Health care

Women's health care activities include both general primary health care and responses to war-related distress. The destruction and looting of health clinics, the flight of professionals, the general lack of medicine and equipment and the usually severe restrictions on people's mobility create situations of great concern: "A few women of the poor neighborhood had assembled on the rooftops and were discussing health care facilities in the area.... The women were distraught with their daily problems of survival and were not able to talk about anything else" (UNICEF, 1992: 59; see also Brett, 1996).

Obviously, the capacity of local populations to provide primary health care under such circumstances is of crucial importance. In the gender-focused literature, women's overall concern for the well-being of people, especially children, as well as their experience as midwives, which enables them to care for women in particularly vulnerable situations, are recognized. While these qualities are seen by some as a natural extension of women's domestic roles as mothers and housewives, more in-depth analyses show that while these gendered roles may render women more sensitive to such problems, their efficiency in providing health care is due more fundamentally to their extended social networks. This seems to be the case even in crises, during which these networks themselves are damaged (Martin, 1992). And as Tommasoli's (1995) study of community-based self-help organizations in **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**, and Jama's (1996) study of **Somalia** show, these networks also play an important role in *rehabilitating schools and health clinics*.

In most war-affected societies, female health professionals have put their skills and experiences to good use, as have women with relevant practical experience, by joining relief and health organizations such as the Red Cross, or by forming voluntary associations which not only provide *medical assistance*, but also organize *training and discussion groups* on health-related issues (ILO, 1994; **Kasmann and Körner**, 1996; Lipsky and Nimol, 1993; Marcus, 1996b; Young, 1994). The importance of women's resources in this field is widely acknowledged. Consequently, it has been argued that targeting women for professional health care training is a key to improving the community's health status. Moreover, it may provide valuable opportunities for long-term employment. However, in practice many programmes continue to discriminate against women when enrolling people in training activities. And when women *are* involved in the health sector, they typically occupy mainly low-level jobs (Lipsky and Nimol, 1993; Moghadam, 1994).

• War-related social problems

Aside from taking part in providing primary health care, women often also play an important role in developing new mechanisms to respond to the many new health problems occurring as a result of war, such as psycho-social trauma, rape, war-related injuries, poor nutrition as a result of displacement and loss of livelihoods, and so on. In the **former Yugoslavia** Republic of Srpska, for example, some women responded to the massive influx of refugees by organizing informal self-help groups to provide refugees with food, shelter and clothing, or to take them to the hospital for treatment. Later, some of these women formally established an NGO called *Duga* (Rainbow) to continue their work, which in addition to relief now includes psycho-social and legal counselling (**Walsh**, 1996). *Duga* is just one of hundreds of self-help

groups and NGOs, many of which focus on health care, that have emerged in the wake of the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

In **Sri Lanka**, increasing numbers of civilian casualties and displacement-induced health problems likewise moved many men and women to do voluntary community work. Some six years after its foundation, the Family Rehabilitation Centre, an NGO originally established to provide health care to war-injured persons, has trained hundreds of victims or clients in health care and social activities so that they can help others. It has established outreach posts throughout the country, and a broad network of international experts and sponsors has been established. As is the case for many organizations that started as small, single-issue associations, the Family Rehabilitation Centre has broadened its scope to include psycho-social counselling, skills training and income-generating activities, all of which are considered preconditions for the improvement of health (Family Rehabilitation Centre, 1993).

Post-apartheid **South Africa** has overcome many of its previous ills, but like many other post-conflict societies, it continues to be ridden with *violence* at all levels (see also **Nordstrom**, 1997). Women experience this at home, where they and their children are physically and verbally abused by husbands and fathers, and in the public arena, where they are at risk of rape, violent attacks and harassment. An illustration of the severity of the problem is People Against Human Abuse (PAHA), an organization founded by a group of women in Pretoria in 1994. Some of the founders had experienced their own families being torn apart by violence. During its first three years, PAHA managed to assist a large number of victims, and more importantly, it has initiated a dialogue with teachers, police, magistrates, health staff, staff from the welfare department and others who may be instrumental in reducing physical and psychological violence and re-establishing trust and justice (Makhoere, 1997). The Autonomous Women's Centre Against Sexual Violence in **former Yugoslavia** (Belgrade) is another voluntary organization that addresses the relationship between the militarization of society and domestic violence. Like PAHA, it aims to help abused and battered women (**Walsh**, 1996).

In addition to threatening the physical health of civil populations in general, civil wars also cause wide *psycho-social suffering*. Mass rape, torture, disappearances, killing, abuse, violence, and so on expose people to extraordinary situations which gradually erode their self-esteem and self-confidence, and generate a loss of meaning and control: "After long years of war, psycho-social problems may express themselves in fear, health problems, alcoholism, anger, bitterness or even suicide. They cause not only mental and physical pain but might also prevent the necessary activities to create a decent livelihood and to integrate into the social community" (Klingebiel et al., 1995: 74).

