

The Power of Women as Agents of Peace



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I have had the pleasure of witnessing many women and women's groups involved at all stages of peace work, from prevention to resolution. When I define peace work I mean it in a broad sense, not just the absence of war, but living honourably, dying in peace, having basic human needs met, and post conflict resolutions.

Amid 39 active conflicts over the last 10 years, few women have actually been at the table of peace negotiations. Out of 585 peace treaties drafted over the last two decades, only 16 percent contain specific references to women. Furthermore, around the world 1 in 3 women are subject to "non-peaceful" or violent situations, including sexual and physical abuses.

Since it is quite obvious that women are very affected by "non-peaceful" situations, and they are 50 percent of this world's population, isn't it quite obvious they are a critical voice in the building of peace?

Inequality in Leadership Roles



It is time for women to come out of the shadows at the podium of peace.

It goes without saying, men tend to dominate the formal roles in the current peace-building process. Male peacekeepers, male peace negotiators, male politicians, and male formal leaders all take the spotlight. Power is unequally distributed between men and women and the majority of women do not have a voice in any local or national decision making processes. Such inequalities cause formal peacebuilding activities and policies to suffer from insufficient understanding of the diverse communities in which they are representing. Not including women in decisions making processes towards peace often means that female concerns are not addressed. Experiences and insights of both men and women during conflict and peace need to be represented in order to encapsulate all dimensions for holistic solutions.

The landscape of women's participation has experienced significant change mostly in the area of awareness. All of us, men and women alike, have gender roles firmly embedded within us. The more we all try to pretend they do not exist, the less conscious we are of our own behaviours that promote inequality. Discussion of these issues openly is a first step to dealing with them and getting more women involved in the process of peace.

Getting Out Of Our Own Way



An effective message by female peacemakers overcomes conflict by refusing to kill the child of another mother.

Many women's groups that are advocating their participation are siloed in existence to their peers. Most of the groups that exist have great broad ideas with lack of tactical implementation skills. Many current women's movements and formal policies do not have established mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the progress of their work. Even at the international level, it is very upsetting to see how programs and policies lack in operational guidance, program implementation, data monitoring and evaluation, knowledge and resources. There is also a huge gap in knowledge for most organizations on how to harness technology resources such as social media that have the influence to mobilize millions all over the world in minutes.

The Women's Leadership Ambition Gap

A bigger part of the problem is not just allowing women to come to the table, it is that women often themselves de-value their role as peacebuilders. So many women, despite their amazing achievements, feel like impostors and do not necessarily recognize the important roles they can play in both building peace and as leaders. Women need to recognize that within themselves they have attributes, valuable insights, and experiences, that NO ONE else has. Women embody the maternal gifts as caregivers, focus on the family, and resolving violence without conflict. Women of faith, in particular, are well suited for participation in peace efforts. They transmit peace values over generations and are already promoting critical values to the world.

What Would Big Change Look Like?

Big changes would happen if we first, could ensure that women play a key role in the design and implementation of peacebuilding activities and give them a confidence to do so. Second, we need to support and strengthen the already established women's organizations that are currently working in their peacebuilding efforts. Finally, systems need to be established for enforcing and monitoring all efforts on a global scale. Women have such untapped potential to be effective participants, key-decision makers and beneficiaries of peace.

They must unravel the potential that exists within themselves to create a more peaceful world. Discovering their own voices. Find the courage to step up. There is a place for all women at the podium for peace.



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