DDR through a Gender Lens in Nepal and Myanmar

In February 2016, PRIO embarked on a new research project to study Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes from a gender perspective. The ‘Gender Equality, Peace and Security in Nepal and Myanmar’ (WOMENsPEACE) project, which is funded by the Research Council of Norway, will have a unique focus on the political participation of ex-combatants in Nepal and Myanmar, with a specific focus on female ex-combatants. The project will also investigate the consequences of the DDR processes on gender equality, women’s and men’s social inclusion, and women’s rights in post-conflict societies.

The project team met at PRIO on 2–3 May for a kick-off workshop to plan and discuss the next three years of the project. The project team includes PRIO researchers Wenche Hauge (project leader), and Ashild Kolas, as well as the two partner institutions in Nepal and Myanmar:

The partner institution in Nepal, the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Research (NCCR), is a research foundation that works around six main clusters: conflict, peace and human security; migration, mobility and development; post-conflict state building and governance; livelihoods and globalisation processes; environmental and resource conflict-governance; and agriculture, land and agrarian transformation. NCCR is led by Bishnu Raj Upreti, who has over thirty years of experience in the development and research sectors.

PRIO’s research partner in Myanmar is Ar Yone Oo Social Development Association (AYO). AYO was established in 2008 in the wake of the devastating cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. It has since expanded its activities to include capacity building of community-based organisations with the aim of ensuring the sustainability of development projects initiated by international organisations in the country. AYO is led by Cin Khan Lian, who has worked for two decades in various international organisations and UN agencies in Myanmar.

To learn more about the project, PRIO’s Julie Marie Hansen met with Bishnu Raj Upreti and Cin Khan Lian on their visit to PRIO.
**Women’s roles in conflicts in Nepal and Myanmar**

Myanmar and Nepal differ in the types of armed conflicts that have occurred there. The conflicts that have been ongoing in Myanmar for decades have been fueled by ethnic-based tensions between many different ethnic minority armed groups and successive military governments. In Nepal, the conflict between the central government and Maoist rebels between 1996 and 2006 has been a primarily ideological one.

The role of women in these conflicts also differs. Lian refers to current data which suggests that few women appear to have participated in ethnic armed groups in Myanmar and that very few of these women have held top positions. This is a trend the project aims to investigate further, as Lian explains:

“There doesn’t appear to be any significant proportion of women in top positions in these groups, with the exception of one or two groups. We’re going to research this; what percentage of women participate and what level of decision-making women have within the groups. It’s an important question and it’ll take time to investigate but we hope to find out what the picture really is.”

In contrast, around 20 per cent of Maoist rebels in Nepal were women. Of this relatively large proportion, many also held leadership roles, explains Upreti:

“These women were very successful in the rebel group. They were leading battalions and, in some places, leading attacks. But what is the situation for these women after conflict? That is what we want to find out.”

**Female ex-combatants in post-conflict society**

Much of the research on armed conflict and gender focuses on the role of women in conflict prevention, warfare or peace processes. Less attention, however, has been given to studying women in post-conflict processes, including DDR. The project therefore asks not only about the roles of women in armed groups but also about what life holds for them once conflict comes to an end.

“We want to understand the state of these women – who they are, what they are doing and where they are going – and how gender sensitive the DDR and political processes have been,” explains Upreti.

For women who have played active combatant roles during conflict, their situations after conflict are influenced by gender inequalities in the post-conflict society. This can be seen in Nepal where, despite achievements in gender balance at the top level of society, gender discrimination elsewhere persists, as Upreti explains:

“Nepal might be seen as one of the leading countries in the world in terms of the status of women because three out of five of the highest constitutional positions in the country are held by women. Our president, chief of parliament and supreme court chief justice are all women. So in that sense we have been quite successful.

“But Nepal is a very hierarchical country where women have been marginalised. We have achieved a lot in the supra-structure of the country, but we still have a lot to do at the local level. The unequal power relations, gender discrimination and exclusion of women are still there.”

Few studies have so far focused specifically on the role of female ex-combatants in post-conflict social and political activism and politics. This project therefore looks also at this kind of participation. In Myanmar, few women are involved the formal peace process, which in part is due to there being few women in leadership positions during conflict. Lian elaborates:

“Very few women are involved in the peace and security sector, at the roundtable and in peace dialogues; the majority there are men. I believe only 7 per cent of those who participated in the last union-level peace conference were women. Women’s participation must be significantly increased, both at peace conferences and in the political dialogue.

