



**Women's Organizations During and After
War: From Service Delivery to
Policy Advocacy**

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October 2, 1998**

Document Number: PN-ACD-336

Research & Reference Services Project
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I. INTRODUCTION

The recent increase in the number of conflicts and their changing nature has led more women to suffer from and participate in war. Women take up arms to combat oppressive regimes, suffer from rape used as a weapon of war, and adopt new responsibilities due to the absence of men in their homes and communities. Many women form organizations to address their needs, thereby revitalizing civil society.¹ USAID, in an effort to promote post-war reconstruction through service delivery, a politically active civil society, and sustainable democratic reforms, frequently works with women's organizations that seek to empower and serve those citizens who are among the most vulnerable.

Support for women's organizations during and after war is derived from two USAID strategic goals: humanitarian assistance and democracy and governance. Support for women's organizations also relates to USAID's policy of promoting women in development (WID). According to a 1984 USAID WID policy paper, USAID affirms that "gender roles constitute a key variable in the socio-economic condition of any country and can be decisive in the success or failure of development plans" (Internet WID Policy Paper 1984, 1).

This paper provides background information for a USAID evaluation series assessing the role of women in post-conflict situations.² Two central research questions drive this paper. First, what role do women's organizations play in war-torn societies? Second, how does support for women's organizations during and after war contribute to USAID's goals? While more research is needed in order to answer both questions, academic and donor literatures provide some preliminary observations and conclusions.

The paper is organized as follows: 1) a discussion of recent trends of war; 2) a conceptual framework drawn from findings in developing countries and war-torn societies; 3) examples of organizational efforts to address women's needs during and after conflict; and 4) a discussion of how support for women's organizations fits into USAID's Strategic Framework. A bibliography and an annex of terms that are frequently used in this paper follow the conclusion.

II. THE EFFECT OF WAR ON WOMEN

As the twentieth century draws to a close, the number of conflicts and their nature has changed drastically. According to a 1995 Mark Adams and Mark Bradbury study (7), "there is a clear upward trend in both the numbers of wars and the number of civilians affected by war. In 1960, there were 10 major wars; by 1992 there were 50." The use of rape and landmines as weapons of war increasingly affect civilians, primarily women and children. Indeed, civilians make up approximately 90 percent of war-related deaths (Adams and Bradbury 1995).

¹ Women's organizations comprise an immense category of heterogeneous organizations whose membership, beneficiaries, and/or leadership are primarily female. See annex A for definitions of frequently used concepts.

² For more information about USAID's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) upcoming evaluation series, contact Krishna Kumar, USAID/PPC/CDIE/POA.

Women suffer from war on social, economic, and political levels. War affects women and their dependents differently, according to the nature of the specific war. In general, war produces adverse psychological and physical effects due to trauma, fear, and instability. One phenomenon of modern warfare is the use of rape as a tool of ethnic cleansing.³ Rape, loss, stress, and fear contribute to the deterioration of women's mental and physical health.

War-torn societies have many women with special needs that need to be addressed in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. In an effort to contribute to USAID's understanding of the different ways war impacts women's lives, the following discussion highlights four groups of the war-affected women most vulnerable during the tenuous peace process.

Refugees

Of the 20 million refugees worldwide (Cohen 1995), approximately 80 percent are women and children (Martin 1992). Female refugees are particularly vulnerable to rape and gender-specific humiliations such as sexual harassment at border crossings. Once women reach refugee camps, they have familial, educational, health, economic, and social support needs that are rarely addressed. Furthermore, women rarely participate in the decision-making of camps. Female refugees are beginning to receive donor attention, particularly from USAID, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), and United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Other women do not cross borders when seeking refuge, but are left internally displaced. It is estimated that over 30 million people are internally displaced, 80 percent of whom are women and children. In crisis situations, women and children are most likely to stay close to home; thereby rendering them more vulnerable to the violence and harassment that typifies modern conflict (Ferris 1993).⁴ Because there is no international body in charge of monitoring and assisting the internally displaced and the political complications involved with entering countries in the midst of conflict, few donor agencies are actively assisting IDPs.

