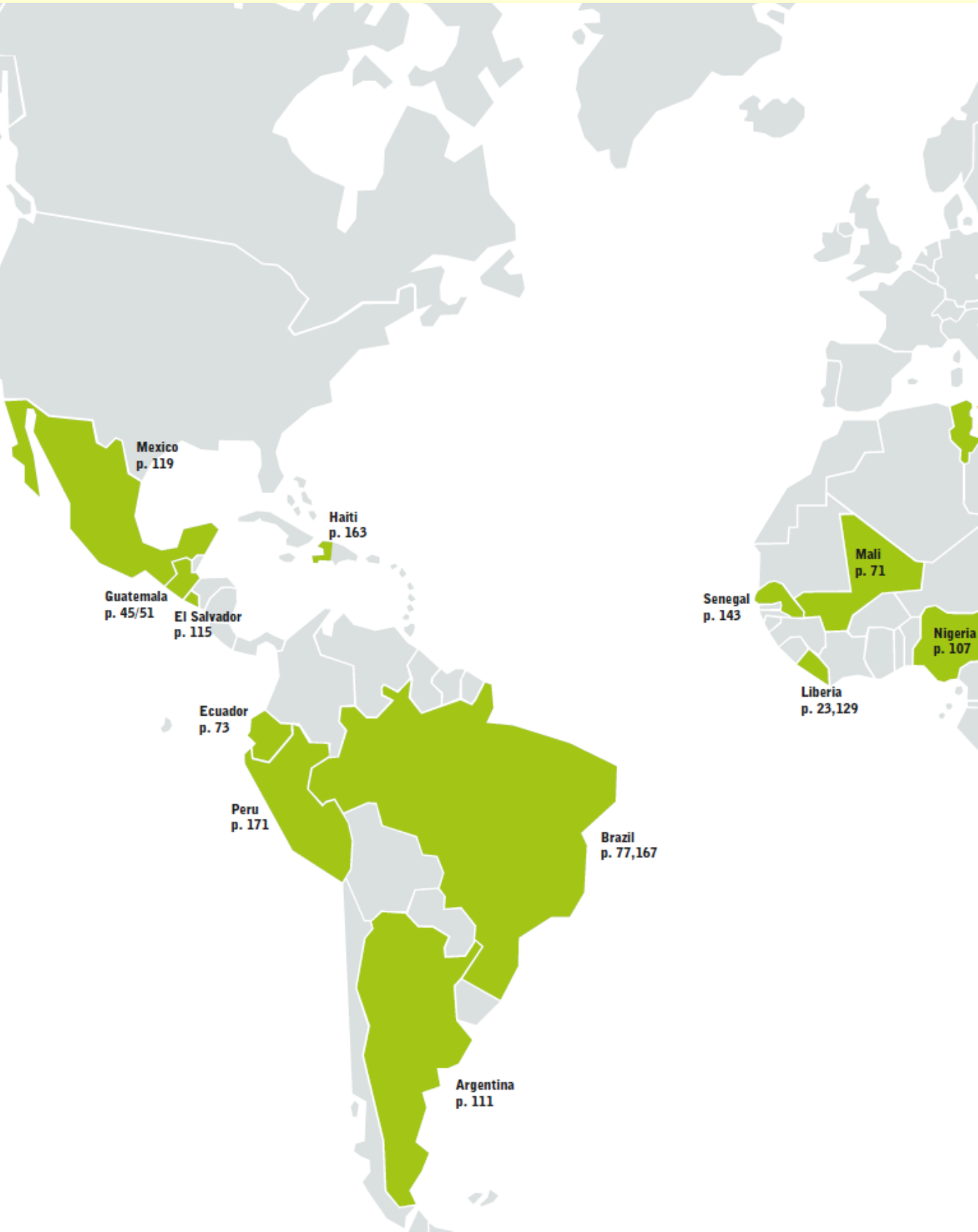
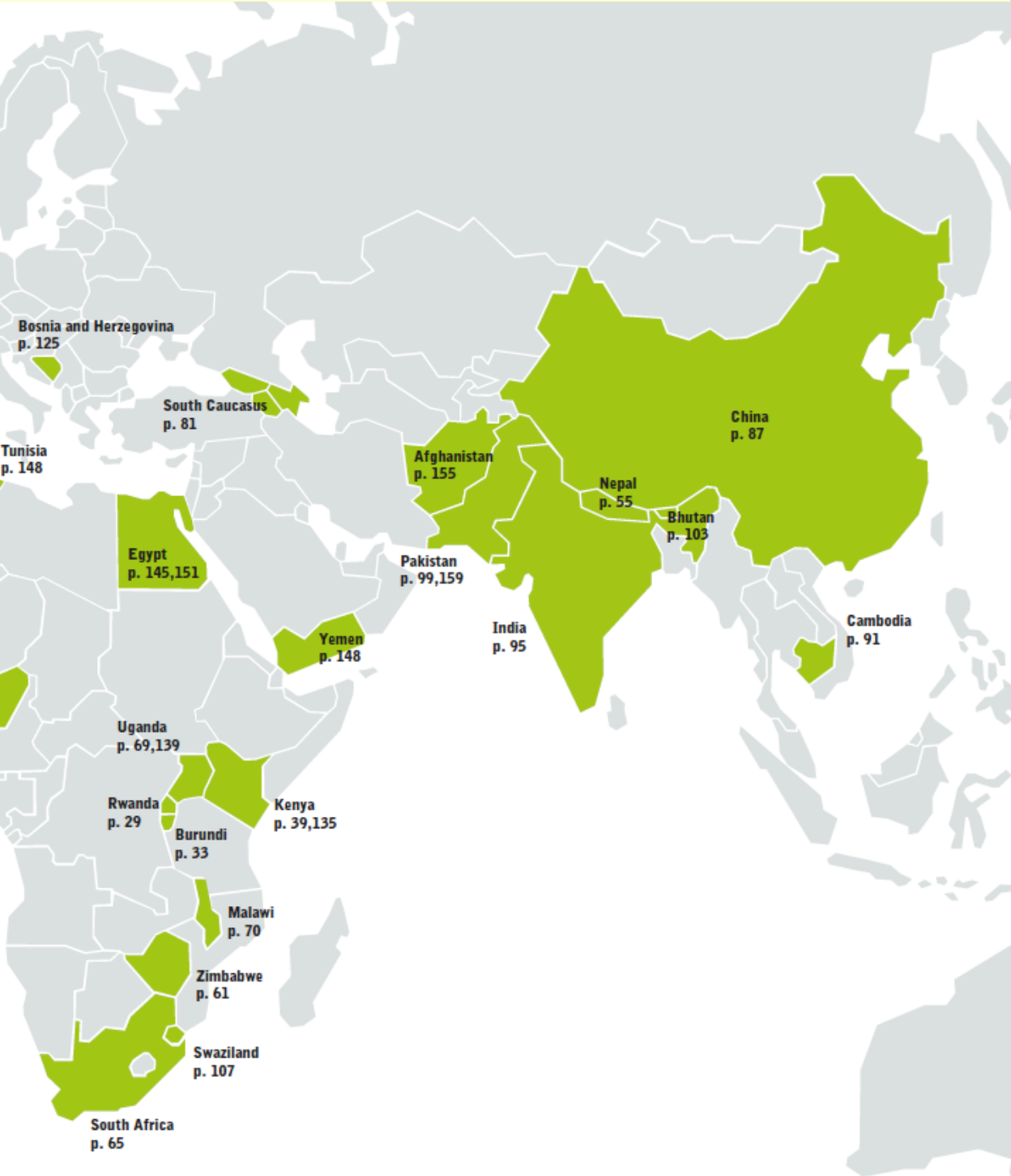
Good News!

How women and men stop violence and save the planet


Mexico
p. 119
Haiti
p. 163
Guatemala
p. 45/51
El Salvador
p. 115
Ecuador
p. 73
Peru
p. 171
Brazil
p. 77,167
Argentina
p. 111
Mali
p. 71
Senegal
p. 143
Nigeria
p. 107
Liberia
p. 23,129


Bosnia and Herzegovina
p. 125
South Caucasus
p. 81
Tunisia
p. 148
Egypt
p. 145,151
Yemen
p. 148
Afghanistan
p. 155
Pakistan
p. 99,159
India
p. 95
China
p. 87
Nepal
p. 55
Bhutan
p. 103
Cambodia
p. 91
Uganda
p. 69,139
Rwanda
p. 29
Burundi
p. 33
Kenya
p. 39,135
Malawi
p. 70
Zimbabwe
p. 61
Swaziland
p. 107
South Africa
p. 65

Good News!
How women and men
stop violence and save the planet

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the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung
and Ute Scheub

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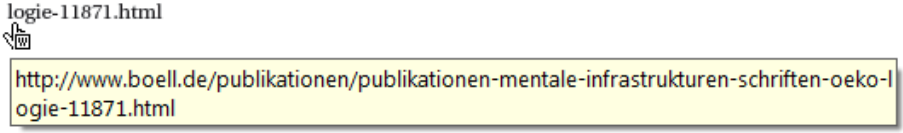

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Contents

Foreword

Good News – doesn't that sound a bit naive given that there are currently over 30 armed conflicts worldwide? We don't think so. This book is not about whitewashing or ignoring the facts or about refusing to take responsibility for international problems. As Ute Scheub writes in her introduction, our aim is to counteract the dominance of bad news and to use the reports from all over the world in this book to show that positive change is possible. In order to bring about positive change, we need women and men who are determined to put a stop to problems such as violence, the violation of human rights, gender inequality, a lack of democracy, poverty, and destruction of the environment. We need people who can find the courage to fight for their dreams and to instigate change. Individuals can make a start, but it takes many people to truly bring about transformation. The reports in this book do not portray women and men who work alone, but rather people who inspire and motivate others.

It is no coincidence that most of these reports are about women. Just as bad news account for the majority of media reports, men's faces dominate the news. We mainly see images of powerful men who have a major influence on politics and the economy. Women's social commitment, which takes a very wide variety of forms, often remains hidden. The enormous potential of such action is not sufficiently perceived or supported, and thus cannot fully develop. Nor do we hear much about those men who are not concerned with maintaining their positions of power or stubbornly clinging to traditional role models. Such men exist –men who do not believe in violence and who encourage other men to abstain from using it, and men who campaign side-by-side with women for equality in all parts of life and are thus creating a new image of masculinity.

Some of the individuals portrayed in this book are people with whom we have worked for many years, such as Dr Chhiv Kek Pung from Cambodia, who campaigns tirelessly against land-grabbing and for adherence to human rights. Supporting such actors of political change is a priority for the Heinrich Böll Foundation. We see ourselves as a global campaigner for the upholding of human rights, non-violent conflict transformation, ecological principles, sustainability, and the development of democracy. Gender democracy – social emancipation and equality of women and men – is a particular focus of our work. Our aim is to include a gender-democratic and gender-just perspective in as

many areas of political life as possible. The Heinrich Böll Foundation has been doing pioneering work in the fields of security and peace policy for many years. We also base our work on UN resolutions, particularly UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, which calls on all UN member states to consider the different living conditions of women and men in war and post-war situations, civil crisis prevention, and post-conflict reconstruction; to provide better protection from violence for women and girls; and, last but not least, to support women as actors in non-violent conflict transformation. Thirteen years after the adoption of UNSCR 1325, its interpretation has been expanded worldwide: it is obvious that sustainable peace cannot be achieved without changing unequal power relations or without permanently including women as participants in reconstruction. However, it is now also clear that women and men must participate equally in such processes of change. Despite the statements made at the highest political level and a general recognition that gender policy is not just "women's business", many people do not know what it means in concrete terms to take a gender perspective on security and peace policy, as required by UNSCR 1325.

Good News provides many examples of how a change in gender and power relations – from the smallest change at the local level to global change – can have positive effects and permanently safeguard peace. These changes should be understood as long-term processes. As such, they often do not fit in with the frequently very short-term approach taken by the projects of international organisations.

The German edition of *Good News*, which was published in October 2012, allowed us to join in the debate on a German National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. This had a positive outcome, and we were very pleased when the plan was adopted in December 2012. We now call on the Federal Government to ensure that the plan is strategically implemented and allocated adequate funding.

In publishing an updated version of *Good News* in English, our aim is to draw greater attention to these positive stories worldwide. We want proactive men and women from Asia, Africa, Europe and South America to discover that people in other parts of the world are campaigning for sustainable development and non-violent conflict transformation in the same heroic way as they are. We hope that reading this book will make them feel positive about the work they have done so far and inspired by other people's actions.

We are very pleased to be able to co-publish this book with Ute Scheub – an experienced journalist, book author, and international peace activist. We would like to thank her and Karina Böckmann and Ramesh Jaura from Inter Press Service Deutschland for their excellent work. We would also like to thank those who hold copyright for the texts and photographs contained here for giving us their permission to use their work. Finally, we would like to thank Joanna Barelkowska and Gregor Enste from the Foreign and Security Policy Department at the Heinrich Böll Foundation for their work on *Good News*.

We wish you an enjoyable and stimulating read. We hope that you will be encouraged, inspired and motivated by the women and men who feature in this book – and we hope that you will carry on their courageous work!

Berlin, November 2013

Ralf Fücks and Barbara Unmüßig
Presidents of the Heinrich Böll Foundation

Introduction

Every day the media inundate us with bad news about war, disasters, violence, poverty and misery worldwide. Although these depressing reports are facts, they do not reflect the whole truth about society. There is also good news – encouraging stories about women and men from all over the globe who manage to make the world a better place.

However, these stories tend not to make an appearance in the normal day-to-day business of the media because positive stories contradict the unspoken law that "only bad news is good news". Newspapers and television stations are fixated on reports about disasters. Another reason for the lack of good news in the media is that positive stories – unlike bomb explosions or the outbreak of epidemics – are not breaking news, but rather lengthy *processes* that sometimes take years or even decades to evolve and cannot be tied to one particular event. This makes it far more difficult for journalists and reporters to track down success stories and to publish them against the competition from a never-ending stream of horrific media reports.

