

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Women's Studies International Forum

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/wsif

From the global to the local: Grounding UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in post conflict policy making



Monica McWilliams^{a,*}, Avila Kilmurray^{b,c}

^a *Transitional Justice Institute, Ulster University, Shore Road, Newtownabbey, Co. Antrim BT37 0QB, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom*

^b *Ulster University, United Kingdom*

^c *Global Alliance for Community Philanthropy, United Kingdom*

ARTICLE INFO

Available online 18 December 2014

SYNOPSIS

Given that women consistently receive less attention than men in peace building and that gender analysis rarely informs strategies related to conflict transformation, this article examines how a European Union (EU) PEACE III project, titled Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning, addresses this gap. It challenges the hierarchal nature of the dialogue on peace building in a post conflict society and suggests how this can be changed. It shows how activists and policy-makers can become more engaged around UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and argues that if government officials had adopted a more contextualised, bottom-up system of policy making, they could have engendered social transformation within the broader processes of post-conflict transition.¹ The project's findings are framed within the context of the dominant discourses on peace and security and should be relevant to those engaged in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 in other post conflict societies.

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Introduction

Whilst the roles of women in conflict may vary, their experiences of conflict and violence often signify that women have different views on what peace means and how peace building should proceed. UNSCR 1325 focuses specifically on prioritising women's participation in the international peace and security agenda, calling for states to (i) increase the number of women involved in decision-making around issues of peacebuilding and conflict transformation; (ii) protect women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, especially from gender-based violence; and (iii) adopt a gender perspective on peace-making, peace keeping and peacebuilding. Adopted in 2000, UNSCR 1325 laid the basis for a number of reinforcing resolutions (UNSCRs 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122) that seek to further develop both conceptual frameworks and indicators for implementation. A report by UN WOMEN in 2012 on Women's

Participation in Peace Negotiations found that the progress since 2000 in this field remains precarious with only 92 (16%) of 585 peace agreements since 1990 containing at least one reference to women and gender (Gardner & El-Bushra, 2013, p.10).

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement concluded in Northern Ireland in 1998 was one of those peace agreements that did include a reference to women through the following insertion: "The parties affirm their commitment to ... the right of women to full and equal political participation" (Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, s.6, para.1.9). The focus of the 1998 peace agreement in Northern Ireland was on power sharing and the establishment of new institutions and arrangements recognising British and Irish identities. The inclusion of gender specific clauses was considered to be an achievement, reflecting the work of women negotiators directly involved in the negotiations (Mitchell, 1999).

Following the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, most political discourse focused on considerations of national/religious identity, decommissioning of weapons and prisoner releases to the extent that gender issues were denigrated to a lower status in the decision making process. The UK

* Corresponding address at: 12 Knockeden Park Belfast, United Kingdom.
E-mail address: m.mcwilliams@ulster.ac.uk (M. McWilliams).

government, the Northern Ireland Executive and, to a lesser extent, the Irish government ignored the commitment to equality for women in the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Peace Agreement. It was not until the mid 2000s that government officials were tasked with bringing forward gender specific policies on issues related to the political conflict in response to advocacy by women's groups in civic society. This task, completed by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister, resulted in the publication of the Northern Ireland Gender Equality Strategy, 2006–2016. The document was the first to acknowledge women's peacebuilding as being an area for action and raised issues of the participation of women in civil society and noted the lack of gender balance in government appointments (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014). Despite this acknowledgment, the implementation of the Gender Strategy has been weakened by the refusal of the United Kingdom government to recognise the application of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security to Northern Ireland. The conflict in Northern Ireland did not fall within the Geneva Conventions as an intra state war and was not regarded by the British government as such.² This refusal to apply UNSCR 1325 to women's peacebuilding efforts in Northern Ireland remains in place despite criticism of the UK government by the CEDAW Committee.