Female Heads of Households

Many women become heads of households as a result of war. For example, an estimated 35 percent of Cambodian households and 34 percent of Rwandan households have female heads.⁵ In Angola, the number of female-headed households rose approximately 33 percent after war (Greenberg, McMillan, Santo, and Ornelas 1997). Women heads of households are likely to be poorer, have fewer of the skills needed in the formal workplace, have less access to labor and

³ Recently, public attention has been directed to the use of rape in Rwanda and Bosnia. Official numbers estimate that between 20,000 and 50,000 Bosnian women are victims of rape. The European Community estimates 20,000 and the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Ministry of the Interior estimates 50,000. Some organizations consider these low estimates.

⁴ For more information see Byrne; Ferris.

⁵ Numbers are difficult to ascertain due to the lack of gender disaggregated head of household data available internationally and the politicization of data available at the local level. Where numbers are available in 1999, pre-conflict numbers with which to make a comparison are rarely available.

markets, have lower earning potential, and have restricted access to community structures and networks (Byrne 1995). After war, women heads of households suffer economically and socially from discrimination. As societies attempt to reconstruct themselves, these women have special needs for training, land ownership, and access to credit.

Ex-Combatants

In some cases, a small number of women actively participate as combatants in wars and revolutions. It is estimated that women formed 20 percent of the armed forces in Nicaragua, 30–35 percent in Eritrea, and 11 percent in El Salvador (Jaquette 1994; Mahling Clark 1996). After war, female ex-combatants find it difficult to go back to their prewar roles in the family and community.

Despite these adverse effects of war, many women are dedicating their time, energy, and skills to form organizations in order to confront the challenges presented by war. Women's organizations have a distinct role to play in the reconstruction, rehabilitation, and peace processes. As part of its humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, USAID has supported women's organizations that work with female ex-combatants in Mozambique and El Salvador; Afghan women who have fled to Pakistan; female rape victims in Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Rwanda; and women's associations in Rwanda. The next section documents the important roles that women's organizations can play in war-torn as well as peaceful societies.

III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A large body of literature exists regarding the role of women's organizations in developing countries. The literature, which is based on peaceful societies, suggests that women's organizations contribute to the development process in a variety of ways. First, they address peoples' needs through self-help or service provision. Studies have found that the majority of women's organizations initially form to address needs such as nutrition, food distribution, education, and shelter (Visvanathan 1997; Moser 1993; Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996). This can contribute to an improved standard of living for women.

Second, women's organizations are a means of empowerment. The Pacific Institute for Women's Health (PIWH) recently undertook an evaluation of the impact of the Global Fund for Women, a California-based organization that offers small grants to women's organizations around the world. The evaluation team found that participation in women's organizations benefits women individually by building self-esteem and confidence (Andina and Pillsbury 1997). Women's organizations also contribute to collective empowerment and press for increased respect for women's rights.

Third, women's organizations contribute to the democratization process. According to Marilee Karl (1995, 19), author of *Women and Empowerment: Participation and Decision-Making*, "women's organizations are one of the principal means through which women participate in the life of society. While women are poorly represented in political bodies and power structures, they have learned to use other avenues to turn their aspirations into political action." Women's organizations help women make political demands and strengthen the grassroots organizations (Karl 1995). As such they can be a useful mechanism for mobilizing women to advocate for

change. Not every organizational effort contributes to political change, nor do all women's organizations empower women. Often, tensions and rivalries within and among women's organizations can undercut these goals. Women's organizations in postconflict society are just one of many means through which positive change can be facilitated.

While more research is needed in order to comprehensively evaluate the role of women's organizations in war-torn societies, a small body of literature is beginning to analyze the role of women and their organizations in conflict situations. Case studies suggests that women's organizations during and after conflict serve many of the same roles as in peaceful countries. For example, many organizations have helped women meet basic needs such as food and shelter. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) Women in Transition (WIT) program in Rwanda has provided over 900 community improvement grants to 600 women's associations since 1996 (USAID August 1998; USAID September 1997b; and Heather McHugh, interview, June 1998). Women identify community needs, then design and implement projects that address those needs. Sixty-five percent of the total funds are used to train and assist women in constructing shelter, 8 percent are used to assist women cultivate livestock, and the remaining 25 percent are allocated to income generating projects. Almost 100,000 women have directly benefited from this assistance.

According to OTI, a short-term result of the WIT program is that women feel more secure in their physical environment, which contributes to the repatriation process. Women have expressed their appreciation for the increased donor interest that the program has generated. However, the longer-term political effects that OTI anticipated—increased political participation at the community level—have not occurred. The next step may involve leadership training workshops for select community leaders.

