Equal Power – Lasting Peace

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Preparing for the next step.

Kvinna till Kvinna

Equal Power – Lasting Peace
Obstacles for women's participation
in peace processes

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introduction

How are transitions made from war to peace? Who has the power to build peace? Who decides what peace should entail? Peace matters to everyone living in conflict regions, so who decides the content of that peace?

Equal Power – Lasting Peace is a study about women's participation in peace processes and the particular challenges of building a gender equal peace after a violent conflict. *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* explores obstacles to women's participation in peace and democracy processes, in regions affected by armed conflict. The report addresses the gaps between words and practice in peace building by gathering experience and knowledge from 79 female peace workers in five different contexts: Armenia/Azerbaijan/Nagorno Karabakh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, DR Congo, Iraq and Liberia. They have a wealth of concrete experience of how exclusion manifests in practice and how windows of opportunity may open. The aim of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace* is to investigate the intimate connection between gender, power and peace and in addition contribute to a better understanding of the power gaps that prevent women from participating in peace processes.

Summaries of the five conflicts/post-conflicts have been produced, based on the study *Equal Power – Lasting Peace.* This brochure addresses the topic "Bosnia and Herzegovina. Preparing for the next step."

For the complete study of *Equal Power – Lasting Peace*, please visit www.equalpowerlastingpeace.org

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3.8

Population of Bosnia and Herzegovina in millions (The state of world population 2011, UNPFA)

31%

Percentage of Bosnian Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina

44%

Percentage of Bosniaks in Bosnia and Herzegovina

17%

Percentage of Bosnian Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina

9

Maternity mortality per 100.000 live births in Bosnia and Herzegovina

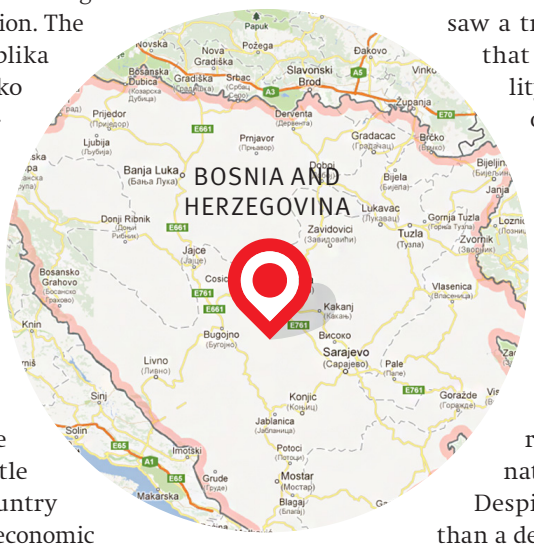
97.9%

Literacy rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Age 15 and above, 2009 UNESCO)

Bosnia and Herzegovina has one of the strongest gender equality laws in the world.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. Preparing for the next step.

Although the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 brought an end to the armed conflict, ethnic divisions still dominate the Bosnian and Herzegovinian social and political scene. Through the Peace Accords, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided into two entities, while the city of Brcko was given a special status in a later arbitration. The Bosniak-Croat Federation, Republika Srpska and the District of Brcko each enjoy a high degree of autonomy. Ethnic representation is guaranteed in almost every elected position as well as in public institutions. Bosnia and Herzegovina is the only country on earth that is run by three presidents: a Bosniak, a Bosnian-Croat and a Bosnian-Serb. With this structure and with one of the most expensive governments in the world, little space is left for moving the country forward towards prosperity and economic development. The international community (the Office of the High Representative, OSCE and other international actors) has helped Bosnian and Herzegovinians achieve many positive changes in the country. However, the international community has also at times failed to push for changes that could have brought the country much further in the development process.



Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have, since the beginning of the 1990s, had a particularly difficult journey. In the deadliest conflict in Europe since the end of the WW2, mass rapes, murder, humiliation and persecution of Bosnian and Herzegovinian women were used as instruments of war. The end of the conflict saw a traumatised female population that nonetheless took responsibility for getting their society back on track. Women were the first to cross the borders of ethnic divisions, and women's organisations have made a considerable mark on the reconciliation process. They provided shelter and psychosocial support to women, and their advocacy work has led to legal provisions for women's rights and gender equality at national and international levels. Despite these achievements, more than a decade and a half after the end of the war, women political activists are struggling to keep up the momentum they had during the early post-war years. Access to formal political structures is hard to gain and 'traditional' values, which developed as part of the ethno-nationalist agenda, created gendered exclusions.