In contrast to this, the European Union had designated Northern Ireland as a region emerging from conflict and set aside funds from the mid 1990s for PEACE I and PEACE II programmes to support the transition. The project that is reported on here was funded under the PEACE III programme and was implemented over the period 2011 to 2014. There were three phases to the project; the first engaged approximately 800 women, in conferences, seminars and roundtable discussions within Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland; the second involved the commissioning of a baseline study on UNSCR 1325 to disseminate international learning, whilst the third phase engaged policy makers and NGOs involved in decision-making on peace and security issues. The advent of the project provided an assessment of women's experiences in relation to the on-going peace process and an analysis of the commitments in the peace agreement that had specific implications for women. Views were sought from women in a diversity of communities across Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland, the latter having also been impacted by the conflict. The PEACE III project placed an additional emphasis on using the community-based discussions to inform a strategic guide and toolkit developed for policy and decision-makers in the statutory sector. The aim was to frame the project and its findings in the context of UNSCR 1325, designing a particular methodology to meet this challenge.

This article highlights the need for policy makers to listen to women's views of peace and security in order to address the inadequacies of institutionalised security approaches in a post conflict situation. The article outlines how women can contribute to policy making in this area by emphasising the importance of interrelated categories of peace and security: health and education, economic security, safety from intimate partner violence, community development and political stability. Adding a gender frame to peace building and conflict transformation can also assist policy makers in understanding the differing experiences of women and men during conflict and post-conflict.

Methodology adopted

The EU funded Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project operated at a number of levels. At its core was the importance of hearing what women had to say, emphasising the experiences of women living in communities recovering from the worst impact of the conflict. It was also recognised that different voices had to be allowed space for self-expression and that the project had to be as inclusive as practicable of women from both sides of the sectarian divide. The project sought to have a minimum of 45% women from Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist backgrounds and 40% of women from Catholic/Nationalist/Republican backgrounds in Northern Ireland, reflecting the political/religious identity within these communities. Particular efforts were also made in Northern Ireland to ensure the inclusion of 15% of minority ethnic women in the project. For the southern Border Counties, participation was set at a minimum of 20% Protestant and at least 65% Catholic which again reflected the religious breakdown of these communities (EU PEACE III, 2012). The project aimed to develop an analysis that accounted for the needs and vulnerabilities of women from different political/religious backgrounds in both jurisdictions as well as the intersections between gender and social relations that included race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and disability. Participation took the form of a series of local seminars, replicated north and south of Ireland that focused on the main pillars of UNSCR 1325.³ Participants were also invited to join cross-border conferences on each of the pillars; for example women from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland came together to discuss Violence, Community Safety and Security in the post conflict situation. In addition each conference benefitted from the input of women international activists, identified by the Foundations for Peace Network.⁴ Over the three-year project, women from Cyprus, Sri Lanka, Serbia and Palestine added their insights on living in a divided society.

Participation in the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project took place through eight seminars organised across Northern Ireland (the larger number reflecting the disproportionate impact of the conflict), with five seminars in the southern Border Counties and six cross-border conferences. In addition to the formal programme, a specific discussion was held with women from the Roma community in Belfast, whilst women asylum seekers were encouraged to attend discussions in the southern border region. Community-based women were trained as facilitators by the project's partner organisation to encourage effective and inclusive participant engagement at each of the events.

A number of ground rules emerged: (a) the main tenets of UNSCR 1325 would be translated into questions that women could relate to such as 'Have things improved in your life since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998?'; (b) attention would be paid to the sensitivity of the language and terms used during discussions,⁵ (c) sufficient time would be allocated for round table discussions, and (d) there would be a mix of participants at each table during the seminars and conferences to avoid clustering from single identity communities. The main points emerging from these consultations were collated and used to inform the policy briefs prepared for policy-makers and NGOs in order to extend the applicability of UNSCR 1325 to a wider range of stakeholders. The five policy papers focused on

the following: Prevention of Gender Based Violence, Participation and Representation, Protection and Security, Recovery, Relief and Rehabilitation, and Addressing the Legacies of the Conflict (Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).⁶