Much bad news is also published because the reporters want to inform the public. But an excessive amount of bad news can actually have the opposite effect – it can discourage people, make them feel depressed, and move them to retreat from public life.

People working in the social sciences have long been aware of the need for positive stories. We are only motivated to take action and bring about social change through role models – and not by horror stories or admonishments. Sufficient numbers of people will only be inspired to help change the world if doing so is not only an ethical requirement, but also an *enjoyable* experience.

Thoughts of this kind gave me the idea of setting up a website called www.visionews.net, which would only publish good news, optimistic stories and positive visions of a peaceful world and a healthy environment – that is where the name "vision news" came from. I could never have achieved this without the support of my fantastic project partners, Joanna Barelkowska of the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Karina Böckmann at the German branch of international news agency Inter Press Service (IPS). I am extremely grateful to them. I would also like to thank the Heinrich Böll Foundation for publishing most of these stories as a book. Following the publication of the German version in 2012, the book has now been updated and translated into English.

In the book, staff from the IPS news agency report on how dedicated women and men all over the world are successfully campaigning for human rights, initiating processes of reconciliation and reconstruction, safeguarding food sources, protecting the environment, and preventing resource conflicts. What makes these stories different is that almost all of the reporters come from the countries involved, so they are experts on local issues. That also means they do not look at the situation from a Eurocentric or Western perspective, which can give a distorted picture.

Most of the stories are about women and women's groups – and this is a conscious and deliberate choice. According to an unconfirmed estimate by the United Nations, women account for around 80 per cent of the people active in peace and environmental projects – and even if this figure turns out to be too high, there is no doubt that women do most of the grassroots work in this area.

The tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 ("Women and Peace and Security") provided the impetus for launching visionews. In October 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted this historic resolution, which calls for the equal inclusion of women at all levels of peace processes. UNSCR 1325 is now regarded as the most important international legal instrument for countless women's peace groups worldwide. Visionews went live at 13:25 on 31 October 2010, the tenth anniversary of the resolution.

Since then, the visionews site has served as a database of good examples and best practices for non-governmental organisations, women's groups, institutions, and all those interested in the topics covered. In May 2012, the Nuremberg Media Academy awarded visionews the Alternative Media Prize in the internet category. It used the prize money to have the website translated into Spanish. In the meantime, visionews reports in German, English and Spanish from nearly 60 countries.

The topics we cover have expanded over the years. When a women's group in El Salvador safeguards community food sovereignty by planting forest gardens or when socially active men in South Africa launch inspiring campaigns to tackle violence against women, these are clearly not typical examples of a literal implementation of UNSCR 1325. Nevertheless, they are also success stories and as such are worth telling. Our hope is that these stories will inspire other people all over the world, be they women or men, to follow their example. What's more, these stories form part of the bigger picture that a different, better and more

peaceful world is possible – and could start tomorrow if the political will existed.

I have updated the facts and figures in these stories for the book, and in some cases I have also added new content. Changes have been noted in the articles. You can read the stories in the order that they appear or choose particular reports depending on whether you are interested in the overall context or in specific countries and topics.

Men also benefit from women's rights

People tend to forget that eliminating the imbalance of power between men and women is a basic requirement for a more peaceful world. An increasing number of studies in sociology, as well as in peace and conflict research, have clearly shown that two main factors help to reduce violence in societies: improved women's rights and the demilitarisation of masculinity. But it is not only women – and thus children – who benefit. The impact on men is equally positive. In countries with a smaller imbalance of power between men and women, men also experience far less violence and have more personal freedom. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 thus has positive results for *everyone* – with the exception of a few unscrupulous perpetrators of violence.

In a statistical analysis of 159 countries for the period between 1960 and 1992, the US conflict researcher Mary Caprioli and her colleague Mark A. Boyer discovered that sooner or later violence in a country has an impact on foreign policy. Countries with few or no female members of parliament, recent women's suffrage, few paid jobs for women, and a high birth rate tend to use violence in conflicts with other nations. Or to put it the other way round: countries tend to pursue a peaceful foreign policy when they have a high number of women in parliament, when women have had the right to vote for a long time, when a high percentage of women are in paid employment, and when the birth rate is low.

More recent statistical studies by Erik Melander and Margit Bussmann have also confirmed this link for domestic policy. Using a statistical analysis of 110 countries for the period between 1985 and 2000, Margit Bussmann of the University of Greifswald showed that countries where women have political representation, economic participation in the labour market, and access to healthcare and education are stable and peaceful. According to Bussmann's study, gender equality also promotes good governance, development and democracy.

In their book *The Spirit Level – Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson use extensive statistical calculations to show that feelings of inequality make both men and women angry, aggressive, violent, unhappy and sick. Such feelings can even make them fat because they turn to food for comfort. In societies with comparatively greater equality, both women and men experience less violence, live longer, more content lives, and are happier and healthier. The Scandinavian countries, where the gap between male and female life expectancy is closing, are an example.

Of course, this is not because women are morally superior or inherently more peaceful than men. In principle, women have the same potential for aggression as men. Researchers and scientists have so far not been able to find any marked biological differences between men and women's brains.

However, women are generally physically weaker than men and they have been kept away from arms, armies and military service for centuries. As a result, they have historically been at a greater remove from violent conflicts and the military. This fact presents an opportunity for all societies, and it should be used to our advantage.

As a result of their traditional roles, women generally do not have any blood on their hands during or after wars. And because of the social skills they have been taught, they are far more able to approach the "enemy". While militarised men are part of the problem, women can be part of the solution. We find examples of how women build bridges between different ethnic groups, social classes, colours and religions in almost all (post-)conflict regions. This is an important strategic resource, which was addressed and included under international law for the first time in UNSCR 1325.

Four chapters – four strategies

The four chapters in the book stand for four different strategies for achieving peace, environmental justice and gender justice. These strategies are by no means mutually exclusive – instead, they overlap and complement each other.

Chapter 1: A World without War is Possible

Women and power – as we all know, this is not an easy topic. Historically, power has meant male power, and this discourages many women from striving for influence and decision-making authority. Power seems somehow tainted. And it is true that the struggle for power can have an extremely negative effect on people. Both women and men must strive to ensure that institutions

do not change them for the worse before they have brought about a change in the institutions.

Nonetheless, there are positive examples. The first chapter includes reports on how women – for instance in Liberia – have brought wars to an end, insisted on peace negotiations, and pacified militarised societies. The stories in this chapter also describe how women have pushed female politicians to the upper echelons of government or to other positions of power so that those individuals could bring about demilitarisation and improve women's rights.

UNSCR 1325 can encourage many positive developments in this area. In this book, we have deliberately chosen not to focus on the rather depressing big picture, which shows that the resolution is not being implemented as much as it should be. At the same time, we would like to mention some facts and figures so that the success stories in the book do not give a false impression. A random sample by the UN of the participants of 24 peace negotiations between 1992 and 2008 revealed that only 2.5 per cent of the signatories, 3.2 per cent of the peace brokers, 5.5 per cent of the process observers and 7.6 per cent of the negotiators were women. A similar study published in the 2008 Yearbook of Peace Processes by the School for a Culture of Peace in Barcelona, in which 33 peace negotiations were examined, found that women accounted for a mere 4 per cent of the people involved.

Women are also absent from the *contents* of peace treaties. According to a study by the University of Ulster that analysed 589 peace treaties signed between 1990 and 2010, only 16 per cent of the treaties referred explicitly to women's needs and rights. Only nine treaties stipulated a female quota in the legislative or executive branches of government; only five treaties supported the idea of female police officers or gender-sensitive policing reforms; only four treaties referred to gender equality in the judicial system; and only four treaties mentioned women's equality or gender equality in the restructuring of the public sector.

By the autumn of 2013, only 43 of the 193 UN member states had drawn up a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. In the meantime – after years of inaction – the German government has now adopted a plan, not least in response to grassroots pressure from civil society. The Heinrich Böll Foundation helped to increase this pressure.

Chapter 2: Men as Allies

The second chapter reports on men and male initiatives that campaign against violence. Many of the men involved have

recognised that stereotypical gender roles also restrict their own freedom. Such men are important allies in the joint endeavour to change repressive power relations and militarised societies.

In our globalised world, men are caught within a structure that the Australian sociologist R.W. Connell calls "hegemonic masculinity" – a hierarchical system of power and dominance that upholds values such as superiority, toughness, a willingness to fight, determination, and a strong will. Only a handful of victors make it to the very top of this pyramid of power, while everyone else forms part of the huge mass of losers.

The military plays a major role in this context. It is a type of symbolic recycling plant where male violence is cleansed, purified and reinterpreted in a positive way, namely as the call for heroes willing to fight and die for their fatherland (or some other half-baked idea). Humiliation is deliberately equated with feminisation in military training: superior officers insult male recruits by calling them "cunts" or "pussies"; they force them to do degrading "feminine" work such as cleaning or washing up, or they make them scrub the floor with toothbrushes. Female soldiers are not treated in the same way as their male counterparts in any army in the world, no matter how high the percentage of female recruits. They are denigrated by groping, insults, rape and sexual violence. This shows that including women in militarised systems cannot be the solution – also not in the context of UNSCR 1325!

Male violence is socially accepted almost everywhere in the world. This acceptance may be explicit or tacit; it may be legitimised by traditions, by laws or by religious practices. Fewer than half of all countries have laws against domestic or sexual violence. Instead, violent masculinity is idolised and celebrated – for example in action films, music videos, combat sports, or the military. In this way, violence becomes an almost natural component of interpersonal relations and is seen as a way of resolving conflicts between individuals, groups and nations. Over the course of this process, many men and women lose the creative skills that would enable them to transform conflicts without resorting to violence.

Canadian sociologist Michael Kaufman regards this regime of hegemonic masculinity as a "triad of violence" comprised of violence against women, violence against other men, and violence against oneself. Most of the victims of male violence are men, and the majority of men *suffer* more under this system of hegemonic masculinity than they enjoy its privileges – particularly men whose masculinity does not conform to the norm, such as gay men or pacifists. But many men are afraid to leave the system

or even to criticise it, as they run the risk of being discriminated against as "pussies" or because they think it would spell the end of their career.

Many men who see things differently do not, however, allow themselves to be deterred. They campaign against violence and restrictive gender roles and fight for women's rights, be this for ethical reasons or because they have realised that this is also in their own interest. This book includes features on some of these men, who publicly advocate an end to domestic violence or child marriage or who work together as former soldiers from opposing sides to promote peace.

Chapter 3: Preventing War by Protecting the Climate, Nature, Food and the Environment

Some sections of UNSCR 1325 cover the prevention of future wars and conflicts – an increasingly important topic given the climate disaster and the growing scarcity of water, land, oil and raw materials. We should do everything in our power to prevent wars over increasingly scarce resources.

There are many ways to prevent wars and conflicts. Campaigning for global environmental justice, which also involves changing our Western lifestyle, is a very important area. We should not forget that the food we eat is often taking away what other people need to survive. Forests in Brazil and Paraguay are cleared to make way for the genetically modified soybeans that are fed to the unfortunate cows and pigs in factory farms that go towards expanding our Western waistlines.

Food security is another important field of action. Indigenous and non-indigenous societies should be able to decide for themselves what they eat and how they can protect themselves against the threats of climate change by cultivating robust crops. This is why we have also included success stories on this type of initiative in the third chapter, as well as reports on water schools or successful cases of environmental protection.

Obviously, a few small groups cannot prevent global resource wars, but taken together they form a worldwide grassroots movement that can prevent the worst thanks to their commitment to making the world a better place. Above all, they can prepare our oil-addicted societies for the shock that will come with "peak oil", "peak soil" and "peak everything".

Chapter 4: Women as Agents of Change

The fourth chapter describes examples of how women are being strengthened in their civic work and how they are empowering themselves. If women are encouraged and if they are given

greater political, economic and social rights, they are able to trigger many small and large changes, which, as a whole, can help to transform conflicts and change society.

UNSCR 1325 can also play a strategic role in empowerment. However, it is important that women are primarily perceived here as actors, rather than merely as victims of sexual or other types of violence. It is particularly important for victims of violence to move beyond their passive role as a sufferer in order to overcome their trauma. State and non-state institutions should therefore aim to turn victims into activists.

Female peace activists regularly explain at conferences how UNSCR 1325 can be made more effective and have a greater impact that is of benefit to everyone. Women who work for peace are most successful when they act as agents of change. Their success also depends on grassroots women (Track 3), women in national organisations (Track 2) and female negotiators (Track 1) supporting each other at all levels of peace processes. It is equally important that women find powerful male allies and develop a shared vision of society.

Strong women's movements are working for peace and justice in many crisis-hit countries. However, only a few countries include them in peace negotiations and reconstruction. Female activists in Burundi and Nepal, for example, brought about gender-just legal amendments and a female quota in parliament. At the same time, the political situation remains unstable and dominated by violence. In the Philippines, the Mindanao Commission on Women, which was set up in 2001 and comprises female representatives of different religions and ethnicities, was able to achieve a large number of improvements in the long-standing conflict between the national government and Muslims. These improvements were not just of benefit to women, but also to indigenous people and ultimately the entire population.

Former UNIFEM employee Irene Morado Santiago was a member of the Philippine government peace panel that negotiated with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front for four years. The experience she gained from that enables her to offer practical advice to other female activists: "Gender expertise should always be strategically linked to expertise in another field. I became an expert on ceasefires. This made me valuable for men, too, and allowed me to take part in their informal meetings. And I would also advise people to focus on diversity, which is of great value to us and is definitely not the reason for our conflicts." At the initiative of the women's commission that she co-founded, women from different religions and ethnic groups joined forces and agreed on

shared positions. "We acted as if we women were negotiating the peace agenda," Irene says.

Another problem regarding the implementation of UNSCR 1325 is that much money is often spent on integrating former rebels into newly formed security apparatuses. That means the problem of militarised masculinity is perpetuated rather than resolved. The Mindanao Commission on Women therefore explicitly calls for a "demilitarisation" of society.