This complex phenomenon is commonly referred to as traumatization. In a recent publication on children and war, Boyden and Gibbs point out that the term "trauma" is a Western notion not easily translated across cultures. Based on their investigations of how people in **Cambodia** perceived and responded to various forms of trauma, the authors argue that more attention should be given to the subjective ways in which people engage with their environment in the context of political violence and other stressful events, an approach which simultaneously gives wider recognition to culturally specific understandings of disease and the corresponding options for healing (Boyden and Gibbs, 1997: xi). Likewise, pointing to the cultural understanding and context of psycho-social distress, Maynard (1997: 206, 213) emphasizes that healing in these settings is rarely a relationship between only a client and a professional, but involves whole families and communities.

Unfortunately, little information is available on the ways in which communities themselves address psychological distress through communal ceremonies, religious rituals, dialogues, and so on, nor is it clear what roles different population groups play in such recovery efforts. In a study of children and war in **Mozambique**, **Gibbs** (1997) gives an example of how people

tried to overcome stressful experiences by engaging in constructive work. The shared experience of doing something useful pushed memories of deconstruction and destruction into the background and offered a positive alternative: "The actual physical work of reconstruction following return — such as the building of homes and the planting of fields — was considered by local people to be particularly crucial to the post-war healing of individuals and communities" (**Gibbs**, 1997: 228).

Arnvig (1994: 155-56) provides an example of how Buddhist temples in **Cambodia** helped women who had experienced sexual assault regain self-esteem by performing a culturally approved cleansing ceremony.

Walsh's (1996) study of selected women's groups in **former Yugoslavia** includes several cases of voluntary groups established with the primary objective of reducing psychological suffering induced mostly by experiences of rape and violence. The study does not provide details regarding the approaches of these groups, but it demonstrates convincingly that for the women in this war, psychological distress is closely linked to the erosion of human rights, and is thus perceived and communicated as a political and structural rather than a psychological and personal issue. Other studies on the same region illustrate how testimonies can be used in the healing process and contribute to generating trust and understanding (**Agger**, 1994; Zajovic, 1994).

The studies of local level associations show that while many concentrate initially on physical health problems, most soon incorporate other aspects, demonstrating the intimate link between health and socio-economic conditions. Walsh (1996) discusses a number of indigenous and external handicraft projects in **Bosnia-Herzegovina** that, despite being labelled as income-generating projects, above all serve an important healing purpose by creating a shared space for women of different ethnic groups.

This points to another characteristic of many women's groups, namely their explicit effort to link healing with *inter-ethnic interaction* and *reconciliation*. The Family Rehabilitation Centre in **Sri Lanka**, for instance, deliberately involves Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim women in its psycho-social programmes. This approach successfully addresses many factors that influence the well-being of the individual woman and serves as an important counter-discourse to the ongoing conflict by stressing the structural similarities in women's situations. **Maynard** (1997: 217) recounts, for **Somalia** and **Rwanda**, how women of different ethnic groups established inter-ethnic associations to deal with psycho-social issues and also contribute to the peace and reconciliation processes by challenging the dominant categories underlying the conflict.

While the above examples testify to the potential of local self-help associations to restore the social infrastructure and to promote social harmony, the case of **Cambodia** reminds us that some conflicts generate almost insurmountable obstacles to a community-based process of social healing. Arnvig (1994: 154) quotes a UNICEF report:

> "The Khmer community suffered a dramatic destruction of its culture, values, traditions and healing practices during the 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime.... This attempt at cultural annihilation has profoundly affected the traditional Khmer concept of self-care (i.e. individual and community attitudes and behaviors toward their own emotional, spiritual and physical well-being."

While psycho-social distress is most often linked to the witnessing or experience of torture, rape, killing, and so on, the reviewed literature suggests that such trauma may also result from a general erosion of social identities and the inability to perform one's social role properly. Allen (1996: 255) recounts how in **Uganda** spirit possession among women increased dramatically following social upheaval, signalling a decline in male control over women (see

also Brett, 1996; Kesby, 1996). Health issues, in other words, are also closely linked to wider processes of social transformation and integration.

Social Integration

> "Conflict may simply provide a stage on which existing conceptions of gender are played out and refined, resulting in women's subordination becoming sharper, if seemingly offset by new advantages" (**El-Bushra and Piza-Lopez**, 1994a: 190).

As mentioned in the opening section of this chapter, post-war social integration is most commonly discussed in relation to the reintegration of demobilized combatants and repatriated refugees, who constitute the most visible "uprooted" categories in need of assistance. However, analyses of the problems and challenges that post-war societies face suggest that more attention should be given to the overall *integration of all sectors of society*, instead of focusing exclusively on the *reintegration of selected groups*. This alternative conceptualization of the problem would also highlight the fact that any post-war society undergoes profound social change, and would enhance our understanding of similarities and differences among different population groups.

• Reintegration of selected groups

Because most studies distinguish returning refugees, internally displaced and demobilized fighters for special consideration, I shall briefly summarize some of the gender-relevant observations that have emerged from these experiences. In most cases, the discussion has focused on problems of programming and co-ordination among humanitarian organizations and government institutions, and while these are indeed important issues, one can but regret that local constraints on, and contributions to, the social integration of former combatants and refugees does not receive more attention (Klingebiel et al., 1995; Sørensen 1996).