The second phase of the project drew together learning on the issue of women and peace building, including an understanding of the existing international instruments through the production of a baseline study on UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions (McKinn & O'Rourke, 2012). An Expert Advisory Panel was established with membership from the local universities, as well as from the Development, International Aid and local NGO sectors. The third phase of the project assessed the level of knowledge and awareness of statutory/government decision-makers on the issues relating to women, peace building and security. Policy makers were informed about the findings from the participatory seminar/conference process, following which they were invited to share existing good practice as well as their concerns on the implementation of an effective gender strategy at the institutional level. A toolkit accompanied by guidance notes, on the development and application of Women, Peace and Security practice in Northern Ireland/Ireland, was a key outcome of this work (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014). This offered a strategic thematic framework that included examples of practice that could be used locally, building on UNSCR 1325 principles. The toolkit recommendations and examples of good practice were informed both by the women participants' views and the public sector stakeholders' perspectives. The Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project concluded with the launch of a package of materials that included the toolkit, the strategic guide and a set of policy briefs based on each of the pillars of UN1325. In short, the methodology took the form of an inclusive iterative process framed by the principles and provisions of an international resolution as applied to a region currently in transition from conflict.

Writing on the subject of feminist theorising, Corrin (1999) holds that it should be (i) based on the experience of women, (ii) needs to consider how such experiences have been constructed, (iii) include reflection on the power relations present, and (iv) built on knowledge that considers how changes in ways of thinking can challenge collectively issues of social and political injustice. Following Corrin, within the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project there was an investment in hearing the diverse experiences of women, both of the conflict and of the post conflict period. There was also a sensitivity as to how these narratives were collected through project planning that facilitated the participation of women from a range of disadvantaged areas as well as from single identity and cross community groups. The reflection on the power relations was encouraged through the facilitation of the trained facilitators, whilst the project toolkit and policy briefs illustrated the collective action for change. In addition, the investment of time in developing a relationship with public sector stakeholders was prioritised with a view to sensitising the system to the need for such change.

The importance of voice concerning the meaning of peace

Turning to the findings, it is worth noting Phillips' assertion that the struggle over recognition needs to be re-defined as a

struggle for citizen inclusion and political voice (Phillips, 2003). The seminar series was designed as a form of citizen inclusion, but it was recognised from the start that the voices would reflect a kaleidoscope of personal views based on where women lived and their experiences over previous years. As it transpired, the participants were tentative about being critical of a peace process that was still viewed as 'a work in progress' and a little bit 'wobbly' as one participant explained. Since the daily fear of becoming caught up in bombs or gun attacks was no longer pervasive, some felt that it was ungenerous not to celebrate the political achievements, whilst others acknowledged that there had been a 'lifting of the heaviness' that existed at community level in previous years. Given that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was framed as a historic compromise in constitutional and governance terms, the peace process was a reality they felt they had to accept as they did not like to be seen as undermining it. What resulted was a kind of silencing of their political voice since the view was that peace – however defined – was better than open warfare. This section now focuses on women's reflections on how they were affected differently from men by the conflict.

What emerged from the exchanges amongst women participants, on both sides of the border, was a perceived dual reality: peace had been negotiated behind closed doors by elected politicians (including former combatants) whilst life continued in communities where the scars of armed conflict were most felt. Women had been affected differently by the conflict as reflected in their higher dependency on antidepressants and sleeping tablets for nervous anxiety and the persistently high levels of caring responsibilities for seriously injured victims. As is the case elsewhere, there was also a web of gender specific harms, outlined by O'Rourke (2014 and this issue), with higher numbers of domestic violence homicides due to the availability of legally held weapons (McWilliams & Ni Aoláin, 2013).

Re-thinking what peace meant in their lives produced a range of interrelated factors being identified, rather than simply freedom from fear of political violence. The participants gave several examples of how security approaches could better ensure 'freedom from want' as well as 'freedom from fear' in their daily life. The re-imagining of peace and security focused on the women's practical needs, such as the need for more women's centres to deal with psychosocial support for the mental anxiety and trauma caused by the conflict. As one seminar participant lamented: "The days of leaving doors open are gone – some people are even afraid to leave the house." They pointed to the need for more secure employment so as to increase their economic security and independence and make them less reliant on their partner's income. This sense of insecurity can effectively undermine the ability of women to exercise their full agency and shows the need for a more holistic understanding of the meaning of security (Hobson, 2003; Wood & Shearing, 2006). Increasing self-confidence was a challenge picked up by Baroness May Blood (from a working class community activist background and now a Member of the House of Lords) in addressing the seminar participants: "I believe in me, do you believe in you? Because if you don't, how do you expect others to?" May Blood was pointing to the need for women to have a greater sense of self-belief in the grassroots activity with which many of them were involved. As Jacobson notes even if women's activism is not widely