“But if the armed groups participating in the peace conferences do not have women leaders, then we do not see women in their delegations. So these groups need to be convinced to invite or offer space to women. Since the population consists of men and women – almost half and half – any single decision regarding peace needs to involve women. It’s time to consider balance.”

**Beyond academic output: Practical contributions of the project**

According to the research partners, the project hopes to generate new knowledge that can help improve the situations of female ex-combatants. In the Nepal case, Upreti argues that by taking into account the gendered experiences of combatants, the research can provide some practical contributions:

“Twenty per cent of the 15,000 ex-combatants in Nepal are women – that is quite a large proportion. These are women who have their specific experiences which also have direct effects on their families and children. The mother is the basis of Nepalese society so in that sense taking care of them, supporting them to integrate well and bringing them into the mainstream is an equally important responsibility of the state and society.

“Our project will aim to generate very clear evidence on how the Nepalese government and the international community supporting Nepal can address the gender dimension of ex-combatants and marginalised people. We are hoping this study will not only be an academic exercise, but will also have very practical value to policy making that affects female ex-combatants, especially in securing..."
their livelihoods and improving their situation.”

Likewise, given the male-dominated political processes in Myanmar, Lian hopes the project’s findings will provide convincing data that can lead to changes in practice:

“We want to compare the different armed groups in Myanmar, to look at which structures within them work better at including women. Where there are more women participating and holding important positions in armed groups, I think we should use this as an example for advocating that others make more space for women.

“With these findings we can convince the new government and parliament of Myanmar that, to a certain degree, gender balance has already taken place, so why not also in the ministries, the cabinet and the parliament? We can also use this to convince other armed groups to include women in their delegations at peace conferences and in the political dialogue.”

Lessons to be learned

While a considerable number of theoretical studies have been conducted on the gender dimension of DDR processes, so far very few case studies exist. The importance of the type of conflict and its implications for gender dynamics has also so far attracted little attention. The WOMENsPEACE project is therefore important in not only providing new case studies but in bringing in case studies from two different types of conflict – the primarily ideological conflict in Nepal and the ethnic-based conflicts in Myanmar.

One of the values of including different case studies is the opportunity to learn across and make comparisons between the cases. This is particularly true for the WOMENsPEACE study where the two countries are at very different stages in terms of DDR. While the DDR process in Nepal has come to an end, a contentious debate around a possible DDR process in Myanmar is still ongoing. Upreti believes the Nepal case has the potential to provide lessons for Myanmar:

“Our project will look at what was not done in terms of gender considerations in the DDR process in Nepal and how gender issues can be addressed in the future. We will be documenting how the DDR process happened and why it happened the way it did. This will provide knowledge for others to not repeat the same mistakes in future. Myanmar and other countries can learn from the Nepal experience.”

Recommended Reading


Hedström, Jenny (2015) We did not realize about the gender issues. So, we thought it was a good idea. Gender roles in Burmese oppositional struggles, International Feminist Journal of Politics 18(1): 61–79.


Norwegian Women Mediators Visit Cyprus

On 26-28 May, a delegation of Norwegian members of the Nordic Women Mediators network conducted a field visit to Cyprus. The purpose of the visit was for the delegation to meet and learn from various actors in the Cyprus peace process. It was also an opportunity for the delegation to share their own experiences from mediation in other peace processes.

The delegation met first with UN officials Lisa Buttenheim, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Cyprus, and Espen Barth Eide, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Cyprus, to get a deeper understanding of the history and current status of the peace process. This was followed by a presentation by Harry Tzimitras, director of the PRIO Cyprus Centre, and Olga Demetriou, senior research consultant at the PRIO Cyprus Centre working on gender issues.

The delegation also met with the Technical Committee on Gender Equality, and later various women’s groups and other civil society organizations. These meetings were an opportunity for both sides to exchange knowledge and advice when it comes to ensuring women’s participation and including
gender issues in the Cyprus and other peace processes. Members of the delegation Elisabeth Slåttum and Hilde Salvesen, in particular, shared their views on the success and challenges of including women and a gender perspective in the Colombia peace process. They also shared knowledge about the Sub-committee on Gender, established in 2014, and a Women’s Summit in 2013, which has been particularly successful in mobilizing women’s organisations in Colombia.