In short, one of the main problems that female returnees and ex-fighters face on returning to their own societies is a *lack of skills, education and resources* required to engage in an income-generating activity (Sørensen, 1996). Another problem is uncertainty about *social status and roles*. On this point, accounts from most war-torn societies are similar in that they indicate the frustration experienced by many women, especially female combatants, who having served their country and cared for their families throughout years of warfare, are suddenly excluded from the public social arena and again confined to the domestic sphere, where they are expected "to undertake their traditional tasks and to obey their parents and their husbands" (Klingebiel et al., 1995: 36; see also Rentmeesters, 1989). Julia (1995: 231) echoes this concern in her study of **Guatemala**: "The socio-political circumstances that influenced the integration...changed with the peace accord and have brought women back to the pre-war roles and status, particularly in family structure, division of labour, social participation and other opportunities."

A strikingly similar picture is given for **Zimbabwe** by Kesby (1996: 581): "Those who did not migrate to the towns had little choice but renewed dependence on the domestic and agricultural spaces and resources controlled by their fathers." For this reason, many women are reluctant to return to their home villages and instead remain in exile or move to an urban area where they expect norms to be more relaxed and the opportunities for an economically independent life greater (Kibreab, 1995 and 1996; Klingebiel et al., 1995). But life in urban areas is fraught with difficulties, as women often lack a social network that can assist them with shelter, childcare, and so on, and the environment is extremely competitive. Yet the

insistence on traditional patterns was not considered undesirable by all women. Kesby (1996: 582) points out that in times of upheaval and insecurity, when the desire for a return to normalcy is strong and there is a need for a post-war healing process, "the certainties of patriarchal institutions and tradition seem therapeutic".

For the women who decide to return to their home villages and accept the harsh conditions, integration may also be more difficult than expected. Barron (1996), Brunt (1997), Tapscott (1994) and Watson (1996) all give examples of hostile and suspicious *social attitudes* facing women from **Chad**, **Mozambique**, **Namibia** and **Nicaragua**. The returned women frequently experienced domestic violence and abuse, in most cases related to alcohol abuse, which in turn was linked to their husbands' sense of insecurity due to unemployment or recent release from the armed forces. Outside the domestic sphere, women often met jealousy or resentment among local people, and were discouraged from assuming a public function (Berg, 1994). Reviewing women's experiences in **Namibia**, Preston (1994: 262) concludes: "Women accustomed to leadership in exile were soon observed to suppress their skills so as to achieve community acceptance."

One reason appears to be that the people who stayed behind believed that the refugees had accumulated great personal wealth while in exile. Watson (1996: 119) describes how some of the returnees in **Chad** found their home environment very hostile; they could find nobody to help them in agriculture, childcare, and so on, and in some cases they had to pay higher prices at the market: "There is no solidarity. People treat us like strangers, as if we were thieves escaping from prison."

Another reason for tensions between returnees and the host population may be that returnees' behaviour and new attitudes developed during war are perceived as a lack of respect for local cultural traditions (Tapscott, 1994: 258). According to Marcus (1996c: 122), female returnees from **Guatemala** who attempted to access what was considered a male social space were exposed to social criticism: "Many women and men who remained in Guatemala perceive this public participation as indicative of 'bad character'. Widows have also been stigmatised and humiliated in some communities and labelled as whores who are using their community activities as a cover for illicit sexual relations."

An exceptional example of the role of local traditional self-help associations in post-war social integration comes from **Sierra Leone**, where Richards (1996: 161) observed that women's traditional initiation associations, Bondo and Sande, were instrumental in the reintegration of female combatants, building on their capacity to create strong social bonds: "This gives initiation comparative advantage over means of establishing social bonds dependent on external reference (e.g. to King or Country) in social landscapes where trust has been shattered by civil war or primitive accumulation." Thus, while kinship and other intimate social networks may prove valuable in getting people back on their feet, it can never be taken for granted that relatives and friends will offer help and support.

• Integration of stigmatized persons

As argued in the opening of this chapter, wars and armed conflicts produce a number of new social categories whose identity and status are not easily determined. Among these we find disabled persons, widows, women who have been raped, orphans, and others who in some way challenge existing norms and images of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood. Accommodating *stigmatized groups* is a major challenge, but also a burden for many societies, as these groups often require more resources. So far, most attention has been paid to women who have been *raped* or in other ways sexually abused, and to widows, some of whom become single household heads. In general, women who have been raped and have perhaps given birth to an illegitimate child are ostracized by society, even if it is commonly

acknowledged that the women are innocent victims. The stigma sticks. In an attempt to address this issue, several organizations have developed psychological counselling programmes. But as a report by African Rights on Rwanda points out, rape is not only a traumatic experience of domination, intrusion and humiliation. It also has long-term social consequences, as these women, due to their marginalization, find it difficult to take part in the social rebuilding process and to create a new, positive identity (African Rights, 1994; see also Warsame on **Somaliland**, 1996; **War Report** on **former Yugoslavia**, 1995). Consequently, psycho-social therapy — even when it is culturally appropriate — is not an adequate solution.