16%

Share of women in parliament (Progress of the world's women 2011–2012).

UNSCR 1325

National Action Plan for UNSCR 1325: As the 13th country in Europe, Bosnia and Herzegovina adopted an action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

Experiences of power and participation

This study presents findings from a field research conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 2011. A focus group of twelve participants from women's organisations was then held in Sarajevo. In addition, interviews with key informants from civil society and key actors at the national and international formal levels were conducted.

Patriarchy and ethno-nationalism. Raising awareness among women.

"If gender justice is not incorporated in all parts of society, then we are talking about a society that is not only unfair but a society that is far more susceptible to war."

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a perfect example of how difficult it is to transform a country from a conflict to achieve sustainable peace. The participants in the focus group all saw a close interconnection between peace, gender and power. While their early activities reflected dealing with the most urgent consequences of war, they are currently struggling to enter and influence decision-making bodies such as the parliament, government and international agencies. However, several questions still pose a dilemma among women: Should the civil society be watchdogs and activists, or should they focus on implementing state-run projects? Should women activists focus on issues of domestic violence, gendered participation in political structures, or reconciliation projects?

One of the most pressing problems to resolve, as the women in the focus group agreed, was to raise awareness on how the Bosnian and Herzegovinian society is increasingly moving back towards traditional values based on patriarchal structures. It is a setback that severely hampers women's attempts to access power and to take active roles in politics.

"We have seen a re-traditionalisation of gender roles. After the period of socialism and the status that women then had — with all its limitations — a period came of total exclusion of women from the public space, and also the hidden discrimination within families ..."

Ethno-nationalism is still the defining force of Bosnian and Herzegovinian post-conflict society. The participants pointed to one particularly worrying problem:

"Nationalism and gender are related. Nationalism is supported by the religious community and it is really a partnership that prevents women from doing politics or having power."

As another informant explained, patriarchy, nationalism and religion are three vertical structures closely related to one another and they create invisible power structures that obstruct women's participation in society outside condoned roles:

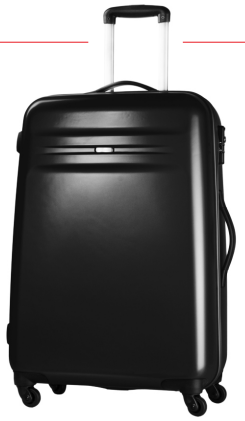
"To break against socially acceptable behaviour brings certain consequences. Sometimes unsaid, sometimes outspoken ... First you become conscious of inequalities, of the need for a more plural democracy, and you protest against the circumscribing of your freedom to pursue your own ideas and plans. Then they wait for you in the bushes, these informal sanctions that warn you that your place is not there. So when women are to make decisions on whether to participate in politics, they have to negotiate all those things. She has to manage and make peace with all those conflicts. I am still not able to do that..."

Several organisations were working on projects to empower women to challenge these informal sanctions with focus on women and girls in rural, more traditional, areas. Apart from being limited by difficult economic conditions, women living in rural areas also face a growing religious influence that limits their options and prevents them from making their own choices. One of the participants explained this through her own experience, by describing how women living in rural areas don't even know that they have the right to voice their opinions. Following the way things had been for generations of women before her, she knows only of staying at home and taking care of the family.

Another participant reflected on what happens with women when they do get access to ideas that challenge the ethno-nationalist/religious structure. Awareness-raising projects that they are a part of might end up making very few real changes in their everyday lives — they might end up being completely ignored, or losing the little power that they had at home:

Traffi cking

Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a **national action plan against trafficking.** However, despite major improvements, trafficking is still a grave problem.



The gender equality law states that **at least 40 percent** of all positions in decision-making state bodies must be occupied by the underrepresented gender. However, this quota system has led to very slight improvements so far.

"We are working with women who continue to live there. And we change them. The consequences may be that those women become excluded from those spaces of power that she had access to up until then. She is without the necessary tools and equipment and she is ultimately abandoned even by those who supported her up until then. I very often ask myself - what have I done? I come along and then I simply abandon her."

Many of the participants recognised the frustration that the above quote expresses. They felt that there was always too much to do, and that they wished that they could engage with the women they met on a more long-term basis. It was difficult for individual women who were introduced to new ideas but still stuck in a highly limiting environment. At the same time they all stressed the urgency of continuing to introduce new ideas and to keep offering alternatives.