acknowledged as political: “the way in which women have set about rebuilding their lives so that their children do not have to experience the same horrors is unmistakably transformative” (Jacobson, 2013, 240).

In post-conflict situations, as soon as the political elites find an accommodating political arrangement and the “ones with the guns” disarm, there is an assumption that the frontline actors who helped to create the peace process are no longer needed. Some participants noted the new focus on projects for male ex-combatants. They were aware that women’s organisations also needed extra resources but since they did not fit the criteria under the Conflict Transformation Initiative (set aside for ex-prisoners), this would lead to increasing competition for funding in the community development sector.⁷ They were expected to be grateful for a situation in which new groups – victims and prisoners – were seen as the priority. The lack of recognition for the creative cross-community work that women’s groups had developed during the conflict helps to explain why the ‘felt peace’ was described in such contradictory terms by some of the women participants.

O’Rourke (2013) argues that women disappear in processes of transitional justice through the stockpiling of issues into the ‘private sphere’, removing them from the consideration of political issues relevant to the ‘public sphere’. Women’s voices can be sidelined, as they are perceived to be raising issues that are not of serious concern in the new post conflict hierarchy of policy priorities. This concern was expressed by one participant who remained concerned at the lack of women within this hierarchy: “Women are torn between rearing children and holding down jobs – but we need more women further up the ladder where the big decisions are being made”. In Northern Ireland, Tallion (2001) documents a pre-existing network of active women’s groups that superseded the community divide, providing solidarity amongst women’s groups in a way that proved impossible for male activists.⁸ This bottom up social movement was, however, viewed by some politicians with suspicion claiming that the electoral mandate was the only one that counted.

Had politicians drawn more on women’s groups’ local knowledge and understanding of these issues, the implementation process may not have been fraught with so many difficulties. A more bottom up process, through what McEvoy and McGregor (2008) refer to as “transitional justice from below,” might have engendered more societal ownership of these issues. As Wanis-St John and Kew (2008) note, it is too often left to government and para/military leaders, political party heads, warlords, and the usual cast of political elites to get the lion’s share of attention and to dictate the conditions for the transition.

The difficulty for women’s organisations to be taken seriously is also highlighted by Nira Yuvel-Davis (1997) where she states that women are too often ‘hidden’ in the various theorizations of competing nationalisms and their public narratives. In this context, organisations that focused on thematic issues (such as violence against women, women’s health and well-being, women’s human rights and equality) raised concerns that impacted on women irrespective of their national/political identity. However, they struggled to be taken seriously by policy makers who maintained a singular focus on national/political identity. On the other hand, it was explicitly noted by the project participants that the validity of raising such issues and the experience of relationship building through

working together remained important in what was a very divided society.

Women also spoke about the fact that fear of violence had shifted away from a fear of attack on a community, to a different kind of fear, based on a sense of personal insecurity originating within their own communities. The perception of increased levels of domestic violence was raised, albeit balanced with the recognition that some women living in Republican and Loyalist areas are freer to report such assaults, now that police officers are permitted access to their homes. McWilliams and Ni Aoláin (2013) highlight the need for increased support at this stage since more women feel enabled to come forward to seek help. Another impact of such abuse can be seen in the testimony of some participants, who referred to their fear of dependency on medication prescribed for high levels of stress during the conflict and to which they were now addicted. One suggestion was that gender specific data from public health agencies should be provided to help map the problem and to scope the need for psycho-social support.