Lessons learned from the WIT experience include the importance of funding community priorities, most of which focus on survival issues such as shelter and income. Long-term political empowerment of women may not be an immediate (or mid-term) result. USAID and other donors should encourage developing programs that empower women, such as literacy and education programs, in refugee camps in order to begin capacity building and leadership training that allows women to emerge as community leaders as early as possible.

Women's organizations have empowered women in war-torn societies, as well as in peaceful societies. During military rule in Guatemala, the widows and mothers of the disappeared organized to encourage the regime to stop violating human rights. These women formed two organizations: Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) in the urban center and the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) in the rural areas. During the conflict, both organizations worked to find the disappeared and decrease violence in Guatemala. However, as the organizations gained more experience, they began to address other issues. Both organizations continue to exist, years after the warring parties signed peace treaties. GAM has remained politically active, as they lobby for a truth commission to investigate human rights violations and increased respect for human rights at the national level. CONAVIGUA has evolved to provide social services to returning women and has established groundbreaking literacy and health care programs.

When documenting the impact of these Guatemalan groups, Sarah Radcliffe and Sallie Westwood (1993) found that, as a result of their participation, women learned to speak Spanish as a common language, began to address health and education needs of their children, became acquainted with the Constitution, taught other women about their rights, and learned about the political institutions in Guatemala as they pressed for change through legal initiatives. Participation in women's organizations gave Guatemalan women tools to empower themselves, their family, and their community.

Women's organizations also contribute to democratization processes in war-torn societies. For example, Rwandan community women's organizations partnered with international women's rights organizations to pressure the International Criminal Tribunal to include rape and inhuman violence in Jean-Paul Akayesu's war crimes trial for the first time in history. The indictment was amended and Akayesu, a Hutu mayor and political party leader who murdered numerous women and children, was tried and convicted for gender-based crimes. Other women's organizations have lobbied governments for peace and human rights in Rwanda, Guatemala, and Palestine.

According to the small body of literature on gender and conflict, Women's organizations serve several functions in democratization processes:

- Strengthening grassroots organizational capacity and the democratic culture at the micro-level during war or after the war
- Instigating a transition to peaceful democracy
- Providing a means of collective action to advocate for women's rights during and after war
- Increasing women's participation in political processes at the local, national, and international level (See Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996; Goetz 1997; El-Bushra 1993; Greenberg, McMillan, Santo, and Ornelas 1997; Jacquette 1994; Moser 1993; and Visvanathan 1997)

The combined effect of women's organizational activity is to provide relief assistance, ensure that women participate in the relief and reconstruction experience, and contribute to the transition to democracy at the local, and sometimes national levels.

However, women's organizations face a number of challenges in conflictive societies. For example, Ann Marie Goetz (1997, 9) found that Ugandan and South African women's organizations suffer from several constraints: women have little time for political activism due to their double and triple duties; women suffer from the lack of financial and political experiences; premier democratic institutions are predominately male dominated; women's organizations tend to seek distance from the state (often due to state repression or oppression) thereby limiting their involvement; and differences among women make it hard to set a broad agenda. Despite these challenges, a number of women's organizations form at various stages of conflict.

IV. TYPOLOGIES OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS DURING AND AFTER CONFLICT

A variety of initiatives that bring women together to face the challenges of war and reconstruction are underway across the world. Organizations that address women's needs emerge at different moments of the conflict. Some begin during the war and evolve to address new issues during the post-conflict process. Others begin during the transition to peace or the reconstruction process. It is not uncommon for one organization to focus on a number of activities. This section attempts to develop a preliminary typology of these organizational initiatives.

Organizations to Support War Efforts

At times, organizations are formed to attract women's support for the conflict. For example, during the Eritrean war, the Eritrean Liberation Front formed the National Union of Eritrean Women to rally women around its cause. Before independence, the members participated in all aspects of the liberation struggle. Since independence, their work has focused on the reconstruction of their war-torn country (Kumar, Silver, Buck, and McNulty 1998).

In Nicaragua, before the Sandinistas overthrew the conservative Somoza government in 1979, the Sandinistas formed the Asociacion de Mujeres Confrontando la Problematica Nacional (AMPRONAC), designed to attract women into the movement. AMPRONAC pressured the Sandinista leaders to include women's issues in the 1979 national Sandinista program. After the overthrow, the Sandinistas disbanded AMPRONAC and formed a new organization, Asociacion de Mujeres Louisa Amanda Espinosa (AMNLAE), with a new vision: unite Nicaragua's numerous grassroots women's organizations.