Domestic violence and poverty. Working for social justice.

Violence against women has been and still is a major issue for women's organisations. Internationally, their advocacy concerning the systematic use of rape during the war directly influenced the international lobbying organisations and changed international criminal law forever. Nationally, they have been instrumental in putting focus not only on the gender-based violence of the war but also on ongoing violence against women. Women's civil society organisations had built up a network of Safe Houses for victims of domestic violence. They also supported victims of trafficking and prostitution and they worked in psychosocial projects with women who were still suffering the consequences of violence from the war. As well as offering protection, they also raised victims' awareness of their legal rights.

In spite of their success, women's organisations suffer from a chronic lack of funding from state institutions. As state-funded programmes for economic empowerment don't exist, victims of violence often end up homeless and unemployed. Seeing no other outcome, they regularly return to their violent husbands.[1] The participants pointed out that this is exactly what they need to focus on: combining awareness-raising advocacy with concrete measures for women:

"If you ask the victims and survivors of violence, what they need is housing … and a job so that they can put bread on the table. But we do not fight for their social and economic problems, we can simply fight for their temporary sanctuary... We are forcing the state to prosecute the perpetrators. But we do not force the state to provide the victims with housing and so on. And (the state) did not in the first place provide the foundations for them to no longer being a victim at all."

Participants felt that they needed to be better in showing the connection between domestic violence and socio-economic circumstances. This would allow them to put pressure on the government to provide long-term support.

The participants also agreed that there is a clear connection between working against domestic violence and working for peace. The violence against women exerted during the war has had severe consequences on overall gender relations. Violence has become silently accepted because the perpetrators enjoy impunity from prosecution. "The extent of domestic violence is precisely a consequence of the fact that victims of war and violence have never gotten recognition", said one participant.

Another participant pointed to the relationship between formal and domestic spheres, as violence in the private sphere stops women from "participating in the public sphere". In order to create a gender-equal peace, the need for security in close, private spheres has to be recognised as well:

"Some people would probably say that what we do (working against domestic violence) has absolutely nothing to do with peace. It depends on how you define peace. I believe that the creation of peace by one person enables the feeling of security in another person and then adding one after another of more people who feel safe. For example, providing protection from violence in close relationships."

Politics and participation. From the grassroots to elite level.

All participants recognised that in order to achieve a sustainable change, more women need to get involved in politics. Thanks to the work of women's organisations, at least 30 per cent of the names on party election lists must be women. Nonetheless, filling a quota does not necessarily mean that the women on the list get to have a say;

in many cases the party only wants to show that their quota is filled. The women are not used to political life and the parties rarely provide training in political skills. A female politician quoted in the Alternative CEDAW report from 2010 tells her own story:

"I do not even know the number of sandwiches I made in the election campaign that we distributed in refugee centres and poor neighbourhoods during public debates. This task was assigned to me by the campaign staff, even though I was a candidate positioned high up on the list. My male fellow candidates did not have that obligation and that was why I felt bad all the time during the campaign." [2]

Furthermore, gendered quotas do not automatically mean that gender equality is mainstreamed into the political agenda. Participants report that some elected women continue to maintain patriarchal values, and some refrain from advocating women's rights simply because they end up being marginalised by their own party. At the same time, women politicians seem to be judged by completely different standards than their male counterparts. For example, instead of reporting about their achievements, the media often tends to focus on either their private lives, or on finding faults with their political activities.

Women's organisations played an important role in getting women interested in political issues in the first place — making them aware of gender issues, teaching them how to 'do politics' and to claim their space within political parties and other political structures. Several organisations represented in the focus group worked with women from different political parties not only on national, entity and municipal levels, but also in units called mjesna zajednica, typically involving a village. Working on this basic level was of crucial importance for two reasons: building up a good base of women engaged in politics, and influencing forums where crucial decisions directly affecting women's daily lives are made. On this level, it was also possible to identify different mechanisms of exclusion that kept women outside physical and symbolic spaces of decision-making. One participant explained:

"In the villages there are no longer any spaces for women to meet. The community centres are devastated or they have been turned into something else... Before, we had libraries but they have been turned into cafés or bars where only men go. The decisions in political parties are mainly agreed upon in those bars, and women are simply not welcome in those places..."