In contrast, female rebels are generally not sufficiently included in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes. They are also discriminated against and marginalised in many societies because in taking up arms, they have gone against their traditional female roles. Their exclusion from such programmes is not merely unfair, it is also strategically blind, as former female guerrillas who have laid down their arms have the potential to build bridges in society.

The funding criteria of international organisations are also a major stumbling block for local female activists. The bureaucracy is often too complex or time-consuming; the criteria are too inflexible; or the organisations focus on particular "fashionable" topics, thus providing funding to transitional justice projects one year and to sexualised violence projects another year. Women campaigning for peace may also be refused funding because they apply for too little money. An activist in Burundi, for example, applied to the German Embassy for funding for a drop-in centre for war refugees. She was turned down on the grounds that the Embassy did not support such small projects.

German organisations should plan and coordinate their work in post-war countries as coherently and strategically as possible, setting long-term goals. They should also work with local peace groups to set clear objectives. While this may seem obvious, unfortunately it is not standard. Many organisations do not work in a sustainable or long-term manner.

Criteria for success

We have deliberately only included success stories in this book. Our criterion was that the processes involved have gone beyond small changes and already brought about significant transformation. However, we must admit that it is not easy to define and measure the concept of "success", as progress almost always goes hand in hand with setbacks.

The Arab Spring is the clearest example of such a setback. Women campaigned side by side with men in Egypt and Tunisia and were also beaten, arrested, injured, tortured and sexually ab-

used. But the Salafists and other anti-democratic forces are doing everything they can to curtail women's rights and to prevent women from appearing in public.

But as we Germans in particular should know from the process of German unification, during the initial stage of democratisation, progressive forces can be greatly hampered and fear can block positive change. We can only hope that the current increasing strength of the Islamists and other anti-democratic forces like the military is not the final word but merely a temporary phenomenon of the transition.

There is another case in this book where it was not easy to measure "success". There are still only a few women in political positions or in parliament in Liberia; despite harsh legislation, violence against women has increased dramatically once again. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf supports repression against gays and lesbians and gives government jobs to family members. On the other hand, President Sirleaf, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate and the first democratically elected female president of an African nation, is a fierce champion of women's rights both in Liberia and abroad. Thanks to her endeavours, Liberia has the most comprehensive, fundamental and furthest-reaching National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in the world. If we think how long it took Germany to become democratic at all levels of society, including families, after 1945, and how long it took to break the silence about the country's Nazi past, then Liberia, which experienced brutal violence and extremely severe traumas, is generally heading in a very positive direction, with the exception of the points mentioned above.

Guatemala is another example. Former guerrilla Luz Méndez took part in the negotiations on the peace treaty between the government and guerrilla organisations, which was signed in 1996 – four years before UNSCR 1325 was adopted. By constantly liaising with women's groups, she was able to achieve important changes that were of benefit to women and *indígenas*. They had experienced horrific massacres and sexual violence, but not even their *compañeros* were interested in women's problems. Unfortunately, hardly any of the agreements were implemented during the following years. Violence, repression and discrimination against Maya women continued on a different level. Guatemala now has the world's highest rate of femicide, that is, the often sexually motivated murder of women and girls because of their gender.

On the other hand, a process of coming to terms with the past has now finally begun in Guatemala. Luz Méndez saw a documen-

tary film about the tribunal on "comfort women" in World War II during a medica mondiale conference in 2008. At the end of the symbolic trial, voluntary judges – both men and women – from many different countries found Japan guilty. The women who had been forced to work as prostitutes during World War II cheered the verdict and wept tears of joy at finally receiving justice. Back home in Guatemala, Luz Méndez organised a tribunal in which indigenous survivors discussed the sexual violence they had experienced. This was the first time that this topic had been publicly discussed in Guatemala and it was also an historic act of liberation.

In the meantime, the former Guatemalan dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt has been convicted of genocide, not least because of testimony of the type described above. However, the Constitutional Court of Guatemala overturned the historic verdict ten days later on the grounds that the trial had been improperly conducted. Because of time constraints, we are not able to report on the latest state of play in this case and thus on the struggle for power in this traumatised country. Instead, we decided to include an article on Claudia Paz y Paz Bailey, the courageous Guatemalan attorney general who dared to have the former dictator arrested and put on trial.

I very much hope that the stories in this book will inspire politicians and activists and encourage institutions and non-governmental organisations to take up similar activities. If so, they will have served their purpose.

Ute Scheub

A World without War Is Possible

Chapter 1:
How Women Fight for a Role in Peace Negotiations and the Punishment of War Criminals

Liberian peace women protesting against war.
Photo: Eric Kanalstein, UN Photos

Leading the Way on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 – But Still Some Way to Go

By **Tamasin Ford and Tecee Boley**

Monrovia, Liberia. Assistant Commissioner Bennetta Holder Warner sits behind her small brown desk, which is covered with books and bulging manila folders. Her crisp black uniform looks freshly made. This Liberian woman is head of the Women and Children's Protection Section, a position and unit that did not exist some years ago.

"In the past, there was no such place where women or children could lodge a complaint and seek redress," she says. "After the war, women and children were the most vulnerable group, so it was decided to establish this section specifically for their complaints."

Fourteen years of civil war in the West African state of Liberia saw some of the worst atrocities women and children have ever experienced on the African continent. According to the United Nations Mission in Liberia, more than 60 per cent of women say that they were raped during the war. Many were used as sex slaves. Some were taken to war zones to have sex with children for ritualistic purposes, while others were forced to have sex with their own children and brothers. This special police department now operating in every one of Liberia's fifteen counties was set up to deal with crimes of this nature, partly in response to United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325.

"UNSCR 1325 has had a great impact. I would say it is successful. For example, we have so many female ministers," says Assistant Commissioner Warner. "We have many female directors and even in the police we have female deputy commissioners. This shows that the resolution has had a positive impact."

Liberia is the first African country to complete a National Action Plan to implement UNSCR 1325. Adopted unanimously in 2000, the legal document calls on countries in conflict to include women in the peace-building process. It highlights the crucial role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected female

president, took office in Liberia in 2005, one of her goals was to increase the number of women in the country's security services.

A women's blockade halted the war

Liberia suffered a devastating civil war from 1989 to 2003. At the height of the conflict in 2003, two women, Leymah Gbowee, a Christian, and Asatu Bah Kenneth, a Muslim, founded the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. They invoked their faith and shared human values in order to mobilise women across churches and mosques. They managed to bring together thousands of women, all dressed in white, in the streets of Monrovia. They presented their demands to the then president Charles Taylor and met rebel leaders to pressure them to enter into peace talks.

The women mobilised hundreds of refugee women in camps in Ghana in 2003 and persuaded them to go to the House of Peace Talks in Accra. They joined forces with their colleagues from the Manu River Women's Peace Network, who were inside the building as delegates. They staged a sit-in, barricaded the exits and threatened to prevent the negotiators from leaving the building until they had reached an agreement.

That was the end of the war. Two weeks later, a peace agreement was signed.

Leymah Gbowee, the Christian leader of the women's action group and chief organiser of the blockade, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her actions in 2011. Unfortunately, the jury in Oslo did not consider Asatu Bah Kenneth, the Muslim co-founder of Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, for the prize.

Women subsequently assisted in disarming the rebels and fought for a women's quota of 30 per cent in parliament. Without them, Johnson Sirleaf would not have won the 2005 elections. Immediately after her election, "Ma Ellen", as the president is widely known, pushed through drastic anti-rape legislation. An exclusively female UN police force from India is responsible for security in the capital of Monrovia and for the recruitment of female police officers.

Number of female police officers increasing

And the numbers speak for themselves. Some years ago, one in 20 police personnel was a woman. Now nearly one in five is female. Less than one in ten women make up the armed forces, but that is a big improvement from one in one hundred in 2005.

But there are still many challenges facing the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Liberia. Protecting women and girls from

sexual violence and violence in general is part of its mandate. However, it is often hard to find access to justice in rural areas.

In Nimba County, in the north of the country, a fragile 27-year-old woman called Hawa walks slowly out of her small concrete hut, bent over her stomach. Sitting is difficult and painful for her. Hawa, which is not her real name, gave birth two months ago. But just four weeks later, she was attacked in her home and gang raped.

"At around 10 o'clock on a Thursday night I was lying down inside with my baby and my big sister when the armed robbers came," says the young mother, as her eyes fill with tears. "First they took two big rocks and threw them over our house."

Hawa takes a seat made of hard brown wood and continues her story.

"They broke down the door with a gun," she says. "There were seven of them. They put everyone at gunpoint. They came and took my baby from my back. One person wanted to shoot me and the other four said, 'Let's carry her into the palm grove before we kill her.' When they carried me they started raping me."

Hawa looks down at the ground. Her braids of corn rows are slowly unravelling with one plait still firm in the middle of her head. Her house is on a hill top, surrounded by lush green banana and palm trees, and is less than five minutes' walk from the nearest police station.

"I called the police, but they did not come to my rescue," she says. "I feel because I'm not a bigger somebody in the community that is why they didn't help me."

Poverty is a driving factor

Hawa's story is not an isolated one. Deddeh Kwekwe, the gender-based violence coordinator at the Ministry of Gender and Development, says that access to justice is difficult for women all over the country. She says that alleged perpetrators have started to lie about their age as they know there aren't enough juvenile courts for them to be tried in. Police aren't given the right equipment to carry out their jobs. They can't reach the survivors and they don't have the cars or the financial resources to respond quickly in an emergency. Poverty is a driving factor.

"We found out that people can't even get to court because they have no transport," she says. The Liberian justice minister is a woman, but Kwekwe worries that, especially in rural areas, men have total control over the legal system.

"I feel the system is male-dominated because most of these people are men. The judges, the lawyers and the jurors are all

men," she says. "They are looking at it from a point of view that says 'This is a man. Why would I want to send this man to jail? He is a man like me.'"

Back at the central police station in Monrovia, the sound of the generator that provides electricity to Assistant Commissioner Warner's office penetrates the atmosphere. A white lace curtain hangs at the only window. She points out that there is still a long way to go before Liberian women truly have full access to justice in Liberia.

"There are women who still do not want to be open and complain," she says. "Since we established the section, it has proved hard for Liberian women to come and complain about their husband or for children to complain about a parent."

All over Liberia, stigma and discrimination against women remains a problem for the success of UNSCR 1325.

A female police detective, who prefers to remain anonymous, says, "People are not in our area to promote females." Although she works in a senior position, she says this is not recognised in her salary. "If you are not connected with the boss, who is a man, you earn less. And a connection may be a friend, a loving friend. That means the man should be your lover."

And this is seen in all walks of life in Liberia. Poverty, a lack of access to education and low economic power put women in a difficult position when it comes to means of survival. They are forced into situations where they have no choice but to use their bodies to pay for food or school fees or to get exam grades or promotions. A recent article in one of the capital's newspapers found that children as young as ten were having sex with men for as little as three cents.

"You have to know what you are doing"

"But there is hope," says Assistant Commissioner Warner. "You know it is a challenge to work with men, I can tell you that," she says. "There are many times that you feel frustrated, you are intimidated, but you have to be firm and stand on your feet and know what you are doing and what you stand for. Once you are determined and you have that passion for your work, you can do it."

Her office is small and noisy. Every five minutes there is a knock on the door, perhaps someone demanding to see her or just an officer who wants to use the only printer in the department. Photographs of police officers, most of them women, adorn the walls. "I can see a big change. Before the war, most of the women

used to sit at home. Our mothers and fathers only used to educate boys," she says.

And it is true. Women are making their mark in Liberia. With a fiercely bold female president who is determined to implement UNSCR 1325, there is a strong sense that life is changing for women here. "Now people are interested in educating girls so they can become somebody tomorrow, instead of being in the home cooking, washing and taking care of the house," says the Assistant Commissioner.

And that vibe of pride and determination doesn't just emanate from her office. Walking out of the crowded department, another female police officer adds, "The women now know that anything men can do, they can do too."

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Tamasin Ford is a BBC reporter and media trainer in Liberia. Tecee Boley is a fellow of New Narratives, a project supporting female reporters in Liberia.

Rwanda: The Village of Hope for survivors of rape committed during the Rwandan genocide. Photo: UN Photos

Women's Post-genocide Success

By **Hope Mbabazi**

Kigali, Rwanda. Rwanda is a landlocked country in central eastern Africa that has become famous in recent years for having the highest rate of female members of parliament in the world – 56.3 per cent since 2008. The economy has been growing every year since the 1994 genocide when 800,000 people were killed during a period of just three months. But the secret to success here has had far less to do with the country's temperate climate and fertile soil than with a group of people who have emerged as Rwanda's most potent economic force: women.

In the meantime, the country has conceivably become the world's leading example of how empowering women can fundamentally transform post-conflict economies and fight the cycle of poverty. This is particularly underlined by how women have got involved in all sectors of business. In the capital city of Kigali, many women work. Women are increasingly becoming shop owners and now own about the half of the shops in the capital's central business district, according to the City Women's Council.

But it is not only in Kigali that women are showing their expertise and ability to lead. Deep down in the eastern province near Akagera National Park lies the town of Ndego, which is home to approximately 50,000 people. When trying their hands at farming for the first time, most of the women in Ndego were far faster learners than the men were. Officials say that the women showed more willingness than men to embrace new techniques aimed at improving quality and profit.

The development of female entrepreneurship in Kigali and across Rwanda in industries ranging from agribusiness to tourism has proved to be a bonus for efforts to rebuild the nation and fight poverty. Rwandan officials say that women invest profits in the family, refurbish homes, improve nutrition, increase savings rates and spend on children's education to a greater extent than men do.

This shows a big shift in gender economics in Rwanda's post-genocide society, one that is changing the way younger generations of males view their mothers and sisters, while providing a powerful lesson for other developing nations struggling to rebuild from the ashes of conflict.

"Rwanda's economy has risen up from the genocide and prospered greatly on the backs of our women," says Agnes Matilda Kalibata, minister of agriculture. "In this process, Rwanda has changed forever and we are becoming a nation that understands that there are enormous financial benefits to equality."