After the Sandinistas were voted out of power in 1990, women realized the need for nonpartisan organizations to continue to address women's needs and concerns. The AMNLAE disbanded and seven networks of women's organizations—violence, economy and environment, sexuality, health, education, social communicators, and political participation—replaced it (Doty 1996). The high level of organization during the war set the tone for heightened consciousness regarding women's issues and empowered women at the grassroots level (Jaquette 1994). Today in Nicaragua, an active and well-organized feminist movement pressures local and national governments and international donors to take women's needs into account. However, this empowerment at the local level has not translated into the equitable participation of women at the national level.

Organizations to Assist Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons

Another potential opportunity for organizations exists in refugee camps. In the past, men tended to make decisions about access to food, training, and housing construction, often neglecting women's needs (Cohen 1995). Donors are beginning to engage women as they develop refugee programs. In Africa, UNIFEM's African Women in Crisis pilot umbrella program assists women refugees in three African countries. Recently, UNIFEM has shifted the focus to women's organizations, emphasizing capacity building, and establishing women's networks.

Guatemalan refugee camps provided an environment in which women could form their own organizations and participate in representative bodies (Byrne 1995). For example, Mama Maquin formed to ensure that women's needs would be met during the repatriation process and demand that development projects for women are brought into the camps (Byrne 1995). In addition to remaining active in the refugee camps, Mama Maquin has evolved to offer skills training to repatriated women. El Salvadoran refugee women organized to demand services and provide leadership in the camps with support from international NGOs and the UNHCR. In a 1994 study, Peter Sollis (1994) found that participation in organizations contributed to increased literacy rates, leadership roles, administrative and organizational skills, and carpentry and mechanical skills.

In other countries, women's organizations address the needs of the internally displaced (Ferris 1993). In Georgia, the Association of IDP Women offers medical services, counseling, and business training to IDP women with UNHCR support (Kumar, Silver, Buck, and McNulty 1998). In *Refugee and Internally Displaced Women: A Development Perspective*, Roberta Cohen (1995, 21) writes "the UNDP and other relief agencies have strongly recommended giving support to women's organizations formed by internally displaced and refugee women. These organizations are the most effective way of identifying needs and capabilities." However, few donors have experience working with IDPs due to the highly mobile nature of the victims and the politicized nature of their predicament.

Peace Building

Women's mobilizing for peace is a well-documented phenomenon during war. Women organized to lobby for peace in Palestine, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Guatemala. In Georgia, the International Women's Center for Education and Information sponsored a 1997 conference entitled "Women for a Peaceful Caucasus." The conference brought together women in order to promote dialogue and peace building (Kumar, Silver, Buck, and McNulty 1998).

When documenting women's voices after war, Olivia Bennett found that women become peace activists when they see no other alternative or feel that violence can no longer instigate change (Bennett 1995). Women's involvement in peace efforts tends to be located at the grassroots. Women's peace activism does not always translate into involvement in peace negotiations or women's formal inclusion in the transition process.

Social Organizations

Some organizations form to address social issues such as health, education, nutrition, and women's recovery from violence. A large number of the documented women's organizations that form after the transition to peace provide basic services such as health, food, education, and shelter. International NGOs and donor agencies often focus specifically on war-affected women when delivering emergency relief services. Women for Women in Bosnia and USAID's Winrock are examples of international organizations' offshoots that target women specifically when delivering goods and services. Local organizations also provide basic services. For example, Medica Women in Bosnia established a health care center to provide medical services to refugee women.

Although many women keep silent about the violence and trauma they experience, other women seek solace in women's organizations. With peace treaties in place, Rwandan and Bosnian women organized to provide services and advocate for women victims of rape and violence. In Bosnia, women's organizations are treating post-trauma stress disorder as well as other medical problems. In Rwanda, grassroots organizations are offering counseling and medical assistance along with training and resettlement. For example, the Duhozanye Association began as a trauma group and has now begun to fund small housing and agricultural projects (Kumar, Silver, Buck, and McNulty 1998).