One of the participating organisations was active in a poor, rural area in northeastern Bosnia and Herzegovina. They had been working to empower women to take part in local politics in order to break down barriers that prevent women from taking part in public discussions and to make sure that gender issues were put on the agenda. The members of the organisation regularly arranged meetings between local female politicians and other local women's organisations, as well as with 'ordinary' women from rural areas. The organisation was widely respected in the area, mainly because they run a number of socioeconomic projects that have benefited the entire community. The female politicians got empowered through their connections with these projects. In addition, a connection between female local politicians and their rural constituency was created. "The women politicians are very aware that if they do not listen, we will not be voting for them in the next elections".

Another informant shared a story of how one woman in central Bosnia and Herzegovina got herself elected to the council of mjesna zajednica in the village where she comes from:

"Information was spread in the village that a meeting was going to take place and that new members were to be elected. When she showed up the president asked her, 'what the hell are you doing here?' She said she was there to attend the meeting, and he asked her who invited her. She answered, 'well, I am here because I heard there was an open invitation that was spread in our village'. She showed through the discussion that she was an able person and she was later elected to that council. The first step was to take the decision to attend that meeting, and she took that step."

Elite exclusions. Relating to formal structures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has well-developed formal structures to ensure gender equality: the Gender Equality Agency (GEA BiH) at state level and the Gender Centres at entity level. These institutions serve to function as co-ordinating bodies between state structures and civil society, and for distribution of funding. Women's organisations, who strongly advocated for the creation of these institutions, have been disappointed with the lack of impact that they were supposed to have on improving women's participation in Bosnian and Herzegovinian political life. At the same time, these powerful state bodies had shrunk the space for civil society. One of the main issues is that the GEA and the mechanisms at entity level had the power to approve projects and decide on funding. The participants felt that their expertise was being misused and that they had become service providers for the state bodies — still doing the work they had done for years, but with diminishing funding and less independence. It often happens that they get funding for only a half of a project, e.g. helping victims of violence, which they then have to finish without funds, on a voluntary basis. Women's organisations, feeling that they have no decision-making power whatsoever, end up having to decide between embracing the partnership with institutions or continuing as small projects.

The GEA saw its role as a coordinating body for NGOs, formal structures and international donors. While in general expressing positive views on NGOs, the office of the GEA described some of the organisations as "donor-driven" and "just looking for money," and stated that

"they must be better controlled".[3] Obviously, there is a gap between this position and the position expressed by the focus group participants. As representatives of civil society, the participants thought that the civil society was not there to only run projects, but also to closely monitor formal actors while maintaining direct links with local contexts:

"(We need to) monitor the results of their work on the real life of the real woman … increasingly they have no communication with citizens."

Mixed feelings. The relationship with the international community.

Since the end of the war, women peace activists have often had a close relationship with the international community. The international actors have had a lot of decision-making power throughout the post-war period, including when it comes to gender issues.

"The implementation of gender perspectives is dependent on the international architecture of the decision-making process. Because the international community has a lot of influence on gender issues…at the highest level these issues were dealt with by the international community."

Even though a number of international actors had played a crucial role in raising gender issues, and supported many of their campaigns and projects, the participants pointed out that the international administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina since the Peace Accord missed many opportunities for including women in the task of peace building. The women on the one hand felt that they were patted on their backs by the international community for their good and important work, but that when it came to "real" decision-making, they were "not recognised as relevant players". Bosnian and Herzegovinian women and civil society actors were excluded from Dayton peace negotiations, just as they were excluded from the recent Butmir process.

The 2009 Butmir conference gathered Bosnian and Herzegovinian political leaders in order to push for the harmonisation of legislation and to break the political deadlock that prevented the implementation of the remaining aspects of the Dayton Peace Accord. The conference organised by Sweden (chair of the EU at the time) and the US did not achieve its aims and was in most respects a failure.[4] As pointed out by participants, during the Dayton process fifteen years earlier, the awareness about the very process was low, women were not organised and did not have the necessary know-how to run successful lobbying campaigns. This is why they never pushed hard to take part in the peace negotiations. Since then, the recognition of women's participation, especially through the UNSCR 1325, has improved both at home and abroad. However, at the Butmir conference "they did not have a single woman at the negotiating table", as was pointed out by one of the focus group participants.