Women are far less likely to default on loans than men are. We visited the home of a fisherman whose fishing boat was recently seized by microfinance officials after he failed to pay instalments on a $200 bank loan. "He spent the money on women and alcohol," says his loan officer, Alfred Rukundo.

Further up the road, we arrived at the house of Yvonne Mukarutamu. The 40-year-old widow of an army officer and mother of four obtained a $100 loan from a well-established microfinance scheme (Duterimbere) in 2007 with a plan to support her family. She paid back the loan within a year. In 2009, she took out a $500 loan to open a maize flour mill. Her business provides the family with an income of a $650 per month.

"They say that women care more about the family, but I do not know if that is true," Mukarutamu said. "I think it has more to do with control. We know how to survive when men despair."

Maybe it should come as no surprise that women have been the solution in reconstructing Rwanda. In the efforts to reduce poverty in the developing world, many leading experts have said that women simply make better investments.

In India's great economic transformation of the past years, states that have the highest percentage of women in the labour force have grown the fastest and have seen the largest reductions in poverty, according to the World Bank.

Testing ground

For the most horrific reasons, Rwanda became a testing ground for such theories after the 1994 genocide. The massacre of ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus by Hutu militias, and the subsequent reprisals, left Rwanda with a population that was 60 per cent female and 40 per cent male by the time the dead were buried.

Several studies have found that between 250,000 and 500,000 girls and women were sexually abused. Many women also suffered the loss of their husbands and found themselves in the role of breadwinners who also had to care for children who had been orphaned during the genocide.

With thousands more men jailed for war crimes or living as refugees in neighbouring Congo, women, at first by default, took on roles in business and politics. Although women had long en-

joyed a relatively higher social status in Rwanda than in other African nations, their property rights were still very limited and female entrepreneurs were rare, if not non-existent.

That changed rapidly, particularly in agriculture where many women were required to take over farms. They found support in the large number of foreign organisations that rushed into Rwanda following the genocide.

The recognition that reforms were required at all levels of society had dawned on the Rwandan government even before UN Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was adopted in 2000. By 1999, reforms were passed enabling women to inherit property, something that proved vitally important to female farmers.

At the same time, women began rising to higher ranks of political power. Today they hold some 56 per cent of the seats in Rwanda's parliament, the highest percentage in the world, higher than in the Scandinavian countries. The Rwandan constitution stipulates that at least 30 per cent of the members of parliament must be women, and there is also a female quota for local and regional councils. Women also make up 40 per cent of President Paul Kagame's cabinet, and hold the top jobs in the ministries of commerce, agriculture, infrastructure and foreign affairs.

Success in economics mirrored the rise of women in politics. Today, about half of Rwandan businesses are owned by women compared with, for instance, 18 per cent in Congo. Rwanda has one of the highest ratios of female entrepreneurs in Africa. In October 2008, a report by the International Finance Corporation, a member of the World Bank Group, estimated that 58 per cent of enterprises in the informal sector were headed by women.

Fast recovery

At the same time, Rwanda has engineered a surprisingly fast economic recovery. Since the wide-scale destruction of 1994, which left many farms and businesses deserted, damaged or in ruins, Rwanda's economy has tripled in size and grown at an average rate of six per cent per year since 2004.

Michel Murindahabi, Ndego coffee producer's executive director, says that male coffee growers in the cooperative have been too rigid in their ways. "They keep saying, 'We've done it our way all our lives, our fathers and grandfathers did it this way, so why should I change and use your way to grow coffee now?'"

He says, "The women are different. They have not done it before, so they are adapting and growing better-quality coffee. That also means they are making more money than the men are."

Abena Mukamana is a case in point. She now employs six workers and produces four times as much coffee as her father and husband did. They sold their poorer-quality beans for local consumption. Her finer grade is largely for export, roasted overseas and sold in coffee shops and specialty stores around the world.

"I'm proud of this," Mukamana says. "I never would have thought that I would be in a situation like this." Her total family income is five times what it previously was – earnings that she has used to improve family life. For example, she has renovated the family home, a modest space of plain cement walls.

"I think that boys and girls are different than they used to be," says Patrick Shema, a secondary school pupil. "Today, women are in business; before, if a woman had some money, she would have had to give it to the man. Women could not compete against a man. But now they are competing and doing better."

Perhaps more importantly for Abena Mukamana, who only attended primary school, is that 19-year-old Alice Mukakalisa, her oldest female charge, is set to graduate from high school this year. Mukakalisa hopes to become an accountant and Mukamana has promised to pay for her higher education.

Nevertheless, by Western standards, women still have a long way to go in Rwanda. Many of the women in Ndego whose husbands are alive are expected to ask for permission before engaging in any form of business. But some of the women who inherited land from genocide victims have been able to use the profits from farming or leasing the land to gain a measure of financial independence.

By all accounts, initiatives by Rwanda's women are providing great encouragement to "women from other parts of Africa who are taking on more and more leadership roles" says Dr Karambu Ringera, the founder of International Peace Initiatives, a global network of individuals and organisations seeking innovative and sustainable methods of overcoming the devastation of disease, conflict and poverty in the world today through education, enterprise and empowerment.

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Hope Mbabazi is a Rwandan journalist.

The Breakthrough for Women Only Came after the War

By **Sham Jeanne Hakizimana**

Bujumbura, Burundi. The term "umunyakigo" in Kirundi – Burundi's national language – literally means somebody in the backyard and is used to designate a girl. This word is a clear indication of the place of girls and women in traditional Burundi society. They were totally excluded from public life, the strict preserve of men, who would speak for them at all times.

"When a man says he will first think before taking an important decision, he generally wants to consult his wife, but he will never admit it," says Deo Bigirimana, a member of the Bashingantahe (Wiseman) institution in Bujumbura, the Burundi capital.

Although women's roles were not valued, they nevertheless acted as advisors.

Throughout history, Burundi women kept this role in the background in spite of their active fight for gender equality. For instance, until very recently, out of more than 20 ministers in the Burundi government, there was only one woman, who invariably represented the Ministry of Women.

Now Burundi women can look back and see that they have come a long way. They have made great strides towards gender equality, even if there is still much to be done.

The decade-long civil war left deep and unhealed wounds, but it also acted as an eye-opener for women, allowing them to leave their role of eternal victims to become agents of their own destiny and key players in the reconciliation process.

Pélagie Nduwayo, head of the organisation Solidarité pour Aider les Sinistrés Burundais (SASB), recalls that at a site for internally displaced persons (IDPs) one day, she felt shattered when she saw the conditions of absolute poverty in which women and children were living. "I decided to do something about it. We could not stand still while women and children were dying," she recalls.

Women from Burundi remain optimistic despite the difficulties they face.
Photo: Martine Perret, UN Photos

Reconciliation through fighting poverty

With a group of friends, Nduwayo set up the organisation in order to provide food and other assistance to those groups of people. She also helped children, most of them war orphans, to return to school.

This was not easy from the start, since the division between Hutus and Tutsis was so large that it was a huge challenge to bring them together. But through income-generating activities, Hutus and Tutsis learned to live together again and to share the results of their work without any ethnic factors.

"Now I am overjoyed that the Hutus and Tutsis I work with have understood that the main issue is not being a Hutu or a Tutsi – all that matters is their means of livelihood," Nduwayo says.

For her, true reconciliation will be achieved through the fight against poverty. "How can you feel secure when you are hungry? Income-generating activities have helped people to regain their dignity," she says.

With so many kinds of violence targeting women in particular, female leaders felt deeply concerned and decided to take action to protect the survivors of rape.

Mireille Niyonzima had a good job at the UN Office for Human Rights, but she did not hesitate to leave it in order to devote her time and energy to ADDF, the association for the defence and protection of women rights, which focuses on gender-based violence.

Niyonzima was born in Kamenge, one of Bujumbura's poor suburbs, where she witnessed many forms of violence against women.

"I saw women beaten, going naked in the streets. I remember acting more than once as a messenger for my mother, who would send me to our neighbours with a bowl of food because a woman was unable to cook for her children after a night of beatings. I grew up with this frustration and concern, and with a strong urge to do something about it," she vividly remembers.

This motivation increased during the crisis as women were systematically raped.

"I saw many cases of violence. There were systematic rapes, in the suburbs, in the resettlement camps, everywhere. Imagine that in the camp, a woman was for instance forced to have sexual intercourse with the head of the camp to get food aid she was entitled to. I felt I could give even my life to save such women," Niyonzima says.

It took time and energy for civil society organisations and particularly for women's organisations to put gender-based violence on the government agenda and have such crimes tackled.

Gender-based violence was indeed initially reduced, but with the penal code enacted in 2009, sexual violence has been criminalised thanks to campaigns by women's organisations.

However, these organisations deplore the absence of active prevention measures and the inertia of the institutions in charge of tackling such crimes, such as the police and the judiciary.

According to Niyonzima, the absence of specific laws on gender-based violence is also a serious loophole.

The association of women lawyers AFJ says that "the penal code did not take into account all forms of gender-based violence. The prevention, protection and compensation of victims are not even considered."

To this end, the AFJ drafted a law on the prevention, protection and repression of gender-based violence to be endorsed by the parliament.

Women as conflict mediators

The war also acted as a catalyst for women to demand a greater share of and representation in the country's institutions. The war had left women on their own, compelling them to play roles traditionally held by men.

"In some suburbs, women settled conflicts, a role they could never have dreamt about before," says Georgette Mahwera, head of the association Abaniki in the Kinama district of Bujumbura.

This reassured them of their ability to play men's roles and proved their skills to the rest of the world. In 2009, the umbrella organisation of women's organisations CAFOB even organised a campaign called Arashoboye, which campaigned for gender equity in all decision-making bodies.

Women demonstrated expertise, but this did not automatically open doors for them.

Goreth Ndacayisaba, head of the organisation Dushirehamwe, remembers that even during the Arusha negotiations when the time was ripe for reconciliation, "it was a big fight to get women represented".

"Imagine that there was no woman even in the peace consolidation steering committee. It is sad that women are generally forgotten during the phase of conception and planning. We struggle to get women represented," she says.

However, the insistence of women finally bore fruit since under the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, a female quota of 30 per cent was introduced in all of the country's institutions, a provision that was subsequently included in the national constitution. "We were able to push women's rights through during the peace process," says Imelda Nzirorera, who was an observer at the negotiations along with a dozen other women.

The same enthusiasm to integrate women was noticeable in the 2005 elections. Apart from the 31.5 per cent of women in the national assembly, and the 35 per cent in the upper chamber, two of the country's five top officials (the head of state, the speakers of the two chambers of parliament and the two deputy presidents) were women, that is, the speaker of the national assembly and the second deputy president.

The representation of women increased in the parliament and government following the 2010 elections. According to Mireille Niyonzima, there is strong female participation at the grassroots level in the electoral process. Women were in charge of political parties' propaganda and campaigns at this level. "For example, women ran for elections in ten of the 13 constituencies in Bujumbura, and were elected," she says.

"If she [a woman] is elected, it means they believe in her. A woman is no longer afraid of speaking out in public in her village. This is a significant step, since if they [women] are elected, they can boost change and mobilise others," she adds.

In spite of this large representation of women in decision-making bodies, women feel that their representatives cannot foster change. The percentage of women in the government has decreased from 35 to 30 per cent. Women do not hold any posi-

tions with decision-making authority in the security or banking sectors or in the public prosecution department.

According to Goreth Ndacayisaba, "there is no influence at all" despite women's representation in decision-making bodies. This is because, as Niyonzima explains, political party leaders are reluctant to involve women in higher echelons and prepare them for the positions they will take on in the future.

"Men are afraid to involve women for fear that they will dominate," she underlined.

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Sham Jeanne Hakizimana works for Burundi's national radio and TV.

Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, who won the 2007 Right Livelihood Award, died in a car accident in 2011.
Photo: Right Livelihood Foundation

Taking on Men's Role as Peace Builders Is Not a Bed of Roses

In memoriam Dekha Ibrahim Abdi (1964-2011)

By **Lillian Aluanga**

The Kenyan peace activist Dekha Ibrahim Abdi ended several armed conflicts using her sophisticated mediation method. In recognition of her work, she won the 2007 Right Livelihood Award and the 2009 Hessian Peace Prize. She was also nominated for the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize as one of the 1,000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe. In July 2011, Abdi was travelling to a peace conference when her car collided with a truck. She and her husband were killed in the accident. Abdi is survived by her four children. In order to honour Abdi's work, which is now being continued by other people, we have added information on her mediation method to this portrait by Lillian Aluanga, which was written a year before Abdi's death.

Nairobi, Kenya. A wedding reception, a deserted home and the incessant rattle of gunfire are what it would take to change the life of a woman living in Kenya's arid north.

The year was 1993 and a pilot working with UNICEF had just been shot dead in the dusty border town of Wajir, in the northeast of the country, fanning the aura of frustration enveloping the town.

The pilot's killing was one of several pointers to rising insecurity in an area already grappling with incessant drought and conflict.

So when Dekha Ibrahim Abdi arrived at her house one evening to find it deserted by her mother and daughter, she knew it had to do with the drums of war that had been sounding between the Ajuran and Degodia clans.

A political contest had pitted the two clans against each other, with tensions rising as the by-election date for the Wajir West constituency seat – now known as Wajir South following administrative changes – inched closer.

"I knew my family had sought refuge at a friend's home," says Abdi, a mother of four.

A 6 pm curfew had been imposed on the town and Abdi, then an employee of Nomadic Primary Healthcare, had little time to attend a wedding reception that would change her life.

"I was determined not to let the violence stop me from leading a normal life," says Abdi, 46, a Right Livelihood Award laureate and one of the 1,000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe who were collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005.

Abdi's harmless demeanour as she sips her tea in a quiet corner of a Nairobi restaurant belies the quiet strength that has come in handy during negotiations. She raises her right hand to adjust the silver pin fastened to her green hijab and excuses herself as her phone rings.

The call is from a peace negotiator in Mogadishu who is desperately in need of Abdi's help to get contacts in Nairobi. Such calls are common for Abdi, whose first name means "Gift from God", and could alter plans for her day which typically begins at 4 am, with prayer and reading of the Quran.