Income Generating Organizations

Donor support is often directed to organizations that provide small amounts of credit to women or groups of women during the economic reconstruction period. USAID has supported small credit organizations in Guatemala, El Salvador, Angola and Rwanda, many of which have primarily female beneficiaries. For instance, USAID's Private and Voluntary Cooperation office provides matching grant funds to the Katalysis North/South Development Partnership Community Banking program. The program provides credit and training to mostly female, low-income entrepreneurs in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh exemplifies the potential long-term results of women's improved access to credit during the reconstruction process. Grameen Bank began as an effort to revitalize the war-torn economy by providing small loans to men and women. They soon discovered that women were better credit risks and more responsible managers of resources. In "Rural Credit Programs and Women's Empowerment in Bangladesh," the authors document means by which women are empowered by these micro-credit associations. Women gain a sense of self, mobility, visibility, economic security, status, decision-making power within the household, an ability to interact in the public sphere and in nonfamily groups, and develop a vision of the future (Hashemi, Schuler, and Riley 1996). The long-term benefits are significant as well: the women who received credit are more politically active as are some of the groups that formed to receive micro-credit.⁶

Human Rights and Women's Advocacy Organizations

Often, women organize in response to human rights violations. They lobby for freedom from violence, the right to an education, and the right to work. The post-conflict CO-MADRES of El Salvador and the Grupo de Apoyo Mutua (GAM) in Guatemala now work openly towards restitution for abuses and equal rights for women. In Cambodia, the Cambodian Institute for Human Rights conducts research about and training on human rights issues.

In many post-conflict societies women's organizations are formally advocating on behalf of women. Women's access to political power is an important item on their agenda. Some lobby policymakers, while others support the election of women in governmental positions. For example, women's organizations lobbied to include women's land tenure rights in

⁶ For a critical look at micro-credit and women's empowerment, see Fernando. It is important to note that this form of development assistance is highly individualized; associations form primarily to distribute funds to individual entrepreneurs.

Mozambique's 1997 Land Law. The Angolan Association for Women's Lawyers battles for legal reforms to protect women's rights. In 1994, after the signing of the Salvadoran Peace Accords, a consortium of 40 women's organizations, *Mujeres '94*, pressured for increased women's participation in political processes.

V. PLACING WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES WITHIN USAID'S STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The important roles that women's organizations play in war-torn societies makes USAID support even more necessary. They contribute to the realization of Agency's humanitarian assistance (HA) goals. In the 1997 Strategic Plan, the Agency outlines three objectives within this goal. As part of its objective to *reduce the potential impact of crisis*, USAID (1997a, 28) will target "vulnerable populations that need food and other necessities" in a cost-effective manner. Women's organizations often form with the explicit goal of meeting women's basic needs such as food and shelter, thereby reducing the impact of war on women. The Strategic Plan also states that in an effort to *meet urgent needs in times of crisis* (Objective 6.2), USAID (1997a, 28) will offer "timely and effective emergency relief to meet targeted groups, including women and children." Women's organizations are well equipped to help USAID provide short-term emergency relief to women refugees, IDPs, and other victims of war. Finally, USAID (1997a, 28) will *re-establish personal security and basic institutions to meet critical intermediate needs and protect human rights* (Objective 6.3). Many of the women's organizations work to protect women's security and fight for human rights. Thus, assistance to Women's organizations during and after war is consistent with USAID's HA goals.

Women's organizations also contribute to USAID's policy to promote women in development. The Global Bureau's WID office advances three goal areas in all countries, including those affected by conflict: the economic status of women; women's educational opportunities; women's legal and property rights and participation in democracy and governance (USAID April 1998b). The examples in the previous section demonstrate that women are organizing to address all of the economic, education, and democracy-related goals in war-torn societies. G/WID measures its impact in part based on the number of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) supported, which suggests that increased support for women's organizations in postconflict countries would complement their objectives.

Finally, women's organizations further USAID's democracy and governance (DG) goal. According to the 1997 Strategic Plan, USAID pledges to support programs and institutions that strengthen democratic practices and ensure the full participation of women (1997a). Specifically, USAID support for women's organizations in war-torn societies falls within the DG objective to *develop a politically active civil society* (Objective 2.3). To achieve this, USAID has adopted three program approaches. USAID plans to increase women and men's participation in the policy process (Program Approach 2.3.2). Women's organizations can provide fora for participation in political processes at the local level. In addition, USAID promises to strengthen the democratic culture (Program Approach 2.3.5), another role that women's organizations serve in some post-conflict settings. Finally, USAID advocates strengthening the financial viability of civil organizations, particularly labor unions, human rights groups, and advocacy organizations

(Program Approach 2.3.3). Again, supporting women's organizations with human rights and advocacy missions after conflict would contribute to this approach.