Demographic estimates suggest that up to 30 per cent of the population in war-torn societies may be *widows*. This is the case in some regions of **Rwanda** and **Cambodia**, for instance (Byrne, 1996d: 40; Marcus, 1996a: 9; Robinson, 1994: 1). While widows in many societies are also ascribed a special social status, their position is usually not considered immoral, and the marginalization they experience is of a different nature. In the majority of cases, widows are marginalized as a result of their decreased access to essential resources. When land, children and other assets belong to the husband's family, widows have few means by which to care for themselves. And if the husband's family shows no incentive to protect and support the widow, it is difficult to avoid the downward spiral of impoverishment (Brett, 1996; Byrne, 1996d). According to Marcus (1996c: 116), the problem faced by widows in highland **Guatemala** is not a lack of land *per se*, but rather restricted access to male support for cultivation, which has forced widows to sell their land. One way for widows to improve their situation is through remarriage, but as Brett (1996) and Allen (1996) state in their studies on **Uganda**, the fact that widows rarely possess any resources and may even have extra responsibilities for siblings' children, together with the fact that the family may have difficulties raising the money for a proper wedding, minimizes the chances of remarriage.

• Reweaving the social fabric

Discussions of social integration should not focus entirely on the so-called vulnerable, marginalized groups, but should include wider processes of social transformation that affect post-war reconstruction. Some dimensions of this process have already been briefly noted in the discussion of political and especially economic reconstruction, but as they are essential to an understanding of the gender aspects of war and post-war reconstruction, it seems appropriate to focus on them again here.

A pertinent place to begin such an exploration would be the family itself and the redefinition of gender roles and relationships. The *renegotiation and reconstruction of family and gender* are spurred first by practical dilemmas facing people during and after war when, as we have seen, individuals are entrusted with new responsibilities and tasks (Byrne, 1996a; **El-Bushra and Mukarubuga**, 1995).

Intrastate wars inevitably erode family relationships and networks, as people are forced to join the army, go into hiding or flee. As Allen (1996: 252) points out for **Uganda**, the erosion of traditional social bonds may not only have serious consequences for economic co-operation, but may also mean that distrust, rivalry, and so on play an increasingly important role in everyday interactions, while the means to solve these problems are simultaneously destroyed. One response to the breakdown of *extended family networks* is the creation of new ones. Christensen shows that in **Afghanistan**, some people who experienced severe family disintegration regrouped into larger, compound groups with more distant relatives, or in exceptional cases with friends, to pool scarce resources (Christensen, 1990: 17). This resembles the experiences of women in post-war **Mozambique**: "The erosion and, in some cases, the breakdown of public institutions has affected the interrelations between kin, friends, and neighbours. New forms of family and association are replacing kinship and extended family ties" (**Chingono**, 1996: 220). The case from **Somalia**, discussed earlier, in which

female relatives from rural and urban areas worked together in trade, likewise bears witness to social reorganization.

In **Somalia** and **Cambodia**, women have not only formed new voluntary networks, but are apparently also involved in a more structural process of family reorganization: *polygamy* has become more frequent in some areas, because, according to male informants from **Somalia**, "there is a need to compensate for the men killed in the war as well as assuring women to get a partner in the face of a supposedly unbalanced male/female ratio" (Warsame, 1996: 41). But while this adjustment to demographic factors may give women some degree of immediate security and social approval, Byrne (1996c) questions whether it will improve and secure their socio-economic rights in the long-term. Other studies on **Somalia** also suggest that fundamental changes at the family level are occurring; traditional inter-clan marriages, which were the basis of alliances and a cornerstone in conflict resolution, are becoming increasingly rare. For security and political reasons, marriages increasingly tend to take place between parties belonging to the same clan (Samatar, 1995).

A different social strategy is to split up in pursuit of individual goals. In most literature, disintegration is primarily associated with war itself, while post-war reconstruction is assumed to entail settlement and integration. However, the portrait painted by gender literature shows more nuances, illustrating further processes of disintegration at many levels, in the years following a peace settlement. In discussions of social disintegration, there is moreover a tendency to concentrate on the fact that something is no longer working and now falling apart. And while disintegration undoubtedly often has high social costs, it should be stressed that for some it may also entail new opportunities and hence be a deliberate choice.

A number of studies on **Chad** and **Mozambique** document this apparent paradox. The decision by women to *divorce* and leave their husbands, sometimes after having awaited reunion and resettlement for years, is usually a difficult one; it may challenge prevailing social norms, and introduce new elements of insecurity. Among the most common reasons for a woman to separate from her husband is a new sense of responsibility and independence, sometimes combined with the husband's diminishing role in supporting the family (Brett, 1996: 290). Reflecting on the social consequences of war and women's newly gained status in **Chad**, **Watson** (1996: 116) states that: "As the terms of marriage shifted and mutual obligations and responsibilities broke down, marriage was no longer the most desirable option for some women." And later she adds that "the trade-offs in the form of economic security that could be gained through submission to men in the marriage contract were no longer to be automatically expected" (**Watson**, 1996: 117), thereby indicating that women reflect more on their position and have developed a new view of their own value. That point is echoed by **Chingono** (1996: 222) in his work on **Mozambique**: "In extreme cases in which business demands and marital obligations could not be reconciled, the latter was often the casualty."