The lack of official strategies, policies and resources to respond to spiralling rates of poverty and increased economic insecurity was also a concern. Participants shared their fears that with few job opportunities, young people could become caught up in anti social behaviour and “recreational rioting”, a term used to describe the sporadic angry encounters with the police on both sides of the sectarian divide. There was a general sense that community reconstruction arising out of the peace process had little impact on the most disadvantaged areas and that the needs of these areas need to be better documented (Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2013, 2014a, 2014b). Whilst concerns were expressed about the instability of the peace process, reflecting the reality of periodic crisis at the government level, many women also felt alienated from a democracy that was perceived to be overly aggressive and confrontational. There was a view that women had become increasingly invisible in decision-making over the fifteen years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. In support of this, the Commissioner for Public Appointments in Northern Ireland concluded that there has been no improvement in the representation of women in public appointments since 1998, accompanied by a serious decline in women as chairpersons of public bodies.⁹ There were concerns expressed that there has been little change in the gender specific assumptions that prevail despite the introduction of a government strategy on gender. Participants on both sides of the border stated their belief that some male leaders still tended to be uncomfortable with women in public leadership roles. In Northern Ireland this was exemplified by the hostility towards the first woman appointed as Police Ombudsman in 1999 and the first woman Chief Commissioner for Human Rights in 2005. They felt that the political antagonism played out in the media made it very difficult to empower women to enter public life or to act as role models for younger women.

For this reason, the project identified the need to fashion support networks for women who were prepared to become politically active. There was also a recognition that creating support networks would not suffice if these were not underpinned by a critical mass of female activism to ensure a transformational impact on the body politic. In this context, two key policy decisions taken after the peace accord were viewed as undermining the activism that had been central to

women playing a key role in the peace process. One was in relation to the depletion of public funding and resources available for local women's networks and the second was the failure of the Northern Ireland Executive to re-instate the Civic Forum previously agreed on in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The Civic Forum allowed for the representation of civil society representatives, from a wide range of sectors, including the women's sector, to sit in an advisory forum alongside the Northern Ireland Assembly.¹⁰ The dissolution of the Civic Forum by the Northern Ireland government illustrates the difficulties in shifting an institutional culture towards the inclusion of civic society. As noted elsewhere this is a common experience in post conflict situations where women ask for, but do not get, the kind of 'hard' legal enforcement that would help to sustain gains for the long term (Ní Aoláin, Haynes & Cahn, 2011).

In the seminars, women activists noted that this was one example where the sharing out of power amongst the political elites did not translate into a more inclusive form of power sharing. As one participant argued: "Political decision-making needs to be stripped back and opened up." She suggested that if more women were present they would "Cut through the waffle and get things done". For the women participants in the Sharing the Learning project, the return to the status quo where political representatives dominated the policy arena was a huge disappointment. In response to these concerns, they identified investment in community networking as being as crucial to the reconstruction phase of peace building as it had been throughout the Northern Ireland peace process.

The continuing emphasis on the predominantly male preserves of demilitarisation, de-commissioning of weaponry and re-configuring of policing and security – shot through with arguments over the allocation of political power – also impacted on the issues of women, peace and security. A woman from a loyalist/unionist community argued that: "Men deal with the money, drugs and power – women are not interested"; however she went on to point out: "You still have to speak to them (paramilitaries) to get something done". In the hierarchy of political risk management, the 'women's dimension' was dismissed since it was not calculated to threaten the curtailment of violence. Assisted by the facilitators, the participants spent time examining the expenditure on security sector reform since the peace agreement. They noted in their discussions that the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish government should be obliged to set aside a minimum 15% of post conflict spending on women's recovery needs and empowerment. This was proposed by the UN General Secretary in 2010 and included direct financing to women's civil society organisations.¹¹ They believed that this would go some way in ensuring that reconstruction policies and strategies would be better informed by women's perspectives. Prioritising social and economic needs in this way helps to balance the 'normal relations' agenda dominated by the 'hard' security issues of demilitarisation and demobilisation.