In October 2009, two prominent civil society organisations represented in the focus group, wrote a letter of protest to the Butmir talks initiators (Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State and the High Representative to Bosnia and Herzegovina). The letter requested that:

"…the international representatives and local leaders include women in the continuation of talks on constitutional changes in the BiH. Women were excluded from all negotiating teams, which have been deciding about the fate of the BiH, starting from the time of the Dayton Peace Accord signing onwards. Butmir talks are no exception to this, while the results of these talks will have an impact on all BiH male and female citizens equally …The EU countries are obliged to defer to the gender balance, pursuant to resolutions, declarations, rule books and road maps, when adopting any decision at the EU level. Contrary to the expectations of the BiH women, but also of the women from the region, Butmir talks initiators ignored all the above mentioned, and proceeded with the practice of ignoring and excluding women, although they were in a position to decide about who was to sit at the negotiating table. This has only encouraged local politicians to continue the practice of discrimination against women, the violation of domestic legal regulations, in particular the BiH Law on Gender Equality, and to ignore obligations that were taken over by the signing of the international and regional relevant agreements…" [5]

No response was ever received. People involved in the first conference claim that they were not aware of the importance of engaging actors from other parts of the society. Also a disregard for civil society in general was evident. Despite evidence of the contrary, one representative maintained that the NGO sector, including women's organisations, had not been interested in taking part. A representative from the EU delegation acknowledged that it was a mistake not to include women, but said that it "just happened that way" and could give no further explanation of how participants were selected.[6]

OSCE shows a better record of including local CSOs, particularly in their work with the election law. In cooperation with the OSCE, women´s organisations conducted meetings in different towns where a draft of the election law was discussed. Since the draft law did not mention gender representation of women, women began lobbying on various levels. Through advocacy by key persons in the Provisional Election Committee, gender quotas were accepted in the provisional election law in 1998 and formally adopted in the national election law in 2001. It is possible to change patterns, the participants argued, by involving the key persons who understand the importance of gender issues at the right time.

It is also hard, they said, to push for gender-equal representations in various bodies in the Bosnian society when the international organisations that influence Bosnian and Herzegovinian decision-making processes never have a woman in a leading position either.

Violent past, fearful future. Working with reconciliation.

"In Bosnia and Herzegovina, we don't actually have peace. It is more like a state of expectancy, where everyone is waiting for something to happen."

Even though the war ended more than 15 years ago, there is still no national reconciliation process in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many perpetrators of crimes committed during the war are still at large — a number of them openly admired by those they were claiming to defend. As one participant put it: "How come a war criminal can be a role model? Because we let them be free citizens, we let them have money. Our war criminals are national heroes." Certain criminal structures created during the war have never been dissolved and now directly affect criminal activities, including trafficking of women. Such criminals are relentlessly protected by their admirers and enjoy impunity that such a protection implies. As the participants put it: yesterday they traded with weapons — today it is women.

Keeping silent about what happened is increasingly becoming the strategy to maintain peace among former enemies. And when politicians turn silence into words, it is often conflicting stories and ethnonationalist rhetoric that threaten to pull Bosnia and Herzegovina apart. The post-war generation that does not remember the horrors of war has become an easy prey for those with extremist views.

Women's organisations themselves admitted that the silence about the past had also helped them meet across borders and focus on common concerns. At the same time, it meant that they had backed away from confronting the past. But maybe the time for speaking out about atrocities has come:

"At present we (the women's movement) are not able to publicly denounce what happened in the war. When it comes to certain things that a particular ethnic group did, we are always silent, because we have a consensus that we should not hurt each other and we are just pushing problems beneath the carpet. After sixteen years it is time to take on the responsibility for raising these issues."

Women's organisations have the possibility to be the groundbreakers in taking on the challenge of dealing with the past. Some participants maintained that this is the only way that they can continue to be a peace building force in society. Women's organisations need to build on their experiences of co-operation straight after the war. One of the participants remembered how she felt when she first met women from the "enemy" side:

"The fatigue among us was so evident. You could feel the lack of tolerance, judgement, condemnation although none of us was involved in the war and none of us had killed another person. At that time, I felt all those bad feelings for the other side. But in that period thanks to our sanity, we started to build a really good relationship among ourselves … now I feel so free, I can say my name, I really feel that everyone in this room is my friend."