Difficulties due to alcohol abuse and domestic violence also lead many women to leave their husbands. Chingono (1996: 224) states that in **Mozambique** "male violence and irresponsibility which are associated with the frustration of a worsening economic situation, have been the main reason for women to seek divorce or separation". Sogge's analysis of people's efforts to build sustainable peace in **Angola** likewise includes examples of domestic violence, alcoholism, and so on. As he points out, the long conflict and the harsh conditions under which people live challenges their self-esteem. He cites a prominent man to illustrate this attack on personality and status: "I used to have many houses and goats, sheep, chickens, ducks, pigs and cattle.... Now I live in one little room, no longer with my land and possessions.... People used to come and talk to me, and give me a bit of money for my counsel. But now no one has any resources, and no one comes to talk to me. Our life has changed so much" (Sogge, 1992: 107). These examples underline the importance of a holistic and gender-sensitive understanding of post-war social integration.

In the aforementioned examples, it was the wife who took the initiative to separate from her husband. Obviously, husbands also decide to leave their wives, who may be less prepared to live on their own. For example, Arnvig (1994: 161) asserts that female returnees in **Cambodia** were often left by husbands whom they married in exile: "Faced with prospects for a better future, some men simply claimed this marriage to be illegal." Other cases confirm this. Alcohol problems, the lack of employment, the search for employment, a lower income and the associated shame, difficulties in adjusting to civil and/or urban life and difficulties in adjusting to women's changed attitudes are the main reasons for husbands leaving their wives.

In assessing the long-term consequences of the voluntary or forced disintegration of families, it is important to recognize that both social and legal aspects are involved. Some *social aspects* — cultural perceptions of widows, divorced single women, and so on — have already been noted. But it is equally important that women's *legal, social and economic rights* after divorce vary tremendously, as do the possibilities of protecting those rights, should they exist. Customary laws on property ownership, inheritance, the custody of children, and so on, all influence a woman's capacity to live an independent life. If land and children belong to the father and his kin group, as is the case in many African societies, divorce and widowhood may result in a devastating loss of resources and entitlements (Warsame, 1996). Even when women do have the right to a share of the household property, they may encounter serious difficulties in exerting their rights. That is where women's organizations play an important support role. Brunt (1997: 14), for instance, describes how women in **Nicaragua** established community-based "legal support groups" in order to teach women about their rights and to help them in court cases.

International Responses

The need for social rehabilitation in times of conflict is widely recognized and constitutes an important focus for international relief operations. However, not all projects that provide social services assistance and work toward social integration have an explicit gender component, nor do they all address the particular post-war situation. In this brief discussion of international interventions in the social arena, the focus is on programmes that comply with these criteria.

One of the earliest international attempts to address social integration in conflict and post-conflict situations was made by *UNESCO*, which initiated its now well-known programme *"Culture of Peace"* in the late 1980s (UNESCO, 1994a and 1997a). The programme targets populations in situations of political instability and armed conflict, and bases its activities on the assumption that conflicts can be ended and just and equitable societies created through peace education, which teaches people non-violent conflict resolution and raises general awareness about democratic principles.

Women are perceived to be particularly instrumental in peace-building, reconciliation and social reconstruction, and therefore many of the programme's activities target women. Some of its country projects provide training in peace education to women, attempting to strengthen their traditional capacities as mediators in family and community conflicts. Rural community radio stations are now being established throughout the Caribbean, Asia and Africa, to enable women to seek advice from each other and to share their experiences with other women under similar circumstances. The local radio stations initiate and transmit discussions on peace and reconciliation, disseminate information on human rights and on various social issues, such as health and hygiene, or raise questions relating to the protection of economic livelihoods. It is hoped that by raising people's awareness and giving them access to information relevant to

their lives, they will be encouraged to become more active participants in the reconstruction and development processes (Culture of Peace).

That this may indeed be the case is illustrated by the national literacy programme in **Namibia,** portrayed in one of UNESCO's (1997c) journals. Literacy is considered a condition for political, economic and social reform. Many of the women who enrolled in the mother tongue classes in the Namibian project soon also wanted to learn English, as this would improve their social standing and enhance their chances of self-employment.

UNESCO's programme faces a well-known dilemma within social reconstruction, namely whether to target assistance to particularly vulnerable groups or to opt for a more inclusive approach. In **Mozambique**, for example, the return of more than a million refugees after the peace agreement soon generated jealousy and suspicion among those who had stayed behind, as the returnees were judged privileged. To prevent initial tensions from building up, UNESCO focused its work on defining common development goals and on building public institutions and places that would serve everybody, and facilitate social interaction across social boundaries, an aspect that is also incorporated in other programmes such as UNHCR's Quick Impact Projects in post-war situations. And as in other UNESCO (1997c: 18) programmes, many efforts were made to improve social communication, so that people would not have to rely on rumours, which tend to be biased and polarized in situations of political tension: "These community-run projects, united around basic values such as equity, solidarity and tolerance, help people gain the self-confidence without which nothing lasting can be built." As the Culture of Peace programme now enters a new phase, it will put more emphasis on conflict prevention, and here the issue of socialization and the cultural and social construction of gender roles will be central (UNESCO, 1997b).

In the early 1990s, the position of women in situations of armed conflict and crisis also became the object of a new *UNIFEM* programme, the *African Women in Crisis (AFWIC)* programme referred to earlier, which aimed to increase the visibility of this problem by creating a wide network of committed and influential African individuals. The programme does not focus exclusively on women in situations of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, although this is a major concern. In short, AFWIC aims to reduce women's vulnerability by addressing questions relating to the loss of support mechanisms, food insecurity, health, violent abuse, inferior legal status, and so on.