Issues of continuing division amongst women participants were also addressed during the roundtable discussions on safety and security. Whilst there were shared concerns about young people, particularly in terms of high rates of suicide and fear of recruitment by paramilitary organisations, it was accepted that women from different communities had experienced peace building in different ways. Contested space, symbols, flags and memorabilia still caused division amongst

some of the women present at the seminars, particularly those within Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist communities where some of the participants expressed the view that the post conflict situation was much worse due to their fear that their identities and traditions were under threat. Speaking on the subject of cultural identity, one woman lamented the fact that "We can celebrate Indian and Chinese culture but not each other's." Women from both communities noted that unarticulated memories about the past could still give rise to inter-generational trauma. A political impasse amongst the political parties, over how to deal with the legacies of the past, sharpened women's discussion of these issues. They highlighted their omission from the official debate although it was noted that much of the argument was over "male history", further indicating feelings of exclusion.¹² Despite the dissent over the flags issue, women also spoke about the importance of cross-community and cross-border work that helped them to realise what they have in common, as well as the issues that still cause division. The participants felt that the insecure, short-term project funding provided by the Community Relations Council for relationship building was not conducive to longer-term work in this field. The importance of such relationship building was recognised and summed up by one woman: "Segregation breeds a sense of difference and difference contributes to fear" (Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, 2013, 2014a, 2014b).

As is the case in Northern Ireland, the more traditional concept of security focuses on the protection of state authority using a predominantly militaristic discourse that limits the participation of civil society in the development of peace and security strategies. Women participants viewed this approach as authoritarian, patriarchal and hierarchical, as one woman commented on how she was told by paramilitaries to control her son: "Mothers are particularly undermined by 'controlling personalities' in the community – the situation means that women cannot freely voice their opinions. This has repercussions for ourselves and our children." As this discussion shows, the focus on territorial, or state, security is often antithetical to how women approach the issue of security. Critical security studies and feminist literature note that it is the person, rather than the state, that becomes the primary referent of security policy for women. UNSCR 1325 adds to this analysis in seeing peace and security as person-centred, as well as focusing on preventative measures. This more holistic approach to peace and security aims to ensure both 'freedom from want' as well as 'freedom from fear' – the former being as important to the women participants in this project as the latter. Rather than focusing narrowly on the threat of political violence, the women involved in the PEACE III project emphasised the importance of interrelated categories of peace and security: health and education, economic security, safety from intimate partner violence, community development and political stability.

Plumbing the perceptions of policy makers

The framing of the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning approach, in which the views of women activists were complemented by those of government officials, demonstrates the importance of including both the community and statutory sector perspectives. Furthermore, it led to an assessment of the

awareness amongst the statutory sector of the provisions of UNSCR 1325. This section now breaks down the main lessons.

First, there was a lack of analysis amongst government officials in relation to the structuring of gender relations in a post conflict society. Instead of affirmative action and strategic gender interests being identified, policy makers relied on the existing equality legislation that placed a statutory duty on public authorities to pay due regard to equality between men and women, one of the nine grounds of discrimination, in order to promote equality of opportunity (McCrudden, Muttarak, Hamill, & Heath, 2013). In response to the misapplication of this provision by government officials, focusing on participation rather than outcomes, alongside the feedback from a wide range of public sector stakeholders,¹³ a section of the toolkit was dedicated to a discussion of gender perspectives, concepts and terms. The toolkit advised government stakeholders that 'Women's participation is just the starting point. Designing policy that takes account of gender analysis, gender perspectives and gender impacts, and that evidences delivery of positive benefits for women and men equally is more than participation' (Hinds & Donnelly, 2014, p.25). Furthermore, the toolkit explained that applying a gender analysis involves focus on the system that determines gender roles and responsibilities and determines access to and control over resources, as opposed to focus on individual women and men. Consequently stakeholders were asked to see progress on equality not just through the non-differentiation between the sexes (the current application of the legislation as noted above) but instead through dismantling barriers to opportunities and the promotion of measures to redress gender disadvantage. As noted by UNSCR 1325, women and men experience conflict differently. Women rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment and needs that men do. In addition, their caretaking responsibilities limit their mobility as well as their ability to protect themselves. Fraser (2003) highlights the need to conceptualise these struggles for recognition in ways that could be integrated with struggles for the redistribution of power, access to opportunity and distribution of resources.