The field visit seemed to encourage the technical committee members and women’s organizations to continue working towards gender inclusion in the Cyprus process, despite the various challenges they face. Kristin Lund, Force Commander of the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), said the visit was “interesting and meaningful for the women of Cyprus” and that “such exchanges were an important part of building support and pressure for the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325” on Women, Peace and Security. Hear more about the impact of the field visit in a radio interview available online with network member Elisabeth Slåttum.

The field visit was organised by UNFICYP in collaboration with PRIO and the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), which are the network’s Norwegian operational partners. The delegation included network members Elisabeth Slåttum, Norwegian special envoy to the peace process in the Philippines; Mona Juul, Norwegian Ambassador to the UK; Major General Kristin Lund, Force Commander of UNFICYP; Hilde Salvesen, senior adviser at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and member of the Norwegian facilitation team to the peace process in Colombia; Laura Mitchell, senior adviser at NOREF; and Julie Marie Hansen, research assistant at PRIO.

The Nordic Women Mediators network was formed in 2015 by the Nordic governments as a joint initiative to increase the number of women involved in international peace mediation efforts. A high-level meeting on ‘Women in Mediation’ was held at the UN in New York to officially launch the network internationally on 11 May. Participants included the foreign ministers of Norway, Sweden and Iceland as well as senior women mediators who discussed the role of women in formal peace processes. The launch was co-organized by the governments of Finland, Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Denmark, together with the operational partners from the Nordic countries: NOREF and PRIO (Norway), Folke Bernadotte Academy (Sweden), Crisis Management Initiative (Finland) and UNU-GEST (Iceland). Read more about the launch in an article by NOREF online here.

Field Mission to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan

By Torunn L. Tryggestad, Director of the PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security

Together with co-members of the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group, PRIO’s Torunn L. Tryggestad undertook a field mission to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan from 3 to 9 April. In recent years both countries have experienced periodic ethnic conflicts partly due to lack of legal demarcation of their international borders.

In June 2010, a fierce land dispute between ethnic Kyrgyz and the minority Uzbek people in the city of Osh led to inter-ethnic violence in South Kyrgyzstan. According to the United Nations and other international observers, more than 2,000 Uzbeks were killed, many of them raped or burned alive, while at least 400,000 people, including over 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks who fled to neighbouring Uzbekistan, were displaced by the pogroms.

The purpose of the field mission was to visit peacebuilding projects funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to meet with project beneficiaries, national authorities, the UN and other organizations and implementing partners (national entities and NGOs) and discuss the nature and effectiveness of the PBF resources allocated to the two countries. The PBF projects visited, particularly the Kyrgyzstan portfolio of projects, have a strong gender focus addressing the integration of gender considerations in peacebuilding efforts, empowerment of women and girls, and reduction of gender-based discrimination.

One particularly interesting PBF-funded project was the Multi-Sectorial Cooperation for Interethnic Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan. Run by UNFPA it deals with training on peace building and reconciliation for Madrassa (Islamic religious school) students, and addresses the important issue of early marriage (especially for girls).

Similarly the UN Women project, Building a Constituency for Peace - My Safe and Peaceful School, is training youth in secondary
schools on issues of gender empowerment, conflict management, and human rights. So is the UNDP-UNICEF project, Women as Peaceful Voters, Women as Candidates, which is assisting women and youth, particularly from ethnic minorities, to participate in the electoral processes as informed citizens and parliamentary candidates.

UN organizations operating in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, together with their local implementing partners, pay special attention to implementation approaches that give a primary role to local actors. The members of the Advisory Group were impressed with how active, confident and articulate women, particularly the young girls, were in explaining the issues they are addressing in the various projects. For more about the PBF check out their website and Facebook page 'UN Peace-building'.

Gender, Peace & Security Seminar for Myanmar Women

On 26-27 April, a delegation of female leaders from Myanmar visited Oslo to attend a two-day seminar. The delegation comprised women from various political parties, ethnic armed organisations and civil society organisations. The seminar, co-organised by PRIO and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), was part of a European study tour initiated by Swisspeace and the Myanmar NGO Nyein Foundation. Following a ten-day workshop in Switzerland, the delegation arrived in Oslo to learn more about gender, peace and security issues.