Contrary to many other programmes with a similar objective, AFWIC has a clear gender policy, which states that women are to be recognized and to be involved as participants in all aspects of the programme (UNIFEM, 1994: 7). Just as UNESCO's Culture of Peace programme does, AFWIC avoids distinguishing between different categories of people. According to UNIFEM, compartmentalizing people as refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons, host populations, and so on, is likely to conceal the "hidden emergencies", and certainly does not foster social integration.

In this context, brief mention should be made of a pilot project called *Health and Development for Displaced Populations (HEDIP)*, initiated by *WHO (Emergency Preparedness Programme of the Emergency Humanitarian Action division)* in the early 1990s. The objective of HEDIP was to use health issues to facilitate peace and the integration of populations in war-affected countries. The assumption was that health care could be a uniting and integrating force. People from various communities and from different relevant state institutions were involved in working groups that aimed to identify and implement local health agendas.

Another recent United Nations project is the *UNCHS (Habitat)* project *"Women Rebuilding Their Lives"* of the Women in Human Settlements Programme. As the previous programmes did, the Habitat project emphasizes that women must be seen as active participants in the

rebuilding process: "Women in war torn societies should not be seen as passive victims and recipients of aid. Their roles have changed profoundly during the crisis period. These roles can be a platform for a new place for women in society as decision-makers, peace-makers and developers" (UNCHS, 1995: 3).

UNCHS' attempt to support the improvement of women's position in post-war societies is based on the assumption that women are particularly qualified and interested in the reconstruction of human settlements. The programme strives to ensure that new settlements meet women's needs, and envisages that women's involvement will have other long-term outcomes, in the form of women's empowerment. Moreover, working on actually constructing new settlements is expected to make a valuable contribution to healing war traumas in a culturally and socially acceptable way, to facilitate processes of reconciliation, and to generate new social relations. Thus, the project overturns the common assumption that reconstruction cannot take place in an environment that is materially and psychologically hostile. And contrary to many other projects which aim to rehabilitate the infrastructure, this project sees the post-war situation as an *opportunity* for people to change things: "...after disaster is a time when people are open to innovations and improvements of the old that has been destroyed" (UNCHS, 1995: 5).

Women Rebuilding Their Lives proposed to initiate activities in **Rwanda**, **Burundi** and **Ethiopia**, with a focus on the first. In preparation of its activities, the programme identified a number of women's grassroots organizations in Rwanda that worked toward improving settlements and providing social services to the needy in their communities. The report concludes that "the strong co-operation between women from all social and ethnic backgrounds is an impressive example of a new Rwanda in the making" (UNCHS, 1995: 8).

Concluding Remarks

As the present discussion has shown, social reconstruction is a complex process that involves the very foundations of any society or nation: social identities, roles, relationships and institutions, and social welfare. In the wake of massive dislocations and disruptions that have challenged and partly dismantled the prevailing social structure, there is a need to redefine the social basis of the nation, as well as the local community and household.

The discussion here has shown that women generally put great emphasis on the rehabilitation and development of the social services sector, as this dimension of the post-war reconstruction task falls within their area of responsibility and authority. For that very reason, women often take initiatives to improve existing facilities. Under difficult circumstances, women re-established children's education, built up primary health care services, and addressed the social ills of violence and psycho-social distress. The particular approaches that women adopted in these cases often promoted co-operation across various social and professional lines. They also stressed the importance of a holistic approach to human development, in which social, cultural, economic, political and religious domains are interrelated.

However, even when women's efforts in this field are widely acknowledged to be of crucial importance, their work is generally perceived as a natural extension of their domestic work. While it is true that women's particular experiences and social positions in most cases make them especially qualified for social work, the failure to admit that this is a professional status may jeopardize women's access to training and remuneration, and eventually lower the status and respect that their work entails for them.

The discussion of women's social standing pointed out that, contrary to what is often assumed, an increase in income is not necessarily matched by higher social status or enhanced

social integration. In some cases, women instead experienced stigmatization and exclusion. This suggests that a more comprehensive understanding of the processes leading to or preventing social integration is required.

Regarding social integration, the discussion showed that the conventional image of post-war social reconstruction as a linear process where hearts, families and societies torn apart by conflict are finally mended is inappropriate. Social reconstruction involves disintegration as much as integration, for people challenge previous social configurations and adjust to new political, economic and social circumstances. Memories of the golden past and aspirations for the promising future, wishes for security and certainty, and hopes of change and improvement all guide people in their actions.

In the context of social integration, the discussion also underlined the importance of social networks and organizations that link individual women with others who share their experiences and position, or whose interests are compatible, and are therefore capable of providing support and resources. Such formal and informal networks may improve women's situation in many respects, in terms of security, bargaining power, respect, self-confidence and so forth.