They had met through their common outcry against atrocities. They were united in their ability to dare to stand up against the fear and they all had experiences of challenging the warmongers. They could share "good stories" and provide a counter-narrative to the stories that fed on fear and estrangement. The story below is told by a participant who lived close to one of the rape camps in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it serves as an example of such "good stories" that are silenced in the post-conflict ethno-nationalist climate.

"I managed to provide shelter and save three Bosniak girls from being raped that night but I don't know what happened the night after that. I almost lost my head over it, I never felt as great a shame when their mothers thanked me so much for saving their daughters. I cannot believe that one needs to be thanked so much for saving someone from being raped."

There have been victims of the war on all sides. That is the common premise that we need to start from, they said. One concrete suggestion for how to do this would be to lobby for a national remembrance day for victims, gathering around the common identity of victims and mothers, thereby building on the legacy from the first period of working together across borders: "You are a victim regardless of nationality".

"All of us are in the end victims of war. We should all agree to dedicate one day each year for the victims of this war, regardless of ethnic identity. That day should be the same for the entire state. We should hear one another and try to understand one another. We should try to share those stories that are still in the back of our minds in order to understand each other. That can certainly help us to build our shared future here."

Losing power? At a crossroads.

"For the last ten years we have been losing power, we are losing the chance to be the ones that are deciding about peace."

The role of women's organisations in the reconciliation process, in talking about war crimes and confronting impunity are some of the most difficult issues that the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina is facing today. As time passed, it became harder to formulate what role they should play in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. Once full of enthusiasm, creating dialogue and building the civil society, women's organizations acknowledged that they now focus more on issues that are only indirectly a part of peace building.

"In the end of the 90s we were fantastic. We spoke publicly, I spoke publicly, we stepped across borders. And

now we are beginning to withdraw from that public discourse."

But the events of the war still greatly influence everyday life in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women's organisations have differing opinions regarding which issues they should prioritise. Now that the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is starting to conclude its work, the national judiciary structures are taking over the prosecution of war criminals. As one informant suggested, women's organisations have a great opportunity to work directly with issues concerning the war by supporting witnesses of crimes of gender-based violence who are given very little economic or psycho-social support.

Others think that — instead of jeopardising their ongoing co-operation by reopening the issues of war and war crimes — women's organisations should focus on tackling the issue of domestic violence.

"We have opened the story of domestic violence against women, and we are not even close to ending it. Now if we open the story of war, and then if we have to decide to give up (on fighting domestic violence), it would mean that we lied to all of those women that we promised something. We have to decide what our priorities really are to be. Yes, I'd like to open up these issues, because I am a witness to many things that took place. But with what can we achieve more? "

Emerging discussions within the focus group made it evident that it was hard to unite various organisations on what issues to prioritise. Should there be such a united front? Who should push for it? What issues are important?

"I have a feeling that if we don't synchronise … we will not achieve much, because I think the key answer to why we haven't managed to achieve a lot is because our work has become fractured … We (need to) create a really large network to work on this jointly, otherwise all our efforts will be simply forgotten."

Part III. Analysis

Exclusion

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina cemented the revival of nationalism patriarchy and religion. The three, conjoined with atrocious consequences of war, exclude and isolate Bosnian women in many effective ways. Women who engage in women's rights and peace building across borders and attempt to challenge the nationalistic agenda are considered "double traitors", because they are expected to uphold the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. They often do this at great peril, as many women active in anti-nationalistic peace work confirmed.[7]

In politics, women are excluded because they are not perceived as fully legitimate actors. Many people see politics as a separate, more or less corrupt sphere, and choose to rather cope with politics than engage in it.[8] "Politics is a dirty business" is a common saying in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which suggests that people deeply distrust politics and politicians.[9] This probably explains why women who are active in politics are often considered out of place and are not encouraged to engage in the dirty game. In spite of the success in bringing obligatory quotas into election cycles, women often find themselves making sandwiches rather than politics — as one of the participants explained earlier. The local media does not either help to promote women politicians: a media monitoring project showed that in daily newspapers, only 2 per cent of reports focused on women (53 per cent on men). During the 2008 campaign for local elections, 99 per cent of all billboards and posters promoted male candidates.[10]

Regarding the exclusion as a result of the international presence, it is clear that the gender blindness among the architects of the Dayton Peace Accord has had far-reaching consequences for the democratic structure of the country. Considering the number of international soldiers, policemen, aid workers and other actors present in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the years, it is needless to say what long-term consequences that blindness has had. It also seems that from Dayton to Butmir very few lessons have been learnt — women are yet to be seen at negotiation tables.