Her days are usually busy, with 200 a year devoted to salaried work and 100 to voluntary activities, which include serving on the Wajir Peace University Trust.

"People were mingling freely at the wedding reception. There were no clan differences, just smiling faces," says Abdi. Judging from the small talk at the event, Abdi discovered she wasn't the only one frustrated by the cycle of violence in the area.

A challenge thrown at her during the ceremony would lay a foundation for the establishment of Wajir Women for Peace. "I was sharing a table with the head of an NGO. He pledged his support if women would take up the challenge to promote peace," Abdi recalls.

But there were hurdles to overcome.

Successful peace women

The Kenyan government largely ignored the country's conflict-ridden northeast, which had taken in many refugees from the civil war in Somalia following the Battle of Mogadishu. In this region, peace building was considered a male role, best left to businessmen, religious leaders and the provincial administration. As is still the case, women's representation at decision-making levels in regional, national and international institutions and mechanisms for prevention, management and resolution of conflict were far from impressive.

With the curfew still imposed on Wajir town and its environs, Abdi, like the subjects of her favourite autobiographies, Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, devised a mobilisation plan.

"We would meet between 5 pm and 5.45 pm and visit homes in the villages to recruit more women," she says. The response was encouraging. Between June and July, the group's numbers swelled to about 70 women, who also worked as "market media representatives".

In a society where women were largely overlooked on matters of conflict resolution, the group offered to share information with the provincial administration on condition that the security concerns would be addressed.

Often the information was pieced together from marketplaces – usually centres where news of an impending clash between rival clans would surface.

However, there was also some external help. Suzie Cohen, a German doctor working for UNICEF, and a Kenyan woman, Kadija Awale, who had worked in Mogadishu and witnessed the disintegration of Somalia, also joined the group on peace missions.

Awale's pleas not to turn Wajir into another Mogadishu worked, and more women, aware that they and their children suffered the most in any conflict, backed Abdi's initiative.

Abdi mellows as she talks about her children, three daughters and a son aged between 19 and 10, and her husband Abdinoor, an ophthalmologist.

"It's never easy being away from them, but I make some time for the family, encourage the children to ask questions about my trips and call them every day whenever I am away," Abdi says.

By 1995, her group was collaborating with both the state and non-state actors. These activities later gave rise to the Wajir Peace Development Committee.

"The state knew how to use violence to bring about peace, but it did not know how to bring about peace without violence," Abdi says.

A fresh alternative

For a region long accustomed to military presence, Abdi's approach of bringing together different clans and arbiters to resolve conflict was a fresh alternative that began to bear fruit.

"We used local level partnership to negotiate the return of stolen items transported across the border. We got better results by engaging with the community instead of sending in the armed forces," she says.

At the Mandera livestock market, the approach was the same. The group used mediators to resolve conflicts which could easily arise from a business deal gone sour and turn into a gunfight in the villages.

In the meantime, Abdi was spending a lot of time travelling, as her concept of peace building and her crisis analyses were increasingly in demand abroad. She presented her model for resolving conflicts at the local level in Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, Israel, Jordan, Cambodia, the Netherlands, Palestine, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Uganda.

"Fundamentally, it is important to react appropriately and to take the complexity of the conflict causes into account," she explains. "It's like building a house – you don't start with the roof, but rather with the foundations."

Two basic principles of Abdi's work become clear here. The first is her focus on rebuilding relationships: "The cultural method that we have used in Kenya involves rebuilding a relationship between the victim and the aggressor," she says. "It is important to see both sides' pain and to find a way to heal and rebuild their relationship. You can do this by speaking separately with each side in private and then bringing them together in a public dialogue."

The second basic principle involves establishing a "network of networks" of mediators and arbiters. This model can transform conflicts in a non-violent way far more quickly and effectively than other structures can, particularly in tense situations. In Wajir, the "inner" network comprised multipliers from various sectors of society who were willing to negotiate and included members of women's groups, businesspeople, government officials, and religious and traditional leaders. The network met once a month to analyse the situation and to intervene in conflicts through mediation and other activities.

A presidential election was held in Kenya in December 2007. Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner, but international election observers and the party of the defeated candidate Raila Odinga said that the poll had been fraudulent. Ethnic conflict broke out as a result at the beginning of 2008. Over 1,500 people were killed; 600,000 people were displaced; and countless women were raped.

When chaos broke out, Abdi was called to chair Concerned Citizens for Peace. This Nairobi-based initiative was also a "network of networks" comprised of mediators and people who were willing to negotiate. The organisation played a crucial role in ending the violent conflict. It supported mediation and dialogue

processes, including talks between women from different ethnic groups in Great Rift Valley, where the clashes were particularly fierce. The women promised to campaign for local reconciliation and healing as "agents of change".

The network was active in all directions: "upstream" with representatives of the government, security apparatus and media and "downstream" with grass roots organisations. All of the participants had the opportunity to analyse the conflict, grieve and reflect on their own actions and beliefs during an open forum, which met for two or three hours every day. In January 2008, this open forum launched an action programme called "The Citizens' Agenda for Peace", which was very widely discussed online, and in diplomatic circles and interreligious forums.

This prepared the ground for a political solution. With former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan serving as a mediator, the two rival presidential candidates Kibaki and Odinga finally agreed to form a coalition government and to draw up a new constitution. Kibaki was appointed president, while Odinga became prime minister.

There is still a long way to go before UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is fully implemented

Kenya, Abdi says, has come a long way from the 1990s in implementing UNSCR 1325, but adds that more remains to be done.

"It is now possible to talk openly about conflict resolution and peace. Women are getting more roles in peace processes, as shown by the inclusion of two ministers Dr Sally Kosgei (agriculture) and the then justice minister, Martha Karua, in the team that brokered the 2008 deal that birthed a coalition government," says Abdi.

Currently, every district in the country has a peace committee, where it is mandatory to have women representatives.

Abdi explains that her model for peace building includes appropriate responses and uses multiple options to address conflict. "The contexts may differ, but the principles are the same. It's also important to address the underlying causes of the conflict," she adds.

She speaks of the 2008 deal and describes Kenya's new constitution, which entrenches greater representation of women in political, economic and social spheres for the first time, as a design for the future, but warns that transition may not be easy. The deal, she says, was an important instrument that requires governmental commitment and a political will for implementation.

"Ours was a ceasefire agreement, different from Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which addresses issues like cessation," she says.

Outside her peace-building work, Abdi loves spending time with her family and confesses to having a soft spot for vanilla ice cream and seafood. But lately she has also been on a spiritual journey and has been writing poetry in Somali and English. "I have about ten pieces, but am yet to be published," says Abdi, who admits to having a ferocious appetite for books. "Sometimes they form the bulk of my luggage and will include autobiographies and writings on peace building," she says.

Abdi's methods for activating grassroots organisations can also be used in the fight against global warming. "If enough towns and religious communities implement environmentally friendly strategies, politicians will follow," Abdi says. "There will simply be no change from above. Politicians do not lead the way. Society leads and politicians follow."

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Lillian Aluanga is a Kenyan journalist reporting for Kenyan and foreign media.

A Soft-spoken Lady Stands Up Against Impunity

By **Julio Godoy**

Guatemala City, Guatemala. When Claudia Paz y Paz was preparing to enrol at the faculty of law in Guatemala in August 1983, the Central American country did not even have a constitution. Guatemala had been ruled by military dictatorships practically since its independence from Spain in 1821 and could in no way be called a nation of law. Only 18 months earlier, in March 1982, a military coup, led by the messianic General Efraín Ríos Montt, had ended the electoral masquerade the country had been living through since yet another coup d'état in 1954. Studying law in Guatemala? What for?

Thirty years later, Dr Claudia Paz y Paz is answering the question through her deeds after having qualified as a criminal law specialist, who in her teens was nurtured by the ideal of the rule of law not only because her grandfather had been a respected Guatemalan lawyer, but also because several members of her family were staunch opponents of the dictatorship.

Since December 2010, Paz y Paz has been serving as the first female attorney general of Guatemala. Under her leadership, the attorney general's office has been pivotal to important judiciary investigations into some of the most notorious criminal cases in the country's recent history. In fact, since she assumed office, over 60 people belonging to the Mexican drug cartel Los Zetas have been sentenced, and several other local drug lords have been arrested.

Paz y Paz has dared to do even more than tackle organised crime. With her at the top, the attorney general's office has successfully prosecuted military officers and soldiers for massacres perpetrated during Ríos Montt's short, bloody rule. In 2012, a court sentenced four soldiers to 6,060 years in prison for killing 201 people in the town of Dos Erres in 1982. It was the first ever prosecution of a civil war era massacre. Early in 2013, Paz y Paz completed the investigation into Ríos Montt's direct responsibility for such crimes. The attorney general has also been able to clarify recent cases of police brutality, political conspiracies and organised crime.

Dr Claudia Paz y Paz, attorney general of Guatemala.
Photo: Danilo Valladares

As the Nobel Women's Initiative wrote in its proposal to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Dr Claudia Paz y Paz, the Guatemalan attorney general's office is pursuing "both the organised criminals of today and the perpetrators of massive human rights abuses in the past" under her leadership.

In May 2013, a local court found Ríos Montt guilty of genocide against indigenous Ixil Mayans during his 1982 – 1983 rule and sentenced him to 80 years in prison. During the trial, dozens of Ixil witnesses testified that the military had killed, tortured and raped the indigenous population under the direct command of Ríos Montt.

Even though the Guatemalan constitutional court, which is mostly composed of judges loyal to Ríos Montt and the economic elite he represents, overruled the sentence for alleged formal errors and ordered a new trial, the investigation and prosecution of the dictator were a unique act of justice in Guatemala. For the first time in the country's brutal history, a head of state responsible for crimes against humanity committed against his own people had been tried for genocide by the otherwise notoriously inept national judicial system.

Paz y Paz was backed in her resolve by solid knowledge gained among things by earning a Ph.D. in human rights and criminal law from the famous University of Salamanca, Spain, and serving as a prosecutor in a violent Guatemalan province and as a legal advisor to the archbishop's office in the Human Rights Office of Guatemala. She founded the Guatemala Institute for Comparative Criminal Studies and has been a legal consultant to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights.

In a country such as Guatemala, where dozens of murders are committed every day, where drug cartels control large chunks of the national territory, and death squads constitute a structural instrument of political hegemony, Claudia Paz y Paz led the prosecution against the dictator and other criminals in an act of unflinching courage and of absolute commitment to justice.

Unsurprisingly, both Paz y Paz personally, and the attorney general's office in general, have become targets of intimidation campaigns. Recently, a prosecutor was tortured and assassinated. Paz y Paz has also received threats.

"So far we've encountered three types of attack," Paz y Paz said in an interview. "One is the series of motions that [were] filed simply to prevent [Ríos Montt's] trial from taking place. Another, the one we're most worried about, is that trumped-up criminal charges have been filed against magistrates on the Supreme Court, against me, and against members of my family. And the

third is that there is a highly orchestrated campaign in the media to discredit the work we're doing. People don't understand that we're only doing our constitutional duty and they try to portray it as an ideological issue."

The fierce anti-communist economic elite of the country claims no genocide or other crimes were committed in Guatemala during the civil war, and that the military campaign of scorched earth and assassinations and abductions of opposition, union and peasant leaders constituted legitimate acts. It attacks Paz y Paz for her efforts to investigate these crimes and to condemn those responsible for them.

And yet Paz y Paz and her team continue doing their work. "As the attorney general's office, we have a constitutional obligation to prosecute crimes, especially serious crimes against life, as in [the Ríos Montt] case, and the other serious human rights violations that occurred during the war. For us, it is very important that we do our job properly because it legitimises both our own role and that of the justice system in general. If serious crimes like these are not brought to trial, the public loses confidence in the justice system."

A very important step towards the rule of law

Paz y Paz calls the case against Ríos Montt "a very important step forward in terms of strengthening the rule of law in the country. It's a very strong message that these serious crimes will be prosecuted regardless of who the perpetrator and the victims are. It also says that, at last, the courtroom is the place to discuss things as important as the criminal liability of top state officials and in this case, former officials."

To do that, the attorney general relies on the cooperation of victims and witnesses of crimes. "We have to convince victims and witnesses that they are our indispensable allies in combating impunity," the attorney general's office emphasises in its strategic analysis of its own duties. A second institutional challenge is the constant training of prosecutors and investigators both to "have the technical ability to solve cases", but also "as a body committed to fighting impunity".

"At the same time, in Guatemala we've had access to forensic investigations which permit the identification of people via DNA," Paz y Paz says. "Various individuals have been identified. People thought to be disappeared have now been identified thanks to DNA."

The army and police have unintentionally helped the attorney general. Both institutions documented the crimes committed

during the civil war in a secret archive, which was accidentally revealed in 2005. These files have served to solve political crimes committed by police and military forces, such as the abduction and murder of union leader Fernando García.

Asked about the legacy of the attorney general office's work, Paz y Paz says, "that our citizens understand that nobody is above the law; that people can't commit these serious crimes and expect them to go unpunished."

(August 2013)

Julio Godoy is a freelance Guatemalan journalist working for several international media and an expert on his country.

Luz Méndez was a pioneer of UNSCR 1325 before it even existed. Photo: private photo

A Pioneer of UN Security Council Resolution 1325

Interview with Luz Méndez, women's rights activist

By **Julio Godoy**

Guatemala City, Guatemala. The signing of a peace accord in Guatemala in 1996, ending 36 years of civil war with 200,000 fatalities and over a million displaced persons out of a population of less than six million at that time, was a huge commitment. At the time, the government and guerrillas agreed on a fiscal reform that would allow the state to collect the financial resources to launch a development programme to overcome the severest poverty. The agreement also made official the state's commitment to a programme of rural development aimed at improving the living conditions of the majority of the country's population, Indians of Mayan origin. Furthermore, the agreement sanctioned women's rights to participate in the political process and to enjoy special protection from violence, marginalisation and poverty.

