

TIPS FOR ENGAGING WOMEN IN CONFLICT MITIGATION

The escalation of conflict in all regions of the world poses a serious challenge to human rights. It is important to pay special attention to the different experiences of women and men in conflict and ensure that women are included in all stages of peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction.



Sustainable peace requires equal participation of all citizens – women and men – in the public life of their community.

Women’s participation is essential and has been shown to contribute to more peaceful societies. Women are amongst the most vulnerable victims in conflict situations, yet they are also pivotal for mitigating conflict and building lasting peace.

WHAT IS CONFLICT MITIGATION?

Conflict mitigation refers to strategies, processes and actions undertaken to address root causes of conflict and to change the way that those involved act and perceive the issues. Conflict mitigation strategies can be used for conflict prevention, as well as intervention in conflict and post-conflict

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As stated by the United Nations in a Security Council Resolution 1325, there could be no sustainable peace without women being involved in the process. Following discussions on the Equitas online community as well as from our own programming, we have compiled a list of ways in which women can be involved in conflict mitigation.

RAISE AWARENESS OF WOMEN’S ROLES

It is important to **raise awareness around the different roles women can play in conflict mitigation**. Women play many roles during their life span - sister, mother, etc. and are therefore able to bring these common roles to the center of discourses irrespective of the conflicting party that they belong to. For example, during the war in Sri Lanka , fathers, sons, brothers and husbands from both the conflicting parties lost their lives and many of them became disabled. This led to men and women being left alone, especially as widows. Hence, in order to bargain with the government to receive support, and also to provide possible welfare support for the victimized families,



several forums were formed like ‘mother’s front’, ‘war victimized sisters’, wives of disappeared persons’ etc.

“Women have always been informal peace mediators and negotiators during the times of war in the north of Sri Lanka.” - Human rights educator, Sri Lanka

CONSIDER INTERSECTING FACTORS

There are many intersecting factors that affect a woman’s ability to participate such as belonging to a minority ethnic community, a minority religion or a lower social caste. As such, it is important to **take into consideration intersecting factors that create hierarchies and discriminate among women** and ensure women from various socio-economic, religious, ethnic and other groups are engaged.

“Disparities in agency among women should also be taken into consideration particularly when selecting women for training or capacity building programs to ensure that programs are not merely gender inclusive, but take considering intersecting factors that create hierarchies and discriminate among women” – Human rights educator, Sri Lanka

PROVIDE CAPACITY BUILDING

In order to help women take action in their community and beyond, it is important to **provide capacity building opportunities for women to engage meaningfully in conflict mitigation**. This can include relevant and transferable skills, such as how to manage a budget, how to plan an event or how to make a presentation. It can also involve knowledge-building components that teach women about judicial processes, as well developing interpersonal skills such as communication and critical reflection.



“In the early years after the conflict escalated, civil society organizations had to address these needs of women. Women’s organizations from the South started support groups for women - where women could simply come, listen and talk with others. (...) Capacity building workshops were held - to help the affected families understand the law and judicial processes. More and more women started participating in forums, at local, national and regional level - sharing their experiences, and views. Today, it can be said that women do participate in meetings and their voices are heard.” – Human rights educator, Thailand

CONSIDER WOMEN'S SCHEDULES

There are variety of different factors that affect when women are available to participate in conflict mitigation. For example, some women may not be unavailable in the mornings because they are caring for their family, or not feel comfortable walking home in the dark. This why it is important to **ensure that activities are held at a time where women are able to attend**. Another way of accommodating women's schedule and commitments is by **providing childcare if necessary**.

***"When conflict mitigation processes are not friendly to women, process may not be accessible, not available or they cannot bring their small children"** – Human rights educator, Philippines*

ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Women are often perceived as incapable of holding leadership positions, as responsible only for family matters and not expected to intervene in conflict. Despite being one of the groups most affected by conflict, they are viewed as incapable of participating in decision-making related to mitigation and resolution. This is why it is important to **advocate for women to take on leadership roles**. Ways that this can be done are:

- Funding departments requiring women's participation in conflict mitigation projects that they support
- Creating opportunities for dialogue between women and decision-makers to give them experience with various leadership styles
- Supporting women's organizations that are fighting for the recognition of the contribution of women to conflict resolution

***"In our community we need to empower to reclaim their power and wisdom."** – Human rights educator, Sri Lanka*

SHARE SUCCESS STORIES

Documenting success stories of women's involvement in conflict mitigation and communicating this in forms that are accessible to both men and women helps raise awareness of the role played by women. This can help all people recognize the importance of involving women in this process, as well as encouraging other women to participate in this process.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The essential lesson is that there are many ways that women can be engaged in conflict mitigation. This posting provides some ideas, however, there remain many more angles to explore. We encourage you to share your ideas with other human rights educators as well as with Equitas. We also welcome your feedback to this *Equitas Shares It!* article. Please send comments to slusthaus@equitas.org.

Thank you to all Equitas Alumni who participated in the online conversation for contributing their insights and examples to this knowledge building and sharing activity on the participation of women in conflict mitigation.

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