Resource persons from PRIO, as well as Norwegian civil society and government, were brought in to share knowledge on their respective areas of expertise. Torunn L. Tryggestad, director of the PRIO Centre of Gender, Peace and Security, started the seminar with a presentation on the successes and challenges of implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security through national action plans. PRIO Senior Researcher Wenche Hauge presented her research on female ex-combatants in demobilization, demilitarization and reintegration processes, specifically in Guatemala. Åshild Kolås, PRIO Research Professor, presented the PRIO project WOMENsPEACE on the gender dimension of DDR processes which looks at Myanmar as a case study country.

Other presentations and discussions included the relationship between humanitarian law and human rights given by Gro Nystuen, senior partner at the International Law and Policy Institute (ILPI) and member of the Nordic Women Mediators network (NWM). Another member of NWM, Hilde Salvesen, who is senior advisor at the Norwegian MFA’s Section on Peace and Reconciliation, shared her experiences from working with gender issues in the Colombia peace process. Finally, Lars-Erik Skaansar from Jannek Consult talked about the gender dimension of ceasefire processes.

The delegation also met with officials from the Norwegian government, including Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Tore Hattretn and Director of the MFA’s Section for Peace and Reconciliation Tone Allers, as well as representatives from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Representatives from the Norwegian People’s Aid and CARE Norway, both of which have projects in Myanmar, also met the delegation to share information about their work on gender issues in the country.

Given that Myanmar is a priority country of Norway’s National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security and that Norway plays a central supporting role in the Myanmar peace process, it was hoped that the visit and meetings would be especially valuable not only for the Myanmar delegation but also Norwegian policy-makers and civil society working in Myanmar.

Somali Women’s Civic and Political Engagement

On 13 June, PRIO held a policy seminar in Oslo on ‘Somali Women’s Civic and Political Engagement: Past, Present and Future’. The seminar was part of the closing activities of the research project Gender in Politics in Somalia: Access and Influence in a Post-Conflict State (GENSOM). The project, which began in January 2014, is a collaboration between PRIO and the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS), funded by the Research Council of Norway (RCN).

The GENSOM project has studied the civil and political engagements of women in Somali politics in relation to their history, access and influence. It has studied the history of women and power in Somalia; the level of access women have to formal and informal arenas of power; and the influence that women in leadership positions have in Somali
society, particularly in relation to gender issues. Findings from the project are based on data collected over two years from 40 life histories, 70 semi-structured interviews and 10 focus groups conducted in Mogadishu, Har-geisa, Garowe, and with diaspora women.

**PRIO Research Director** Cindy Horst, who has led the project, presented key findings at the seminar. One of the main messages from the research is the importance to recognise other forms of civic engagements in post-conflict settings, as formal political engagement is not the only way women contribute politically. The research also discovered a need to pay more attention to localising the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

**Some project findings** are presented in the new PRIO Policy Brief ‘Introducing a Women’s Empowerment Agenda from Abroad? Gender and Stability in Somalia’, co-authored by Cindy Horst and Elin M. Doeland. The policy brief, which was launched at the seminar, focuses on how the Women, Peace and Security agenda, as a women’s empowerment agenda “from abroad”, is met by local actors in Somalia and provides some policy recommendations in light of this.

**HIPS researcher** Maimuna Mohamud has also published an article entitled ‘Women, Piety and Political Representation: Islamic Discourses in Contemporary Somalia’ in the Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World, HAWWA, issue 14 (2016). More publications from the project are forthcoming.

**The seminar was** opened with welcome remarks by Torunn L. Tryggstad, director of the PRIO Centre on Gender, Peace and Security. Sanam Anderlini, director of International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN), gave the keynote speech in which she shared her perspectives on the role of women’s leadership in post-conflict societies. The documentary film ‘Gender and politics in Somalia: access and influence in a post-conflict state’, made by Abdiaziz Elmi for the GEN-SOM project, was also shown at the seminar, and is available to watch online.