Credit for the inclusion of women's rights in the agreement goes to Luz Méndez Gutiérrez, who participated in the Guatemalan peace negotiations as the only female member of the delegation from Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), the coalition of four guerrilla groups who fought against the army. Investigations by Guatemala's Historical Clarification Commission, which was supported by the UN, showed that the army was responsible for 80 per cent of the forced disappearances.

Méndez is regarded as a pioneer of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 since before the resolution existed. She is now president of the Advisory Council to the National Union of Guatemalan Women, an association that promotes women's leadership, equitable political participation and the dissemination of the peace accords. From 2005 to 2008 she coordinated the Consortium of Women as Agents of Change, which helped to empower women who had survived sexual violence during the country's armed conflict and to start a process of psychosocial healing. Méndez also participated in the Burundi peace process throughout the last decade as part of the UN team of gender experts whose mission was to advise on the incorporation of women's rights in the process.

How do you rate the fulfilment of the conditions established in the peace accord?

Méndez: First of all, I want to emphasise that the Guatemalan peace accord was pioneering in including the protection and empowerment of women and their participation in peace negotiations and in the political process in general. The UN General Assembly only adopted UNSCR 1325, which calls for "increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts" in 2000, that is, four years after the Guatemalan peace agreement established such representation and participation as part of the political process. I took part in the debates at the UN ahead of the ratification of UNSCR 1325 as a witness and actor in the Guatemalan process.

On the other hand, the fulfilment of the peace accord in Guatemala is far from satisfactory. Women continue to have very limited access to public positions. Actually, this aspect is worse than before the agreements of 1996. At the moment, only 12 per cent of the members of the national parliament are women, compared with 13 per cent before the peace agreements. No woman holds a leading position in the government today. Such marginalisation of women from the political process is an insult to us Guatemalan women. It is also absurd, given that Guatemalan women now have the highest professional qualifications in the history of the country.

In addition, Guatemalan women are victims of rising levels of violence, which is almost unequalled in the world. This violence takes various forms – from sexual violence to murders of hundreds of women every year, what we in Guatemala call *feminicidio*, that is, femicide.

What good have the peace agreements of 1996 brought about for Guatemalan women?

In the past years, we have come to learn that it won't be possible to implement the agreements without political pressure exerted by organised activism by women and by civil society in general. In that sense, the most remarkable progress in the defence and protection of women's rights in Guatemala is that women have become organised. In recent years, we Guatemalan women have been able to create organisations such as *Foro Nacional de la Mujer* – the National Forum of Women – and the *Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena* –

the Ombudsman for Indigenous Women. We are now able to provide legal counsel to women and to encourage them to stand up for their rights.

Can one say that the violence against women and the political marginalisation of women is a reaction by the most conservative forces of society against the political militancy of women?

There are multiple and complex reasons for the dreadful situation faced by Guatemalan women today. Guatemala has always been a patriarchal society. Furthermore, the capitalist economic structure that prevails in the country creates conditions of extreme social and economic inequality which marginalise large sectors of society. Millions of Guatemalans live under conditions of extreme poverty. This lack of opportunities encourages crime and violence and reinforces patriarchy. In recent years, Guatemala has also become a haven for drugs traffickers, who fundamentally add to the traditional violence and criminality in the country. Women are the victims of all these factors – of patriarchy and of violence rooted in economic and social inequality and drugs trafficking.

If your analysis is correct, and given the stubborn opposition by Guatemala's ruling class to reforms of the economic system, what reasons do you have to expect that the peace agreements will ever be fulfilled and the rights of women fully recognised and practised in the near future?

Our hope stems from women's capacity to organise and to demand and fight for their rights. Improvements are being made as a result of the permanent struggle by Guatemalan women to overcome their present situation. Last year the Guatemalan congress passed a law making violence against women a crime. Under its provisions, judges are receiving special training to deal with such crimes. This law symbolises a rising awareness of the necessity to pursue and sanction violence against women effectively.

This growing awareness includes many of us women. In March 2010, we carried out a tribunal of conscience that was inspired by the International War Crimes Tribunal for Japanese 'Comfort Women' in order to deal with the sexual crimes committed by the Guatemalan army during the civil war, especially against Mayan women. Sexual violence, in particular rape, was used as a systematic policy by the

Guatemalan in the framework of its counterinsurgency strategies at the height of the civil war in the early 1980s. During the tribunal, hundreds of Mayan female survivors of such crimes spoke of their suffering and the crimes against them in public for the first time in their lives. They also demanded that justice be served against the perpetrators and that reparations be paid. Of course, these demands are mostly symbolic, but nonetheless they express the willingness of Guatemalan women to no longer accept crimes against them and the impunity that has corroded Guatemalan justice throughout its history.

Which means does Guatemalan civil society have at its disposal to exert pressure on Guatemalan state institutions to fulfil the peace agreements, especially as regards women's rights and UNSCR 1325?

A Guatemalan national forum supervises the fulfilment of the peace agreements. It is very important that the Guatemalan government and the national parliament finally adopt a fiscal reform to increase tax revenue in order to boost the public financial resources to combat poverty. A rural development reform, which would improve the living conditions of millions of people in the countryside, is also urgently needed. These reforms are part of the peace agreements of 1996, but have yet to be implemented. The empowerment of social organisations is crucial in order to encourage the government to implement reforms.

What can the international community, foreign governments, international institutions and organisations do to encourage the Guatemalan government to implement UNSCR 1325 and the peace agreements?

The most important action is not to forget Guatemala. Very little is known about the political regression in Guatemala outside the country. The international media must inform the world about what is happening to Guatemala, and in particular to Guatemalan women. The international community must demand that the Guatemalan government implement the national peace accord in its entirety – especially the fiscal reform and the rural development programme, which are essential to resolving the conditions of social and economic injustice that create the conditions for violence against women. (October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Julio Godoy is a freelance Guatemalan journalist working for several international media and an expert on his country.

Conquering Violence against Women Is More Difficult than Climbing Everest

By **Shailee Bhandari**

Kathmandu, Nepal. Ten Nepali women formed the first exclusively female team to scale Mount Everest on 23 May 2008. In doing so, they accomplished not only a unique sporting achievement, but also had a message for all women in Nepal: there is no peak in the world that women cannot conquer.

The successful expedition to the world's highest mountain was celebrated in the Himalayan state as a "great leap forward for Nepal's women". Since then, the climbers – Shushmita Maskey, Shaili Basnet, Nimdoma Sherpa, Maya Gurung, Poojan Acharya, Usha Bista, Asha Kumari Singh, Nawang Futi Sherpa, Chunu Shrestha and Pema Diki Sherpa – have been using their renown to campaign in the country's schools for equal opportunities for women.

For centuries, women have played a peripheral role in traditional Nepali society. But now they have won a certain amount of recognition in the literal sense of the word, both as participants in the ten-year-long civil war headed by the (Maoist) Communist Party against the unpopular monarchy and in the popular demonstrations that brought an end to King Gyanendra's dictatorial rule in 2008.

Until the outbreak of hostilities in 1996, the idea of armed women and girls in what was then the Kingdom of Nepal was almost unthinkable. In the Maoist People's Liberation Army, however, they were well represented, accounting for more than a third of the combatants. Nepali women began to be held in high esteem, also because they were very often not only their families' sole breadwinners, but also highly active in politics.

"Agents of change"

Günther Baechler from Switzerland, who played a decisive role as his country's special adviser in helping to negotiate a peace agreement, recalls the critical role of women, whom he describes as the "agents of change" who took to the streets in 2006 to demand peace and democracy.

"The issue of human rights violations, impunity and human security helped to create a nationwide women's movement across sectors, professional groups, parties and identity groups," Baechler wrote. "The movement gave women greater space to raise their voices in the streets of Kathmandu and district headquarters (provincial towns), as well as in the political sphere of the state institutions," he added in his report called "A Mediator's Perspective: Women and the Nepali Peace Process", which was published by the independent mediation organisation Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in August 2010.

Women missed their goal of being broadly represented at the peace negotiations, but independent women and some female members of the main political parties were able to participate in preparatory talks, consultation meetings and capacity-building activities, as well as in meetings with the Peace Secretariat, which was transformed into the Peace Ministry after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed.

In particular, women were represented in the "peace task force" composed of representatives of the political parties, the Peace Secretariat, local facilitators and international advisers (facilitated by the Nepal Transition to Peace Initiative), the Swiss peace mediator underlines.

Women demand a better constitution by singing in Kathmandu.
Photo: Sudeshna Sarkar/IPS

Women lobby successfully

The women's movement in Nepal was successful even before the peace treaty of 2006. Its relentless lobbying forced the government to pass a bill decriminalising abortion in 2002. In the same year, the Nepali government passed legislation that allowed women to inherit property. Four years later, the country's Supreme Court abolished a law allowing men to seek divorce if their partner was infertile. Soon afterwards, women were allowed to give their children citizenship rights.

Also in 2006, a parliamentary decision assured Nepal's women 33 per cent of jobs in all state institutions. In addition, women campaigned successfully for a proportional representation electoral system, which gave them a fair share of seats in the Constituent Assembly.

As a result, the Constituent Assembly consisted of 197 female politicians who spoke with one voice when it came to anchoring important women's rights in the future constitution. Moreover, with Sahana Pradham as the country's foreign minister, Nepal had the first female at the helm of its Foreign Ministry.

In addition, the Nepali parliament enacted legislation in 2009 making domestic violence punishable.

This series of positive developments in Nepal places the country among the few states that can show progress in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. The resolution calls for the equal participation of women in all spheres of securing peace and for the protection of women against sexual and other kinds of violence.

Behind the achievements of Nepali women are personalities such as Binda Pandey, who also fought on the front line for the restoration of democracy during the 1990s. "It is so important that gender equity be included in the new constitution," says the 47-year-old woman and peace activist, who chairs the Fundamental Rights and Directives Principle Committee tasked with shaping future civil rights in Nepal and enshrining them in the Nepali constitution. However, it has not yet been possible to adopt a new constitution due to political disagreements among the parties.

Pandey, one of the 1,000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe, points to a multitude of problems that have yet to be overcome. "We have been successful in advocacy so far, but when it comes to policy-making, we still need to build up skills in presenting our points," she says. "This is particularly the case when it comes to concrete measures to prevent sexual violence against women and

to assist the many survivors of such crimes, thus putting a brake on the male-dominated political system."

Nepal's supreme court apparently shares this view. In February 2010, it called upon the government to avail of that year, which Nepal had declared as the year to end gender-based violence, to consider the prerequisites for setting up "fast-track courts" that punish the perpetrators of violence against women without unnecessary delay.

Young girls are sold by their families

Another unsolved problem is the trafficking of young girls, thousands of whom are sold by their families as housekeepers each year, mainly to families in India. Many of them end up as sex workers and, according to human rights organisations, are exploited under unimaginable conditions.

Widows and women belonging to the caste of "untouchables" (Dalits) in rural areas suffer the worst abuse. UN Women estimates the number of Nepali widows at about 800,000. Many are war widows who have been forced into social isolation by the sudden loss of their husbands. Discrimination, violence, sexual exploitation and lawlessness often determine their everyday lives.

As the poorest of the poor, widows and Dalit women are often held accountable for deaths and other misfortunes in their surroundings. This practice was described in 2009 by a victim from the Lalitpur district, 40 kilometres south of the capital Kathmandu. After several cattle died, the woman was brutally maltreated, imprisoned and forced to eat her own excrement. She was freed only after a forced admission of guilt. She brought the case before the court of justice, but those who had maltreated her so harshly were merely fined.

Female activists such as Binda Pandey constantly urge Nepal's male politicians to publicly condemn gender-based violence. However, positive responses appear to be extremely unlikely. Günther Baechler has accused the former warring parties in Nepal of misusing the Constituent Assembly as a stage for tactical games and individual power gains. "The elected women – many of them in the political arena for the first time in their lives – were of course not able to stop this nonsense by the political parties' powerful male leaders," he wrote in his report. He believes that the chances of this changing are not very high, but remains hopeful nonetheless.

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Shailee Bhandari is a Nepali journalist specialising in gender issues.

“You don’t need to be a superman”

Chapter 2: Men as Allies

Jonah Gokova. Screenshot from the film "16 Days of Activism against Violence on Women". Photo: Padare

“Men have an incredible fear of women”

Interview with Jonah Gokova, founder of the anti-sexist men’s movement Padare

By **Ute Scheub**

Harare, Zimbabwe. A trained theologian, Jonah Gokova is the founder of the anti-sexist men’s organisation Padare, The Men’s Forum on Gender, in Zimbabwe. Ute Scheub spoke with him at the international conference Gender Counts, in Berlin in March 2010.

Mr Gokova, the organisation you founded is called ‘anti-sexist’. Why?

Jonah Gokova: Padare, The Men’s Forum on Gender, is an anti-sexist men’s organisation in Zimbabwe that brings men together to discuss gender issues. The idea is to get men to spend time looking at how they are influenced by patriarchal thinking and looking at ways how they can support each other towards change. The organisation started in 1995 in Zimbabwe’s capital Harare, now it is spreading in many other parts of the country. We have different departments, working with men in rural areas, with traditional leaders, with school boys and teachers. We also have 18 chapters or branches with, on average, about 50 or 60 members.

What does the word Padare mean?

Padare is a traditional institution of decision making in Zimbabwe. Men would meet in the villages in the evening, sitting around a fire and making decisions – involving men only. Our idea was to take this institution and to open it up and to talk about the participation of women. So our Padare is actually an improvement, a transformation, it promotes positive gender roles for men and women. All our meetings, all our programmes encourage men to be open to accept the involvement of women as equal partners in all structures of society. Our branches meet at least once a month. So there are various Padare meetings taking place, for men only but discussing nothing but ways of transforming gender roles. These are spaces that we create for men where they have occasions to challenge other men about their understanding

of manhood. We also engage women and their organisations for constant feedback. Sometimes we also organise meetings where we discuss issues with women.

Why did you found this type of organisation?