In addition to setting out the need for gender analysis amongst government officials, the second lesson from these interviews, was the need to apply a gender frame to peace building and conflict transformation in order to understand the differing experiences of women and men both in conflict and post-conflict. This required the toolkit to offer some practical approaches to gender sensitive policy-making. The importance of collecting and analysing sex-disaggregated information, examining women's and men's specific needs, their access to decision-making and the linkages between these and other factors in the broader social, economic, political and environmental context, were highlighted as critical to the development of gender-responsive planning and programming.¹⁴ Utilising the findings of Elson (1999), Budlender (2002), and Blickhäuser and Von Barga (2007), the toolkit also points to the impact that gender planning can have within these institutions. One of the tools recommended to translate this kind of gender sensitive planning into practical action was gender responsive budgeting, showing the impact of restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality (Stotsky, 2006). This recommendation was put forward in the context of initial policy-maker stakeholder views that saw decisions on public finance as being gender neutral.

The project showed that from a gender perspective, where stabilisation relates only to the absence of security 'threats', the stability that it infers will not fulfil the promise of Resolution 1325; to equally involve women at all levels of peace and security activities. In order to expand the concept of what constitutes stability, women's perspectives need to be included within this discourse. Whilst gender balancing ensures that women are guaranteed space and acknowledges that the security needs of women are best determined by the women concerned, and not just by political and military elites, there is also a need for mainstreaming to ensure the engendering of peace and security issues within policy making. As Meenakshi Gopinath and Sumona DasGupta recognised in their South Asian project, mainstreaming can 'bring the perceptions, experiences, knowledge and interests of women to bear on policy-making' (Gopinath & DasGupta, 2006, 297).

Highlighting examples within their departments of good practice on gender proved useful as government officials began to understand that UN1325 on women, peace and security could be implemented through official policy making in their everyday work. Since UNSCR 1325 is designed to accord women a sense of agency rather than victimhood, and seen by some as a milestone in the discourse on peace building (True, 2014), the toolkit on Developing and Applying Women, Peace and Security Practice in Northern Ireland/Ireland recommended regular audits of post conflict financing that would hold governments and donors accountable for gender equitable budgeting. Where peace processes overly focus on formal negotiations and settlements (often hurried on by international interests) they tend to overlook 'the significant contribution of broader, complementary peacebuilding efforts that are vital to sustainable peace' (Conciliation Resources, 2013, p.7). Within this latter sphere, women play an unacknowledged central role that often fails to transfer into formal political recognition.

Conclusion

Creating a space to listen to women's views of peace and security in post-conflict societies revealed two things: the inadequacies of institutionalised security approaches in meeting women's security needs during transition and the contribution that women can make to policy making in this area. In Northern Ireland, as in other post conflict societies, the transition from armed conflict into elected politics resulted, in part, in the continuing silencing and exclusion of women so the encouragement of discourse between and amongst women on the issues of safety and security should be taken more seriously.

The discussions from the Learning and Sharing EU Project illustrate what peace means to women in a specific post conflict setting and shows how tangible this concept can be. Women participants expressed relief that the peace process had meant a return to devolved politics, less destruction of lives and property and an increased feeling of safety on the streets. However, as the project showed, there was a contradictory feeling amongst the participants that the transition from conflict had diminished leadership roles of women within local communities, with a loss of public funding for women's projects and a diminution in personal economic independence. Some of the women participants also remained concerned about crime in their communities and felt that intimate partner violence as well as 'anti-social activities' had increased during

the transition. There was also a sense that the gender specific harms that women had experienced during the conflict were denigrated in terms of budget allocation and public expenditure because they were not considered as part of the 'security' agenda.

The participants' conception of security however did not generally fit in with the institutionalised, more patriarchal, approaches to peace and security. Many of the participants in the seminars called on government bodies to move away from policy making based on patriarchal assumptions and instead use a more contextualised, bottom-up approach to safety and security that better reflects the everyday reality of women's lives. Given that the peace accord supported women's demand for empowerment, and affirmed the importance of women's role in public life, women participants also rejected the reconstruction of society as currently determined by political elites and policy makers.¹⁵ The view amongst the participants was that women had become increasingly invisible in decision-making over the fifteen years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, despite the introduction of UNSCR 1325. With the absence of consistent and articulate representation at the heart of political decision-making, the effectiveness of women's voice and activism could become even more limited. This is particularly the case in a contested society wavering on the brink of conflict transformation, where a range of conflict related challenges such as an agreed Bill of Rights and issues of identity, symbols and language have yet to be resolved.