**The seminar ended** with a panel discussion. Tryggstad and Anderlini were joined on the panel by two British-Somalis – the award-winning novelist Nadifa Mohamed and the activist Adam Matan, who leads the Anti-Tribalism Movement organisation – to discuss the role of women in Somalia and the wider Somali diaspora.

Read more about the project in a previous issue of the GPS Update Issue 1 (2015).

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### International News

Several countries recently launched National Actions Plans for implementing UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, including South Sudan, Sweden and Timor-Leste.


PRISM, a journal of the Center for Complex Operations, released a sixth volume in March 2016 exclusively on the topic of ‘Women, Peace and Inclusive Security’. Access all articles online here.


The Nordic Women Mediators network was launched internationally with a high-level meeting on women’s meaningful participation in peace processes, held at the United Nations in New York on 11 May (see ‘Norwegian Women Mediators Visit Cyprus’ story).

The Transitional Justice Institute at Ulster University held an event on ‘Hierarchies of Wartime Sexual Violence’ on 18 May.

Women in International Security and the Embassy of Liechtenstein in the USA held a roundtable discussion on ‘Women, terrorism and violent extremism: Radicalization and recruitment’ in Washington DC on 19 May.

The governments of Afghanistan, Norway and USA co-organised a symposium on women’s empowerment in Afghanistan, held in Kabul on 21 May.

PeaceWomen Across the Globe organised a week of events entitled ‘Rwanda – a country of women’ with Rwandan women’s rights and conflict expert Justine Mbabazi in Switzerland on 23–27 May.

The United Nations Security Council held an open debate on Women, Peace and Security on 2 June, where the discussion centred on responding to human trafficking in situations of conflict-related sexual violence.


The LSE Centre on Women, Peace and Security held a conference on ‘Prosecuting Conflict-related Sexual Violence: What have we learnt?’ in London on 16 June.

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### News from Norway

The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs held a seminar on ‘Women in elected politics: Variations, barriers and effects’ in Oslo on 14 June. A video of the seminar is available online.

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### News from PRIO

PRIO will collaborate with the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security on developing a Global Women, Peace and Security Index (more details to come in the next GPS Update).

The Research School on Peace and Conflict opened for applications to the PhD course ‘Gender, Peace and Security’ in autumn.
2016. More details and the application form are available online.

The PRIO GPS Centre, together with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organised a seminar on ‘Gender, Peace and Security’ for a group of women from Myanmar in Oslo on 26–27 April (see separate story).

The PRIO project ‘Gender Equality, Peace and Security in Nepal and Myanmar’ (WOMENSPEACE) had a kick-off workshop at PRIO on 2–3 May (see separate story).

PRIO, together with NOREF and UNFICYP, organised a field visit to Cyprus for Norwegian members of Nordic Women Mediators network on 26–28 May (see separate story).

A PRIO seminar on ‘Somali women’s civic and political engagement: Past, present and future’ was held as part of the closing activities of the project Gender in Politics in Somalia (GENSOM) on 13 June (see separate story).

The PRIO project ‘Female Empowerment in Eastern DRC’ organised a presentation at PRIO with Dr. Christine Amisi from the International Centre for Advanced Research and Training in Bukavu, DR Congo on 17 June. Amisi shared preliminary findings from a survey on survivors of sexual violence, conducted as part of the project in South Kivu in 2015.

Torunn L. Tryggestad, Senior Researcher and Director of the GPS Centre, went with the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group on a field mission to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan 18–20 May: (see separate story).

Torunn L. Tryggestad, Senior Researcher and Director of the GPS Centre, attended a two-day meeting of the UN Peacebuilding Fund Advisory Group at UN Headquarters, New York on 1–2 June.

Elin M. Doeland, Research Assistant, wrote a PRIO Blog post entitled ‘It’s time to open our eyes to women’s involvement in peace processes’, available to read online.

Pinar Tank, Senior Researcher, has published a report entitled ‘Kurdish women: Liberation through the barrel of a gun?’ for the New Middle East: Emerging Political and Ideological Trends project at the Institute of Culture and Oriental Studies, University of Oslo.

Recent PRIO Publications


Tank, Pinar (2016) Kurdish women: Liberation through the barrel of a gun?, NewME Report, Department of Culture Studies and...
A seat at the table is not enough: Understanding women’s substantive representation in peace processes, Peacebuilding, 5 June 2016.