Lack of security and prevalence of domestic violence are clearly understood to be the legacy of war, as is trafficking and prostitution as well as the economic and political power structures and networks created in wartime. This needs to be understood also in relation to the conservative norms in society discussed above, which further strengthen the exclusion of women.

Achievements

Women's organisations have always been the voices for peace in the region. They have managed to work on issues that unite across ethnic barriers. In the legal arena, this work has resulted in progressive gender legislation concerning domestic violence, trafficking and discrimination in various forms. A national gender action plan has been adopted as well as gendered quotas on election lists. Quotas were a direct result of women organising and teaming up with key persons who represented international organisations. Also, support to women politicians may be instrumental, not only in making other women take the step into politics, but also helping them to push towards a gender-aware agenda.

In some rural areas in particular, several organisations have made successful connections with local politicians. There are great possibilities for hands-on change at the local level. Using the goodwill and popular leverage that their local development projects create, civil society has increased its access to formal spaces of power, and at the same time strengthened the power of elected women.

Although this theme was only touched upon in the focus group, it is imperative to also note that Bosnian and

Herzegovinian women's organisations have made groundbreaking achievements at a global level. For example, their work with victims of sexual violence and victims of trafficking has fed directly into the work on international legislation making rape and sexual violence in wars a crime against humanity. It has also had an impact on UNSCR 1325. Many active individuals with high levels of expertise are directly engaged with different UN bodies and other global and regional platforms for policy change.

Challenges

Supporting women who decide to venture into politics is one of the very important roles that women's organisations in Bosnia and Herzegovina have to play. Their experience and know-how can be a bridge-builder between informal and formal spaces of power. The fact that there is a rise in the number of women in politics does not mean that gender equality is increased; women must be given the power to change and influence things, otherwise it is just window-dressing.

As Bosnia and Herzegovina slowly moves away from its post-conflict state, the landscape of international donors, national structures and civil society actors is changing. New power imbalances are created when donors turn to other more pressing issues. While NGOs must learn to relate to the national structures while safeguarding their role as monitors and watchdogs, the state actors must develop a democratic understanding of the role and importance of an independent civil society sector. The step backwards that the international funders are taking gives a great possibility for some NGOs to abandon the role of a service provider and instead formulate their own goals. This may provide an opportunity for civil society actors to unite and take proactive steps to engage in different sectors and forums in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society.

The struggle goes on to claim access to formal arenas and to be taken seriously as partners. While participants expressed a lot of frustration over the difficulties in making gender issues part of the public discourse and the way many powerholders keep their doors shut, they also showed many examples of how they had managed to identify agents of change in different spaces and at different levels and learnt to use them as access points. The experiences from working in local contexts may provide lessons — such as that of a young woman who challenged hidden networks of power when she decided to go to a local council meeting. Focusing on finding key individuals within formal structures — national and international — that are open to change may prove to be a constructive path to take.

Another issue that needs to be further addressed is the link between domestic violence and socioeconomic context. Many women have limited access to economic means and little power over household finances. Shelters for victims of domestic violence are insufficiently funded and women are not given a chance to set up a new life away from their violent partners. Lack of funding also affects the victims of war who suffered from gender-based violence. Women who testify to war crimes in courts are left with very little support. Continuing to provide concrete support for victims of war-related or domestic violence — whilst at the same time lobbying for increased awareness of the socioeconomic dimensions of violence — is a great challenge for women's organisations.

Finally, the women's movement as a forum for dealing with the past may be an effective method. As ethnic categorisations have become fixed in discourse and impossible to escape, the politics of identity has become a tool used by power-hungry politicians who managed to persuade people that they could not live together. As a result, there are deeply conflicting stories of the past that continue to divide the Bosnian and Herzegovinian society. There is little agreement about what happened in the war and why. People become imprisoned by the invisible but insidious power of nationalist discourse and choose silence in fear of threatening fragile coexistence. As several participants pointed out, the new generation's ignorance of the war and the crimes committed is just one sign of this silence surrounding the past. Sharing stories across ethnic divisions and reaching a more multidimensional understanding of the victims and agents of war is a painful and precarious process. However, challenging the continuous hold of the ethno-nationalist narratives may also open the way for imagining what an inclusive, gender-equal peace might entail. Hence, the process of 'dealing with the past' is part of the transformation of the society towards a sustainable democracy that includes gender equality.