As the EU Peace 111 project shows, an end to armed conflict represents only the first step in the process of social transformation. To facilitate the transformation, international partners should define parameters for women's participation and representation more clearly as a precondition for their assistance. The increased participation of women and the destabilisation of gender roles in this way can also be critical to the re-socialisation of men to re-think the current artificial distinction of 'private' and 'public' issues. The project aimed to break down the public/private dichotomy in policy-making and to make gender a central consideration of domestic policy. The toolkit designed to assist key (predominantly male) stakeholders in the process of gender mainstreaming should also help them to re-think their strategies on peace and security. When women's views are heard and their interests are recognised through public policies, there is greater scope for increased access to resources. In showing how the key aims of UNSCR 1325 could be applied to local policy making, the project helped to ground the international Security Council Resolution thus making it more relevant to the process of conflict transformation at the local level. Where there are opportunities in post-conflict situations to 'build back better', these should be availed of so that women can become more centrally involved in the process of sustainable peace building.

Endnotes

¹ This paper refers to the post conflict context in Northern Ireland but focuses more on the transitional process.

² The Geneva Conventions did not apply, as Northern Ireland was not classified as an interstate conflict.

³ The five pillars of UNSCR 1325 are (i) Women – Community and Political Participation; (ii) Women – Violence, Community Safety and Security; (iii) Women and Decision-making – Making a Difference; (iv) Women: Your Community – Your Role; and (v) Women: Dealing with the Legacies of the Past.

⁴ The Foundations for Peace Network is a peer exchange network of independent community-based Foundations, with a commitment to peacebuilding and social justice, located and working in contested societies (www.foundationsforpeace.org).

⁵ An example of this is where the Protestant/Unionist/Loyalist community refer to the Belfast Agreement, whilst it is referred to as the Good Friday Agreement in Catholic/Nationalist/Republican communities.

⁶ Both the baseline study and the working papers were made available on the webpage designed for the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project at www.communityfoundationni.org.

⁷ In 2008 the Department of Social Development was responsible for administering £1 million of additional funding for a Conflict Transformation Initiative which focused on prisoner re-integration projects.

⁸ Ruth Taillon's study documented the existence of over one thousand women's issue groups alongside some five hundred 'activist' women's organisations – 68% of the latter operating in deprived areas with strong support networks being formed across the political/community divide.

⁹ Commissioner for Public Appointments submitting evidence to the Northern Ireland All Party Working Group on UNSCR 1325 in December 2013, cited in Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning Policy Note on Issues of Participation and Representation: Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, Belfast (www.communityfoundationni.org).

¹⁰ The Civic Forum was established following the peace agreement in 1998 but was stood down shortly afterwards and has not been reinstated following the devolution of powers to the Northern Ireland Executive in 2007.

¹¹ The UN goal of earmarking 15% of post-conflict funding for women's empowerment was set because women tend to spend money on the health, education, and food security of their families thus investing in the local economy. In 2010, the actual proportion of funding was only 5–6%. UN Women also claims that investing in women equates progress towards accomplishing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

¹² Two specific conferences were organised during the project to give voice to 'legacy of the past' issues, each one attracting over 250 women participants.

¹³ These interviews were conducted for the Women and Peacebuilding: Sharing the Learning project and form part of the overall project.

¹⁴ UN Women defines gender mainstreaming as a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. It has also produced guidance on gender budgeting as part of this strategy.

¹⁵ In Northern Ireland, women had taken on a range of important roles during the peace-making process, notably through civil society groups and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition (NIWC), a women's political party that played a significant role in the drafting of the Good Friday Agreement. There was an absence of these more public roles for women in the post conflict stage.

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