The Global Bureau's Center for Democracy and Governance (G/DG), an office established to provide a focal point for the Agency's DG goal and support USAID missions as they develop DG programs, has developed its own Strategic Plan. In accordance with the Agency's plan to *increase the development of a politically active civil society* (Agency Strategic Objective 2.3), G/DG pledges to support missions as they help *informed citizen's groups effectively contribute to more responsive government* (Support Strategic Objective 3: Civil Society, April 1998a). G/DG's R4 states, "to assist the achievement of [democratic reform], USAID civil society activities focus on strengthening those organized and progressive elements of civil society that are pressing for democratic reform" (G/DG R4 1998, 42). Such organizations are often referred to as advocacy organizations, defined as "nonstate groups that engage in or have the potential for championing the adoption and consolidation of governments" (Hansen 1996, 1). Much of the Agency has followed G/DG's lead in focusing on support for advocacy organizations.

Some women's organizations mentioned in this study and the supporting literature are advocacy organizations as defined by G/DG. A few organizations are founded with the explicit goal of championing reform in postconflict settings; others evolve to address political issues. Some experts argue that those organizations that offer services to women and provide basic fora for participation are other forms of advocacy organizations. Many have suggested that the Agency expand its definition of "advocacy organizations" to include not only "policy advocacy," but also all organizations that provide support for the disempowered. If the Agency adopted a broader definition, support for most of the women's organizations mentioned in this paper would fall well within the parameters of the Global Bureau's DG objectives.

Support for women's organizations furthers the Agency's HA, WID, and DG goals. They contribute to social, economic, and political reconstruction goals. In order to facilitate the work of women's organizations as they empower women and foster democratic change, it is important for donors to increase their support and work with them in a constructive manner.

VI. CONCLUSION

Two broad conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, women's organizations are potential agents of change. The organizations that women form during and after conflict, in response to the crisis and change, may provide a vehicle to address their needs (practical and strategic) at the local and national level. If women can utilize this vehicle throughout the transition to peace and democratic consolidation processes, democracy has an increased chance of being sustained.⁷ To encourage this evolution, donors should view the act of organizing as a positive development result, not solely a process to meet other goals. When an evolution from practical to strategic does not occur, there may be barriers to organizing effectively, such as women's fear and

⁷ For instance, a team of USAID evaluators found that in Angola the more women incorporated into the tenuous democratic experiment and fully engaged in Women's organizations, the greater the chance that Angola's fragile peace will evolve into a stable democracy (Greenberg, McMillan, Santo, and Ornelas 1997).

resistance, class and race divisions, or an inadequate enabling environment. Assisting in reducing these barriers may be another appropriate role for donors.

Second, in some cases local level women's organization during the war translates to an active organizational dynamic at the grassroots level during the transition and in the post-conflict phase. This is best documented in the Central American countries. However, even when women have been highly mobilized and organized during and after war, this has rarely translated into inclusion in high-level decision-making (Adams and Bradbury 1995). This may indicate broader structural causes of gender discrimination and violence that necessitate different donor interventions. For example, donors can insist that women and women's issues are addressed during peace negotiations and during the ensuing national planning process.

Women's organizations are not a panacea; they can not abolish the underlying causes of violent conflict. However, this paper highlights a number of important roles they serve in war-torn societies and argues for increased donor attention. More data and fieldwork are necessary. This analysis provides a conceptual framework for future research on the issues. Many questions remain regarding the nature of donor support, the nature of women's organizations, and the sustainability of the changes they instigate. There is general agreement regarding *why* women's organizations are important and *what* they do. The next step is exploring *how* to assist them in the most effective and beneficial manner. USAID's upcoming 18 month evaluation series on the effect of war on women will address many of the questions that remain, such as: What factors and conditions contribute to the emergence, revitalization, and/or decline of women's organizations in post-conflict societies? How did they emerge and when? What type of activities have they initiated in different post-conflict societies? What factors affect their overall impact and performance? What effects did the activities of women's organizations have on the processes of democratization and empowerment?

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ANNEX A: Definitions of Frequently Used Concepts

The following definitions are offered in order to clarify some terms used frequently in this paper.