At the beginning six of us were working in a non-governmental organisation. We started casual discussions about the social expectations that we have as men in our society. And we discovered that we all agree on one thing: that we did not conform to the expectations of the patriarchal images and prescribed roles of men and that we want to change that. At an individual level, we have always been struggling as men with these social expectations. At that moment, I invited some men into my house. We discussed, we cooked together as men, we washed the dishes as men and we left the place clean. We were excited by our discussions as men. Later on we realised that we need to open up these meetings to all men in our society. In March 1993 we booked a hall of a hotel and made an announcement, inviting all men to participate – that was towards the International Women's Day celebrations, and we invited all men to discuss the significance of Women's Day for men. The response was overwhelming. So we decided to form an organisation to take our work further.

Zimbabwe experienced a lot of violence in the past. How do you deal with that?

Yes, there was a lot of violence, particularly during the national elections in 2008, also before colonialism, during the colonial period and during the liberation struggle against colonialism. Our society currently is a very conservative society, very patriarchal in nature and as a result, we are dealing with another form of violence that keeps our women in perpetual subjugation. We are convinced that we have to deal with this past. During the height of political violence, a lot of women were raped. These are issues that we also need to address as men in our society.

Do you also talk about men as victims of the patriarchal system?

At the beginning our focus was that we are doing work on behalf of women. It was later that we discovered that we are doing this for ourselves, that our work is not only about the liberation of women, but also about our own liberation of ourselves from all forms of patriarchal expectations. We as men are not able to deal with stress. As men we are not free

to show our emotions in public, even to cry. We say to men: 'This is also for your own salvation. When you accept that you are able to cry – that's liberation. When you are able to express your emotions – that's liberation. Then you behave as a human being and not as a super human being. You don't have to be a super human being.'

Do you have problems with other men saying that you are feminine?

Yes, we have always been accused of compromising manhood and promoting Western ideas or wanting to turn men into women. These people are terrified by this idea of men supporting and encouraging women to assert themselves. We say to ourselves that these accusations open up opportunities for engagement. We are discovering that a definition that limits our identity to the possession of two or more balls is very limiting and humiliating for men!

Were you able to discover the secret of how to convince men to participate in an anti-sexist movement?

(laughs) First of all we have to open ourselves, to be transparent and genuine. Sometimes we were also accused of being much too hard on men. But I think there is no other way but to begin from a position where you get men to take ownership of their good or bad actions, realising that they have been collaborators in a system that is oppressing women and tolerating violence against women. And also violence against men.

Do you have funds for your work? I imagine that the economic situation in Zimbabwe is very tough.

Fortunately we get support from Bread for the World in Germany, UN organisations, Oxfam and others.

Do you also collaborate with women's organisations that take care of victims of violence?

We have a good relationship with women's organisations. We ask them to connect us with the male perpetrators. When we talk to perpetrators, some of them really regret but they don't know how to come out of that violent behaviour. So we assist them to come out of it, we walk through the process of counselling with them where they learn to take responsibility for their actions and begin to realise that these actions were destructive, and that they must make a commitment to move away from their violent past.

Do they apologise?

They do, to our counsellors. And also to their wives. We encourage them to do that openly before their partners, in the presence of witnesses.

Maybe this is more worthwhile than a criminal procedure?

That's right. But it is also important that rapists are prosecuted through the legal system.

When you wear a T-shirt from your organisation with the slogan 'Real men don't abuse women and children', how do people react?

In our society that kind of exposure triggers some conversation, positive and negative comments, and sometimes we get also very hostile reactions from men who feel threatened. That has also to do with the insecurity of men, they feel so insecure. But we are able to deal with those issues. Every reaction is an opportunity to open up a conversation.

Men are violent because they are insecure?

Right. It is an unbelievable unpronounced fear of women that you find in men. And this violence is not an expression of male strength but of the weakness of men. That needs to be appreciated as well.

You need courage for this work.

Yes, a certain level of courage. But we are happy with the progress that we have made. At least we now have men who can stand up. They are not shy or afraid.
(March 2010)

Male Violence Can Be Healed

The Sonke Gender Justice Network

By **Lungi Langa**

Cape Town/Johannesburg, South Africa. "Women can emancipate themselves from violence alone with a small amount of help from men," says Patrick Godana, a representative of the Sonke Gender Justice Network in South Africa, which campaigns for equal rights for women and for the protection of women against sexual violence by working with men.

Godana runs the One Man Can campaign, the organisation's flagship project, which encourages men to take action against domestic and sexualised violence and to establish relationships with women based on partnership and respect. The initiators also endeavour to combat the idols of militarised masculinity through non-military role models.

"There is only one movement – it's a women's movement that could start to campaign for women. We as men are not a movement. We are supporting the endeavours that our mothers, wives, girlfriends and daughters are undertaking," Godana says.

However, Godana points out that charity begins at home. Women's rights first need to be upheld in their homes and men need to be made aware of all types of oppression.

"Who does the care work at home? Women do. A woman must get up at 5 a.m. to fetch water, make porridge for her husband, iron his clothes and make sure that a number of kids are prepared for school. The same woman is expected to look after herself. How on earth is she expected to manage that? This means that this woman is always the last to sleep. She might also face demands to supply sex. This is violence against women," Godana says.

The Sonke Gender Justice Network has been reaching out to men through the One Man Can campaign since 2006, working at the community level.

"We hold talks and from those talks we provide structured training in the form of workshops. From the workshops we continue to establish peer educators in the community," he explains.

South Africa's president sets a bad example

However, the task has been complicated by several controversies, including South African President Jacob Zuma's rape trial and polygamous relationships. Although Sonke was critical of Zuma during his rape trial, the organisation accepted the court's decision to acquit the president, who has held power since 2006.

"During the trial we picketed outside the court, saying that anyone who rapes must be prosecuted and sentenced. We made it clear that we supported the alleged rape survivor and we were called names for that."

However, Sonke won a court case against former African National Congress Youth League president Julius Malema for "his derogatory statement" against Zuma's accuser.

"Malema said she must have enjoyed sex with President Zuma. We took Malema to court and we won because we wanted to ensure that people who hold influential positions in our society must be responsible for what they say. Malema commands a lot of support and he is a man. We cannot allow that to happen," says Godana.

In the report "Working with Men and Boys: Emerging Strategies from across Africa to Address Gender-based Violence and HIV/Aids", which was produced in conjunction with the MenEngage alliance, Narnia Bohler-Muller, professor of law at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth wrote: "[The Malema case is] an excellent test case. It could encourage women a little more to realise that [the equality courts] are available. It's the high-profile cases that draw attention and encourage people to use the courts... and [this case] might be good because people's eyes will now be on the courts as a venue for addressing gender discrimination."

However, Zuma's polygamous lifestyle continues to be a "challenge in Sonke's work".

"I was working in prisons two weeks ago and [the prisoners] asked me again about the polygamy issue. They asked me how this man continues to be in the cabinet. I respect his right, and in this country polygamy is legal but I'm saying that, as a person, I do not like it because it continues to undermine women and women's freedom. This whole issue makes our work very difficult, but it is for us to say that we are against [polygamy], as it continues to undermine women and their status in society," Godana adds.

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 5.7 million people in South Africa are infected with HIV. At least 3.2 million of these people are women.

Research identifies multiple and concurrent sexual partners as one of the key drivers of HIV. Godana maintains that it is impossible to separate polygamy from multiple sexual partnerships and HIV.

"One of the core drivers of HIV is multiple and concurrent partnerships. To my mind, polygamy obviously involves multiple sexual partnerships and I'm not quite sure whether condoms are used. I'm not sure whether people know their HIV status. There is a constant risk. I personally don't believe in multiple sexual partnerships. As long as you have multiple sexual partnerships you are putting your life at risk from the danger of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV," he says.

Volunteers from the Sonke Gender Justice Network.
Photo: Lee Middleton/IPS

Fear of strong women

While Sonke reaches men through community mobilisation by holding workshops, it is also trying to tackle the tough and complex issues of equality in the workplace. Godana recalls a workshop he was invited to conduct at a reputable company in Cape Town. When he arrived, he found that a "third of those attending were women". He was told that the majority of the men in the company were preparing for an audit.

Sonke currently has a partnership with the Department of Correctional Services where it holds regular training sessions. "Women are being placed in positions of power in the department, but some of their male counterparts complain that they

got the jobs because they slept with someone. For me that is a cry for attention. It's a cry for help because [men] can't take it that a woman can be put in charge. For them she must have done something out of the ordinary to have gotten the job," Godana says.

He notes that most companies in the country still attach gender stereotypes to positions in the workplace. For example, positions in administration and human resources are still regarded as jobs involving care and support for the workforce and should therefore be held by women.

However, he concludes that "men are not born violent. They learn to be violent and since they have learnt it they can also unlearn it." He identifies social issues such as apartheid as some of the key influences behind men's abusive habits.

He says his own upbringing, overshadowed by abuse and violence, shaped his thinking. "At home we were eight siblings and two parents, but I never saw my late father kissing my mother when he was still alive. I did see him beating up my mother and for me that became a learned behaviour," he recalls.

When he was a young man, Godana joined the liberation struggle against apartheid and travelled as far as Lesotho and Zambia to train as a soldier. Upon his return to South Africa he was shot and arrested. He also suffered abuse at the hands of the police force. "I'm carrying emotional scars because of seeing my mother being battered. How do I close that chapter? I'm also carrying physical scars from the violence of the police during apartheid," he says.

He adds that the conditions his father worked under during apartheid lowered his self-esteem. This provoked him to return home from work with the intention of "reassuring himself that he was still in charge, still a man and a human being".

It was later, as a student of theology, that Godana's attitude towards women changed. "This kind of work [with men] becomes healing and has become the second phase of my struggle," he says.

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Lungi Langa is a journalist with the award-winning South African "Health-e News Service" [www.health-e.org.za].

How African Men Are Changing Traditional Beliefs

By **Henry Wasswa**

Kampala, Uganda. Charles Kayongo of Uganda is a father of two girls aged five and three. And even though age-old traditions among his ethnic group, the Baganda, say that a man should have an unlimited number of children and a son as an heir, Kayongo refuses to have more children.

Like a growing number of cash-strapped young parents in this landlocked East African nation who yearn for a modern lifestyle, he says that he and his wife, Eunice Kayongo, want a small family.

"Enough is enough. I do not want any more children. I discussed this with my wife, and we have been using pills and condoms for the past two years. The cost of food, of sending the girls to school and buying medication is already too high for me," the 33-year-old tells IPS from his home in Mukono town on the outskirts of Uganda's capital, Kampala.

Kayongo, who owns a bar, says he spends ten dollars a day on his family and earns a total of 440 dollars a month. "I am interested in family planning because it helps us to live a better life. I make sure I go with my wife to the clinic. I have to plan financially for my family."

Uganda has one of the world's highest population growth rates at 3.2 per cent per year. The country's total population is currently 34 million. "One million people are added to the Ugandan population annually, but the resources are not increasing at the same rate," Anthony Bugembe, a programme officer at the Population Secretariat in the Ministry for Finance, Planning and Economic Development, tells IPS.

Kayongo is among an emerging generation of young Ugandan husbands who are beginning to defy the old African tradition of fathering large numbers of children and are opting for smaller, manageable families.

Lynda Birungi from the national family planning group Reproductive Health Uganda says that more young fathers are becoming involved in family planning than before, largely for financial reasons. However, these men are still a minority. "Out of

every five women who come to our clinic, only one comes with a man. But over 20 years ago, no men came. These days, the young generation of male partners wants a better standard of living, and it feels that it can attain this by having small families," Birungi says.

Sudanese men play football as part of the campaign We Can End Violence Against Women.
Photo: Albert González Farran/ UN Photos

Men's Travelling Conference in Malawi

Meanwhile, in the southern African nation of Malawi, what started as a travelling theatre of only ten police officers 12 years ago has now grown into a movement of over 1,000 men preaching against gender-based violence, which fuels unwanted pregnancies and increases maternal mortality.

The group, the Men's Travelling Conference, is a team of mostly men and some women funded by the Norwegian government and the UN Population Fund.

In 2003, the Men's Travelling Conference marked the annual 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, an international campaign calling for non-violence against women and children that is held from 25 November to 10 December, in a unique way.

Men from Kenya, Zambia and Ethiopia converged on Malawi's capital Lilongwe after travelling there by bus. Along the way, the men stopped at each community they passed, and left behind the message that violence against women was destructive and that men hold the power and responsibility to stop such violence.

Now the Men's Travelling Conference travels every December by bus to various communities in Malawi to educate men. Wisdom Samu is one of the men who travel with the group.

In September 2001 he lost his wife shortly after she gave birth to their seventh child.

"Through the Men's Travelling Conference, I have learnt that I was to blame. I never allowed her to use family planning methods because I wanted more children," Samu tells IPS.

Samu has since become a role model and has persuaded many other men from his community of Namitete – situated 50 kilometres outside Lilongwe – to become involved in family planning.

"I tell them to listen and plan together with their wives, and to allow their wives to use modern family planning methods," he says.

Samu's story is echoed across Malawi, a country where 13 women die every day from avoidable pregnancy-related complications.

"It was these scary statistics that made us think outside the box. We agreed to recruit and mobilise male supporters at all levels and sectors to push the agenda through drama, song and discussions to tell men that it's time they sat down and planned smaller families with their wives," Emma Kaliya, chairwoman of Malawi NGO Gender Coordination Network, tells IPS.

Progress in Mali

As Malawi strives to involve more men in family planning, the West African nation of Mali was slowly but surely making progress. In March 2010, the country's Millennium Development Goals report by the UN Development Programme said that Mali's maternal mortality rate had dropped from 582 to 464 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2001 and 2006. This was partly because of intensive campaigns to involve men in family planning.

"Ten years ago, my clinic in Bamako only used to receive women, but today the women are accompanied by their husbands and that to me is a sign that what we are doing is working," says Mountaga Toure, executive director of the Malian Association for the Protection and Promotion of the Family, known by its French acronym AMPFF. The association is an affiliate of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF).

