



Kvinna till Kvinna

Women's participation in peace negotiations: the role of the negotiating parties

Round-table in Geneva, Switzerland
26 April 2012

Summary of discussions

Background

A round-table on women's participation in peace negotiations was organized by the Swedish Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation in Geneva, Switzerland, on 26 April 2012, financed by the EU Instrument for Stability. The round-table gathered experienced mediators, experts on gender and peace negotiations and women from civil society in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, Liberia and the South Caucasus region, and addressed the following questions:

- Including women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table: what is the role of the negotiating parties?
- What incentives are available or can be created for peace negotiators to welcome women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table?

This is a summary of the discussions.

The role of the negotiating parties

No matter who mediates a peace negotiation women hardly ever participate in the negotiations, whether it is in the negotiating delegations as such, or as mediators or third parties, for example women from civil society.

The negotiating parties will not only negotiate the actual peace agreement, but also, most likely, be the ones who are responsible for the implementation of the peace agreement. If the parties actively take the decision to include women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table, rather than being forced to do so they then, as a consequence, are more likely to implement the decisions made and the agreement will therefore be more sustainable.

A further complicating factor is that many mediators view themselves as "weak". The ultimate power to decide on the agenda and the structure of the process lies with the parties. On the other

hand, even if the mediator is in a difficult position to make demands, it is actually the only neutral actor with the ability to make those demands.

There are also examples where the negotiating parties play a positive role for the inclusion of women and a gender perspective in peace negotiations. Women can sometimes, in their capacities as representatives of civil society, have an advantage because they are seen as non-partisan in the conflict and thereby gain the confidence of the negotiating parties.

Incentives for negotiating parties

1. *The self interest incentive: Find ways to convince the negotiating parties that a gender balanced negotiating team is in their best interest.*

It would serve as a strong incentive for the negotiating parties to include women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table if they see that their interests are best served by doing so. Arguments in favor of this are:

- *Women make up 50% of the constituency.*

The peace agreement will most likely be followed by democratic elections in which the warring parties will run for election. Ensuring women's support during the peace negotiations by including them may be a strategic move to ensure positions of power in the post-conflict context.

- *Including women and civil society at the negotiating table leads to more sustainable peace.*

According to research, the likelihood of sustainable peace is higher when civil society including women's organizations are involved in the peace talks, as well as when a gender perspective is included in the peace agreement. Further research and documentation is however needed to reinforce this connection.

2. *The financial incentive: Funding can be used to motivate the negotiating parties to include women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table.*

- *Extra seats for women at the negotiating table.*

Donors can fund extra seats for women at the negotiating table. If negotiating parties do not want to include women into their teams, an extra seat will be left empty. Funding for these seats must be included in the overall budget for the negotiations, avoiding an add-on to the budget which is then easily cut.

- *Funds for the peace process and/or rebuilding conditioned on women's participation.*

Donors can also condition the funding of the peace process and the rebuilding process of the country. If the negotiating parties do not comply with the conditions on including women and a gender perspective in the negotiations the donors could withdraw funding.

3. *The public opinion incentive: Public opinion can be used to pressure the negotiating parties to include women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table.*

Public opinion may put pressure on the negotiating parties to include women and a gender perspective at the peace table. One important way to increase public awareness on this issue is through both traditional and social media. For this strategy to be effective it is essential to identify and cooperate with the actors who have the trust and the ears of the public. It is, however, important to remember that media is also many times part of the problem, reinforcing gender stereotypes and spreading rumours regarding the reputation and moral of women participants in peace negotiations.

4. *The non-threatening incentive: With quite small measures including women and a gender perspective can become less threatening.*

- *Changing the language.*

The resistance among negotiating parties to discuss women's rights and participation might sometimes be alleviated by a change of language. If the concept of gender is provocative, it could be called something else. Women's rights could become a discussion on economic development, constitutional reform and social justice. It may also help to bring in male gender experts to hold gender trainings with men.

- *Track 2 processes.*

If including women in the Track 1 processes is difficult, the negotiating parties may feel less threatened by women from civil society in Track 2 processes. For these processes to be efficient it is important to have direct links between the two tracks.

- *Mainstreaming gender expertise in mediation teams.*

The gender advisers in the UN Mediation Standby Team are not deployed since the negotiating parties do not request their assistance. A way to deal with this challenge is to insist that all mediators and their teams have knowledge on gender issues.

UN and other third parties

- 1) *Include a gender perspective in the mandates of mediators.*

The mandate of the mediators cannot be dedicated only to keeping the conflict from escalating. It should focus on creating sustainable peace and thereby making the inclusion of women and civil society, and a gender perspective, an important part of the mandate.

- 2) *Introduce standard minimum procedures to mediators, such as:*

- Consultations with women from civil society before and during the negotiations;

- Quotas: the mediation teams should *always* include gender expertise and women at senior positions.
- Requesting negotiating parties to include women in their delegations.
- Part of the funding of peace negotiations should go to women's organizations in order to strengthen them and facilitate their participation.

3) *Introduce mechanisms of formal reporting on gender aspects.*

To be efficient the mandates and standard minimum procedures must also be complemented by formal reporting on gender aspects. This will encourage transparency and accountability.

4) *Ensure that the mediators have adequate information about the conflict and the context.*

Assessment missions should be made to the conflict affected country prior to the arrival of the international negotiating teams. Put threats of sexual and gender-based violence at the same high level as other components in the security threats analysis. Historical background analysis, mapping of the conflict, incorporating gender specific data, and oral and written briefings on the experience of women in the conflict, are useful methods. The purpose of the mission should be to make a thorough evaluation of the context through consultations with a number of stakeholders, including women from civil society.

Women's organizations

1) *Women's organizations need to be strengthened.*

- In order to participate fully in the negotiations women need technical knowledge of the process: the different phases of the negotiations, the issues at stake and the language used. In-depth knowledge of the political aspects of the negotiations is also important.
- Long-term and flexible funding is crucial for women's organizations to be able to be a partner in peace processes.

2) *Focus on security for the women who participate in peace negotiations.*

It is important to provide for physical security for the women that participate. It is also important to prepare women of the risk that rumors, questioning their moral, could be part of the enemy's counter strategies.

3) *Women need to build coalitions.*

Liaising with strategically chosen men, women may increase their chances of being heard and taken seriously. Women's groups can also form alliances within the Diaspora, using its different channels to gain influence and to put pressure on the negotiating parties.

4) *Women need to stay informed and create strategies.*

Women's organizations have to stand up for their rights and to work strategically to influence the process. If women from civil society are not included in the formal processes, they can set up informal meetings with influential people. Women's organizations also need to make sure to come prepared to the negotiations and agree beforehand on common goals.

5) *Women have to stand up and show that they are experts.*

Women from civil society seldom act as the experts they really are. Women's organizations have to improve their communication skills. One idea could be to make a list of relevant qualified women and present it to the mediation team.

6) *Negotiators or mediators?*

In the case of Liberia and initially also Northern Ireland, women from civil society organizations tended to be seen as non-partisan in the conflict. Although this is sometimes positive, it may also result in women being seen as mediators rather than negotiators. In order to have maximum influence, it is probably better for women to be negotiators on equal terms with the men.

Conclusions

- The role of the negotiating parties cannot be overlooked when trying to increase women's participation in peace negotiations.
- The ultimate responsibility for including women at the peace table lies with the negotiating parties and convincing them is a daunting task.
- Incentives can be created to motivate the negotiating parties to include women and a gender perspective at the negotiating table.
- Women's inclusion in peace negotiations is key for creating sustainable peace and democracy, an issue that is important to all of us, men and women alike.