To conclude, a central lesson from the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is how an analysis of the connections between gender equality, power and peace opens the way towards an understanding of the complexity of peace building. It can also help us uncover the long-term consequences that the first phases of peace-making can have on sustainable peace building as a whole. Today Bosnia and Herzegovina has peace. Reflection needs to continue on what the content of that peace is to be.

things to bear in mind

To the international community

1. Finding

Women's organisations are and have been important actors for peace and reconciliation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Women were the first to cross front lines and start the processes of reconciliation in the years immediately following the peace agreement.

Recommendation

Acknowledge the women's organisation's experience and expertise by meeting them, listening to them and funding them.

2. Finding

The international administration of Bosnia and Herzegovina has since the Peace Accord missed many opportunities to include women in the task of peace building. One of the latest examples being the Butmir process where women once again were excluded. In the late 1990s, women were appointed to three key positions: Special Representative of the Secretary General within the UN mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Head of the OSCE Democratisation Department, and Head of Office for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. These women then took a personal lead in organising close consultations with women's organisations.

Recommendation

International actors have to stop excluding women and start recruiting them for decision-making positions. If women have more power and influence, the international community will be more likely to promote women's participation and women's human rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

To national decision makers

3. Finding

Laws and public institutions are important for gender equality but not enough to safeguard women's human rights. Implementation of laws is limited and thus the effect of judicial structures is limited. Additionally, gender equality institutions often lack the mandate, knowledge and financial resources they need in order to be efficient.

Recommendation

Provide gender equality institutions with preconditions for real change; clear mandate, knowledge and funds.

To women's organisations

4. Finding

Women's organisations have the possibility of being ground-breakers in taking on the challenge of dealing with the past.

Recommendation

Work to establish a national remembrance day for victims. Provide a chance of gathering around the common identity of victims and mothers, thereby building on the legacy from the first period of working together across borders: "You are a victim regardless of nationality".

[1] Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly 2010, 45.

[2] Ibid, 33.

[3] Personal interview, Sarajevo 7 November 2011.

[4] The Butmir initiative collapsed in Dec 2009. Unrealistic time plan and a "take-it-or-leave-it approach" by internationals with little credibility are pointed out as blatant flaws of the process (Sebastián, March 2011).

[5] Helsinki Citizens Assembly Banja Luka and United Women Banja Luka sent the Letter of Protest on 27 Oct 2009. It was addressed to Butmir talk initiators Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Carl Bildt, US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and High Representative to BiH Valentin Inzko. Signed by Lidija Zivanovic, Executive Director, Helsinki Citizens' Assembly Banja Luka and Nada Golubovic Executive Director, United Women Banja Luka.

[6] Personal interview, Telephone, 19 January 2012.

[7] Barry and Nainar 2008.

[8] Björkdahl 2012.

[9] Helms 2007.

[10] Rights for All and Helsinki Citizens' Assembly 2010.

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation supports women during times of war and conflict to increase women's power and influence in society. We collaborate with over 130 organisations that empower women to participate in working for sustainable peace and rebuilding.

In wars and conflicts, violence against women and girls is used as a method of warfare. Women are subjected to mass rape, are mutilated and killed. Women are locked in their homes and girls are not allowed to attend school. Women's voices are silenced if they express what they think and feel.

But history shows that women are important actors in the struggle for peace. The world witnessed this in the Balkans, in Liberia and in Northern Ireland. Yet women are seldom allowed to play a part in deciding how to arrive at peace and democracy. This is why The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation exists. Our partner organisations educate people in women's human rights, they work with women's health issues and combat violence against women. They create meeting places for women, where it is otherwise difficult to meet. They wield political influence and create dialogue across the borders of conflict.

Kvinna till Kvinna is a Swedish Foundation which supports women's organisations in Central and West Africa, the Middle East, South Caucasus and the Western Balkans.

The role of The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is to provide financial support and mediate contacts between organisations, in co-operation with our partner organisations. Our mission is to participate in empowering women's movements in regions of conflict.

We influence development assistance and security policies by contributing to increased awareness of the situation of women in conflicts and the importance of women's representation in peace processes. We spread information about women in conflicts to the general public, government bodies and organisations in Sweden, and at the EU and UN levels.

We support studies and research relating to women's conditions in conflicts and the positive effects of women's participation in peace initiatives.

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