V. Conclusion: Looking Forward

While women's difficulties in times of armed struggle have recently featured more prominently on the international agenda for war-to-peace transitions, women's positive contributions to peace-building and post-war reconstruction remain largely unrecognized and undervalued. The preceding chapters on political, economic and social reconstruction efforts, however, have clearly demonstrated that although women may be particularly vulnerable to the impact of war and traditionally less active and visible in public life, they are not disengaged and passive in the rebuilding process. On the contrary, women are active and ingenious participants in almost any aspect of post-war recovery and rebuilding. And as the concluding summary at the end of each chapter suggests, the overall importance of women's initiatives is far from insignificant. However, as the preparatory work for **Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction** revealed, descriptive and analytical studies are still scarce, dispersed and fragmented, and unfortunately most also show a remarkable lack of clear and coherent conceptual and theoretical frameworks, which prevents the development of a clear picture of the meaning, impact and sustainability of women's contributions to post-war reconstruction.

On the one side, it is therefore important that women's positive contributions continue to be carefully and critically documented to supplement existing material and to counterpoise the dominant image of women as victims. On the other side, it is imperative that in addition to such descriptive work, an effort is made to reassess and improve existing conceptual and analytical tools to enable a better understanding of the many different gender dimensions of post-war reconstruction. The remaining part of this conclusion concentrates on this aspect and attempts to identify some appropriate perspectives relevant to both academics and practitioners.

Reconsidering Conceptual and Analytical Frameworks

As noted above, much of the research on women in societies emerging from armed conflict is flawed in a number of ways, and this has serious implications for both our comprehension of women's situation and our ability to assist them.

• From gender-blind accounts to gender-sensitive analysis

The most apparent drawback in existing literature on war-to-peace transitions and post-war reconstruction is its remarkably gender-blind perspective. Growing out of disciplines such as international relations, political science and economics, a large number of analyses concentrate on macro-issues without distinguishing between men's and women's positions. But even when the focus is shifted to rebuilding activities carried out at the grassroots level, the adoption of inclusive categories such as "people", "the population", or of more narrow technical categories such as "refugees", "internally displaced persons", "demobilized soldiers", or "disabled persons", conceals the inherent gender differentiation and the gender specificity of experiences and interests.

The present paper has repeatedly emphasized the need for more gender-specific data and especially for gender-sensitive analyses. Gender analysis, contrary to women's studies which focus on women exclusively, addresses men's and women's respective roles and the social relationships between men and women. It does so from a constructive position that challenges presumptions about "natural" gender roles, and instead gives priority to showing how men's

and women's identities and positions and the particular relationship between them is constantly constructed, contested and given new social meaning. As this review has demonstrated, conflict and post-war situations are highly illustrative of this process. Due to recent war-induced political and socio-economic changes, women's (and men's) traditional roles and relationships are challenged or being challenged. And both women and men struggle to identify and consolidate new identities and roles that appear more appropriate and satisfactory in the current situation. However, as these struggles of identity and status are often mixed with battles over resources and power, the reconstitution of gender is potentially conflictive. Nevertheless, this dimension must be looked at if we are to understand the new situation of women and men. Moreover, the gender perspective is a valuable entry point for understanding crucial aspects of the emerging social structures and cultural patterns of post-war societies and their internal dynamics. As women and men set out to win, consolidate or reclaim different rights and positions, social institutions and categories such as community, family, household, workplace, and friendship take on new meanings and roles.

Gender analysis, however, should not be confined to issues pertaining directly to men's and women's different situations and the relationships between them. It would also make a useful contribution to the understanding of other areas such as state-building, national identity formation, democratization, economic development, and so on, which have previously been regarded as largely gender-neutral, and often external to women's domains. The issue here is not simply to identify the differential impacts and implications for men and women of these phenomenon, but to see how these processes and categories are themselves inherently gendered.

• From universality and homogeneity to specificity and diversity

As stated above, much documentation on post-war rebuilding disregards the issue of gender altogether. Or, it follows the tradition of women's studies which in contrast to gender analyses isolates women for special treatment; this is especially true for most material deriving from international aid agencies. One of the major flaws in this kind of material is the tendency to portray women as a homogeneous group. This problem is not unique for work on post-war rebuilding, but also characterizes much of the work done on women and development in general, and it may be a result of the struggles to get women included in mainstream development thinking in the first place, as any emphasis on diversity would easily obfuscate the project.

The most explicit result of seeing women as a homogeneous social category within the war-to-peace context is the construction of a universalistic narrative of women's experience of war. In attempting to highlight women's particular situation (as opposed to men's), it fails to document and explain the diversity of experiences and positions among women, and therefore it may only vaguely resonate with any specific case.

This review has clearly demonstrated that women come out of armed conflicts with highly diverse experiences and priorities for the rebuilding process. It has also shown that women develop dissimilar strategies and employ different means to deal with what appear to be similar conditions. The diversity in situations and responses first of all reflects the varying nature and dynamic of conflicts, but more importantly it testifies that women are positioned differently with regard to options for action, the nature of their experiences, their access to resources, skills, participation in social networks, perceived options and future aspirations. So while there is a need to pay more attention to women as a special social category, the understanding of their situation requires recognition of other factors such as class, age, ethnicity, region and education which cross-cut and intermingle with gender identity.