First, **conflict** is broadly defined as a state of prolonged violence. Mark Adams and Mark Bradbury discuss the types, causes, and phases of conflict in their OXFAM report, “Conflict and Development: Organizational Adaptation in Conflict Situations.” They assert that the roots of conflict lie in ideology, governance issues, race, environment, or identity (or a combination thereof). The causes tend to be related to a constitutional crisis, poverty or inequity, or a systematic crisis resulting from the international structure (1995). Bradbury and Adams divide conflict into two broad categories and four nonlinear phases. The categories are intrastate and international and the phases are preconflict, conflict, peace processes, and postconflict. They recommend that donor interventions vary depending on the cause, type, and phase of each situation. The Institute for Development Studies’ (IDS) Briefing on Development and Gender (BRIDGE) uses the OXFAM report as a point of departure when looking at the gender implications of war in seven countries. The authors found that the gendered effects of conflict also differ depending on the nature, phase, and causes of the war (Byrne 1995). This paper addresses the conflict and postconflict phases of intrastate wars, and its effect on women and democratization.

Violence is the abusive or unjust use of power. In *Women, Culture and Violence: A Development and Human Rights Issue*, Annemeik Richters (1994) differentiates between two types of gender violence: domestic violence (experienced at the home or family level) and organized violence (at the macro level). While this study is explicitly concerned with organized violence, the two are often interrelated. Feminist scholars point out that many of the societal forces that lead to domestic violence contribute to or exacerbate gender violence during war (Richters 1994; Byrne 1995).

Next, the issue of **civil society** and its implications for democratic development and women’s empowerment in postconflict situations must be defined. Civil society is “the sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifest in norms of community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication” (Costen, 7).⁸ Scholars and development practitioners herald civil society as an important force in democratic development. Civil society can play the following roles in strengthening democracies:

- Increase citizens’ participation in democratic processes at the local, national, and international level by mobilizing marginalized groups
- Protect citizens from excesses of the state by acting as a buffer against possible predatory behavior

⁸ For more information, see Costen; Fox; Putnam.

- Guarantee political accountability by facilitation communication, representation, and negotiation between citizens and the states
- Advocate on behalf of disempowered citizens
- Increase the role of nonstate actors in the performance of public functions
- Contribute to the development of a democratic civic culture (Costen 1995; Fox 1995)

While the traditional democratization literature suggests that the role of civil society differs according to the stage of the democratic transition,⁹ fewer analyses touch on the specific dynamics of the democratization process in countries engaged in conflict. However, most agree that a strong civil society is an essential component of postconflict democratization (Wood 1997).

Civil society can not cure all challenges affiliated with democratic development. For instance, when studying NGOs in Kenya, Stephen Ndegwa found that civil society is not necessarily democratizing. He documents the diverse position that local NGOs took in Kenya's democratization movement. He argues that while civil society is well placed to further democracy through grassroots empowerment, this sphere of activity is neither inherently democratic, nor an instigator of democracy. Civil society sometimes serves to reinforce existing inequities, including gender imbalances that exist in societies (Ndegwa 1996). In sum, an active civil society is a necessary, but not sufficient facet of democracy.

In theory, civil society is a broad sphere that encompasses many heterogeneous voluntary organizations that bring citizens together, such as local or neighborhood associations, nongovernmental organizations, political parties, labor unions, etc. In practice donors tend to narrow their focus to local, national, and international organizations that are nonprofit and nongovernmental. Donors find that often these organizations are more efficient than larger state-run institutions, more familiar with the local development context, more cost-effective channels for development assistance, and more likely to increase the chances of sustainable reform by engaging local institutions in the development process. This study analyzes women's organizations that fall under the broad rubric of civil society, including private voluntary organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and grassroots organizations. This narrows the focus to local associations, neighborhood groups, indigenous nongovernmental organizations, national umbrella groups, regional consortiums, and international nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations.

Two additional terms merit attention. **Participation** is the "active and meaningful involvement of the masses of people at different levels of the decision-making process for the determination of societal goals and the allocation of resources to achieve them" (Martin 1992, 10). Women's **empowerment** includes (but is not limited to) building an awareness of women's situation, rights, and opportunities among men and women; building women's capacity to plan, make decisions, organize, manage, and carry-out activities; and participate in decision-making

⁹ See O'Donnell and Schmitter for a discussion of the stages of democratic transitions.

activities at all levels (Karl 1995). True participation and empowerment of women in post-conflict societies are both means and ends of democratic development.