The importance of taking more ethnographic information into account lies not only in the possibility of more precisely describing specific post-war situations. Without ethnographic information, we can neither fully comprehend the meaning of women's post-war rebuilding activities, nor assess their potential value and impact. When it is observed, for instance, that women in post-war societies rely increasingly on petty trade and informal sector activities, what does this mean? To understand the wider and long-term impact of this trend, it is, for instance, important to obtain information about whether these women have traditionally been involved in market trade, or whether this is an innovation in response to war-induced changes. As we have seen, this may have multiple consequences for how well-equipped women will be for this task, how other members of society will respond to their activities, who has control over the revenue from trade, etc. In cases where women's trading activities were a continuation of pre-war practice, they were more likely to win respect and support than in cases where their involvement in extra-domestic activities was a recent phenomenon. In such situations, women's efforts to support their family implied a major break with existing social patterns and norms, and they risked social marginalization and exclusion which added to their vulnerability.

So, while the general statement about women's increasing involvement in informal sector activities is important in that it challenges the stereotype of women as agricultural farmers, it requires further empirical contextualization in order to add to our understanding and to serve as a basis for assistance.

Finally, more contextualized descriptions and analyses of women's post-war rebuilding activities provide a solid basis for comparison of single cases which are also needed if we are to enhance our general and theoretical understanding of the issue at hand. And contrary to the context-free universalizations, generalizations based on in-depth and comparative analyses are more likely to maintain their link to the historical, political, social and cultural contexts that generated them, and thereby enable us to reassess initial assumptions.

• From victimized women to female actors

Also related to the prevalence of a universal narrative of women's war experiences is the tendency to portray women as victims and particularly vulnerable. It is, of course, important to recognize that modern warfare often targets civilians and the institutions and structures that support them in their daily lives, and we should continue to identify and meet people's immediate needs in these dire situations. But one of the risks of conceptualizing women as victims is that we reinforce existing incapacitating processes by introducing welfare-oriented projects that aim to reduce suffering here and now, but which do not support women's own long-term strategic interests.

In recent years, women's coping and survival mechanisms have often been welcomed as a way to highlight and give support to women's initiatives. However, it is important to note that both of these terms are based on minimalist perceptions of reconstruction: even when they stress women's inventiveness and perseverance, they focus on just staying alive and managing. This review has confirmed that women play an important role in a household's survival, but that their visions exceed mere survival. Their actions are often directed toward future goals — for themselves, their family, their community or the whole society. In other words, their actions are in principle transforming.

Another approach that has been adopted in recent analyses of women's situation is the so-called vulnerability approach. Basically it maintains the idea of women as particularly vulnerable victims in times of crisis. But rather than confirming this as a result of women's nature, this approach shifts the focus to the structures and mechanisms that turn women into victims in the first place, and that reproduce or even increase their vulnerability in times of

crisis. The potential strength of the approach is that it combines structural, cultural and personal levels of reality, and that it incorporates both a short- and a long-term perspective. Although the term vulnerability has not been extensively used in this review, it has a similar orientation, and the discussion includes several examples of how the ongoing processes of post-war reconstruction may, despite initial gains, eventually result in women's marginalization.

Although a committed effort is made to avoid the relegation of women to positions of victims, none of the above approaches fully recognize women as social actors with a will and capacity to influence things. This review has attempted to highlight this dimension, and to show that even in dire circumstances women possess some resources, skills and capacities that can be — and are — gainfully used in rebuilding. What is more important, women have agendas that may or may not correspond to the agendas of other individual and institutional actors, which when left out of the analysis seriously distort our understanding of the ongoing process. The social actors approach developed in development anthropology (Long, 1992; Booth, 1994) emphasizes people's agency, or their capacity to influence a given situation. The focus of this type of analysis is the social interaction and strategic manipulation of social relations that takes place among actors, and the different backgrounds, resources, power, values, concerns, and interests that people bring to these encounters (so-called "interfaces"). This approach appears relevant for the post-war context not only because it ascribes the same analytical significance to women as to men, but also because it highlights the contested, conflictive nature of post-war rebuilding and recognizes the need to substitute the linear view of reconstruction and development with a more complex model. However, while the social actors model provides a valuable tool for understanding the power dimension and inter-personal dynamics of reconstruction processes, it does not directly address the question about appropriate forms of intervention in such situations.

The present review has shown with all clarity that women constitute an indispensable force in rebuilding societies emerging from armed conflict. But women's valuable contributions notwithstanding, much could be done to support them. However, as has also been demonstrated, there is no universal answer to the question about how best to support women in societies emerging from conflict. The complexity and dynamism of post-war situations defy any such attempt.

Nevertheless, as this discussion of experiences from many different countries and areas of rebuilding suggests, assistance to women would generally benefit from adopting a constructive and gender perspective where women's and men's shifting roles and the relationship between them are considered. Moreover, recognizing the internal differentiation and stratification among women and acknowledging both the particular structural vulnerability and agency of women is also imperative to achieve more sustainable results. Finally, any type of assistance should be perceived as part of a long-term, complex process of negotiated change which involves not only the material, but also the political, cultural, social and more intimate levels of life, and which is inherently conflictive. In sum, building on women's resources and capacities and supporting their projects for rebuilding is important and necessary to avoid their marginalization, but it cannot be done without a view to the wider conditioning and constraining processes of rebuilding society after civil war.

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