"I sometimes see men coming on their own to collect contraceptives for their partners, saying that their wives are too busy to do that," he tells IPS in a telephone interview. This, he says, is a massive change in a deeply Muslim country like Mali. Toure says

that the AMPFF, in partnership with the IPPF, is deliberately encouraging men to talk about what has always been regarded as taboo.

"To make them understand, we talk about the economy and whether it can allow any man to support ten children. This makes them understand the reason why they need to plan with their wives how many children their pockets can support," Toure says.

Meanwhile, back in Uganda, Kayongo's decision not to have more children has not gone down well with his mother. "My mother wants me to have sons, but I do not want more children. It is my decision," he says.

(November 2012)

Henry Wasswa is a Ugandan journalist who works for IPS.
Additional reporting by Mabvuto Banda in Malawi.

Young Men Break with Macho Stereotypes

By **Leisa Sánchez**

Quito, Ecuador. At the age of 20, Damián Valencia speaks knowledgeably about every aspect of gender equality. He is a member of Cascos Rosa (Pink Helmets), a young people's initiative working for cultural change against machismo and violence against women in Ecuador.

"We seek and promote gender equality and equal rights and opportunities for men and women," said Valencia, one of the founders of the network of young people – originally all men – united against machismo, whose members call themselves Cascos Rosa. The group was formed in 2010 by teenagers and young adults who had received awareness-raising training on gender equality, violence and ways of expressing masculinity from the Ecuadorean chapter of Acción Ciudadana por la Democracia y el Desarrollo (Citizens' Action for Democracy and Development) and the Coalition against Trafficking in Women and Girls in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Valencia said that gender equity "is such a huge problem that it affects everyone". He acknowledged that "an improvement can be seen" in the country, but added that "even so, we are still living in a patriarchal society".

Belonging to Cascos Rosa has had a major impact on his life, he said. At home there was "a macho scheme of things" in which the men "did not wash clothes or do the ironing, did not cook or wash dishes, and expected everything to be done for them. Now we all share the same jobs at home, no one is above anyone else, and we have the same rights and opportunities."

The network promotes a new mentality for combating gender violence and the use of sex workers and pornography.

Its pink helmets and T-shirts "break the stereotype that only women wear pink, that baby boys are dressed in blue and girls in pink," said Valencia, the network's spokesperson.

Cascos Rosa originally had 33 members who emerged from the first workshops held in educational centres. It has since grown to 140 members. So far, 900 teenagers and young people have received training. At first, only young men were included, but as of 2013 women have joined the ranks.

The network members share their knowledge by giving talks in schools and conducting awareness-raising activities at gather-

ings that draw young people, such as music festivals. The work of Cascos Rosa has spread from Quito to four other municipalities in the northern province of Pichincha, where the local government supports the project. They wear pink T-shirts at their talks, meetings and other activities in order to create an impact and practise what they preach.

Carolina Félix, who runs workshops for the network, tells IPS that the campaign is an ongoing effort because deep-seated change is not achieved in a twelve-hour training session. "That is not enough to modify behaviours and attitudes, let alone reality," she said. But she added that the workshops do spark reflection, interest, questions and new practices among young people.

"We do not impose a way of thinking. We encourage the construction of a society based on equality, human rights and equity. The goal is to create spaces where men do not have power over women, where they express their emotions, and where women also understand that they have rights, freedoms and responsibilities, just as men do," Félix said. As well as shaping character and educating young people, the aim is to encourage leadership traits and to make each young person a multiplier of their knowledge and experience, both at home and in educational centres.

What happened in Valencia's home shows that this can be achieved. In this middle-class family of three children, where the parents are shopkeepers, he says that "everyone has changed, especially my father, who now washes the dishes and sometimes does the ironing. My mother is happier and calmer because her burden is lighter."

"A definite change is taking place," says Félix, describing the impact on the new generation taking up the baton for gender equity. "They are not afraid of showing themselves as they are, and neither do they say, 'poor women, such victims!' because this is an issue that both men and women have to work on."

Violence: the tip of the iceberg

The Transition Commission set up by the government to determine the public institutions that will guarantee equality between women and men recognises the need to "promote cultural transformations" to eradicate inequality and discrimination.

The priority, according to Alexandra Ocles, who chairs the commission, is to transform "cultural patterns involving values, customs, practices, the social imaginary, habits, sexist stereotypes, representations and symbols to do with sexual diversity and the traditional roles that society assigns to women and men."

Gender violence is one of the most serious problems, according to the National Survey on Family Relationships and Gender-based Violence against Women, the first of its kind to be carried out in this country of 14.5 million people.

The survey, which was conducted in 2011 by the National Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), found that 60.6 per cent of the women interviewed had suffered some type of physical, psychological, sexual or financial gender-based violence.

Psychological or emotional violence was the most frequently cited (53.9 per cent), followed by physical violence (38 per cent), financial or property violence – the removal or retention of property or economic resources belonging to the victim – (35.3 per cent) and sexual violence (25.7 per cent).

Damián Valencia (second right) and other members of the young people's network against machismo. Photo: Cascos Rosa

"Ninety per cent of married or cohabiting women [in the sample] who had experienced violence were not separated from their partners. Some 52.5 per cent of them said that couples must overcome their difficulties and stay together, and 46.5 per cent said their problems were not so serious," the study says.

The debate on gender-based violence emerged into the public arena in the late 1980s. The first special police units providing services for women and families were introduced in 1994, and one year later the law on violence against women and the family came into force.

In 2007, the National Plan for the Eradication of Gender-based Violence against Children, Adolescents and Women was laun-

ched. Its aims include "changing discriminatory social and cultural patterns". The constitution approved in 2008 mandated the integration of a gender perspective into all public projects and established institutional guarantees for women's human rights.

Advances have been made in recent years, including the provision of comprehensive services in the justice system, campaigns against machismo and gender violence, and a strategy to mainstream a gender perspective in higher education.

Progress has also been made in women's participation in the different branches of government: the proportion of women in the judiciary rose from six per cent in 2006 to 43 per cent in 2011; in the executive branch their participation rose from 14 to 33 per cent in the same period; and in the legislature the share increased from 25 to 34 per cent.

Left-leaning President Rafael Correa has declared that achieving gender equity is one of the priorities of his government.

(May 2013)

Leila Sánchez writes for IPS from Ecuador.

Football Paves the Way to Masculinity without Violence

By **Fabiana Frayssinet**

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It's Friday night, and in Santa Marta, a favela (shanty town) in the south of Rio de Janeiro, a group of men are relaxing over a beer after a hard week, while a song plays above the rowdy chatter.

The lyrics, set to a samba rhythm, are about typical topics such as football and women, but also about gender violence. They mingle with the smoke from a barbecue, where meat is roasting over a makeshift grill on the pavement. Many people are following the beat and singing along with the song, which speaks of a man who has a row with his wife because, in her anxiety over paying the rent, she forgot to wash his football kit.

"Problems between a husband and wife are normal. But don't cross the line into verbal or physical aggression," repeats the catchy refrain. The song is part of the strategy of Promundo, a nationwide non-governmental organisation that aims to raise the consciousness of men in Santa Marta by using two of Brazil's cultural icons, football and music, to address another of its leading concerns, women – but with a difference.

This samba is also the informal anthem of a football tournament which has been taking place for the last six months in this favela of 10,000 people atop a steep hill in Rio. Anyone who wants to can play, on only one condition: they must participate in a workshop about violence against women and about masculinity.

"The project broke all precedents by talking about these issues man to man," says Gilson, a 32-year-old rap singer, on the evening IPS joined some of the 119 participants in the Santa Marta workshops. "You get to do what you like most, which is playing football," Gilson adds, and proudly points out a photo of himself wearing the team jersey, with a slogan against violence against women on the back, which was published in a community newspaper by Promundo.

Leaning against the bar, Gilson chats with other players about the tournament final. "Let's have a barbecue here in the favela for everyone," suggests Samuel Marques, one of the community coordinators.

Marques, who is from Santa Marta, recalls that at the beginning no one wanted to put their names down for the group workshops, which dealt with issues such as gender-based violence, sexuality, the division of labour in the home, men's health and homophobia.

Fabio Verani, a senior programme officer with Promundo, explains that "the idea is to involve men in discussions about gender equity". The project is part of the White Ribbon Campaign, a movement against sexist violence initiated in Canada in 1991 that has since spread to many other countries.

A football fan in Brazil.
Photo: Fabiana Frayssinet/IPS

In the end, the workshops attracted mass participation with only occasional absences from the sessions. Marques says that it was "a huge achievement".

Leandro, a 29-year-old married man and father of four children, who is currently unemployed, says that at first he was extremely wary of telling others in the group about his personal life. "Talking about what happens at home, in your private realm, is difficult at first," he says.

But over time "it became easy," and he learned to see the relationships between couples and within families in a different way. "It's not just women who have to learn how to look after the children, but men too. Just because the man puts the rice and beans on the table doesn't mean he has no further responsibilities in the home," he says.

Now he takes his children to the playground so that his wife can study at home; he reads them stories and plays with them. "My daughter makes pretend meals and says, 'eat, Daddy', and I eat," he says. "The meetings opened my mind to new ideas."

Marques describes the process of changing attitudes among men, saying that first the socially imposed model of behaviour has to be taken apart. This model, reproduced by men, women, the family and institutions such as the church, teaches that the male role in the family is only that of the "protector and breadwinner".

Verónica Moura, another community coordinator, says that violence against women is fuelled by what she calls a "macho society". "It can arise from the domestic situation. The father may physically attack the mother, or the mother assaults the father, and the children go on to do the same later on to their sweetheart or spouse because it is what they have seen since they were born," Leandro says.

Verani says that he is surprised by the number of men who are unaware that they themselves exercise violence, which they regard as socially acceptable.

Promundo found that between 20 and 25 per cent of men in the group meetings all over Brazil recounted their own acts of violence against the women they live with. Marques stresses that many men think that hurling insults is not violence, while others justify their violence as a way of "disciplining women".

In Brazil, the Maria da Penha Law introduced in 2006 condemns violence against women and the family, and includes prison terms of between three months and three years if someone is injured.

"The workshops were my salvation because I did not want to be violent, but I didn't know how to change my ways," admits Gilson.

"I have met up again with ex-girlfriends who at one time used to drive me up the wall. But now I reflect and calm myself down," he says with elation. Male aggressiveness, he says, is due to men being "closed-minded because of ideology".

"People stop by the bar and talk about football and women, but no one ever talks about sexuality, or the children, or helping with the chores at home," he says.

Gilson is aware that violence cannot be ended overnight. But he says that "the issue can be worked on with the children who are tomorrow's adults, by talking to them about sexuality, violence against women and raising children together".

Promundo plans to evaluate the workshops when the tournament ends in late July, but there are already visible results. "This football tournament is one of the most peaceful in the history of Santa Marta," Verani said.

(July 2010)

Fabiana Frayssinet is a correspondent for IPS in Brazil.
The surnames of the workshop participants have been withheld at their request.

From Worst Enemies to Best Friends

By **Vahagn Antonyan**

Marneuli, Georgia, South Caucasus. Nearly 20 young men and women crowd into a narrow room on the first floor of an apartment building, stealing furtive glances at each other and trying to examine one another while the trainer Azad Isazade from Azerbaijan writes the meeting topic on the small blackboard. A little later, he and the other trainer Albert Voskanyan, who comes from Nagorno-Karabakh, start the workshop called Gender Ideals in the Family and Society by asking the participants to introduce themselves. Young Georgians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis read each other's names (Suren, Givi, Aynura) and listen attentively to the stories about what the names mean. The workshop organised by Alla Bezhentseva is being held in the office of the non-governmental organisation Union of Azerbaijani Women of Georgia, in the town of Marneuli, Georgia, and Isazade and Voskanyan are here at Bezhentseva's invitation.

The two trainers are both former military men, officers who fought in opposing armies in the Nagorno-Karabakh War from 1992 to 1994. Now they work together teaching and calling for peace. Isazade normally works as a psychologist in Baku Women's Crisis Centre, while Voskanyan is the director of the Centre of Civilian Initiatives in Stepanakert, Nagorno-Karabakh.

Such kinds of meetings can now only be held in Georgia. This one was held in Kvemo Kartli in south-eastern Georgia, where Georgians are in the minority in some areas compared with ethnic Azerbaijanis and Armenians. Relations between these three ethnicities often appear smooth on the surface despite many internal conflicts. This is a place where an Azerbaijani village changes, without any difference in appearance, into an Armenian village; where the godfather of a new-born Christian Armenian can be a Muslim Azerbaijani; where two children of different nationalities share a desk at school; and where their parents exchange the latest news in the tea house in the middle of the village.

The situation is a bit different here than in Armenia and Azerbaijan, where the societies feel great animosity towards each other. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh, which was largely inhabited by Armenians, seceded from

Azerbaijan, causing a massive war between Armenian and Azerbaijan. The region of Kvemo Kartli is like a barometer, where at any moment a problem connected with Nagorno-Karabakh can resurface, causing new difficulties and unleashing new violence.

Bezhentseva, the director of the Union of Russian Women of Georgia, which organises awareness-raising seminars for vulnerable groups of women and young people from ethnic minorities living in Kvemo Kartli, met the trainers Isazade and Voskanyan during a three-year Omnibus 1325 course run by the Berlin-based organisation OWEN, as well as the other trainers Vafa and Saida Abdulvahabova from Azerbaijan and Susanna Khazaryan from Armenia and the other 20 participants who stayed for the advanced course.

Isazade and Voskanyan are certainly the most original pair of trainers. This type of training course is currently only possible in Georgia because there is still great hostility between Armenian and Azerbaijani societies, and the hostility in Azerbaijani society towards the Armenians from Karabakh could not be any worse than it already is. Some years ago, Isazade and Voskanyan were no exception to this widespread state of affairs. They shared the feelings of their respective societies. But during the last few years, many things have changed, in large part thanks to their attendance at the Omnibus 1325 course, and now they are participants in the network of the same name.

"Probably we have told each other thousands of stories, including very painful ones. There were also tears. Many times, people weren't able to stand the emotional pressure," says Isazade, who works as a psychologist at Baku Women's Crisis Centre. "When I was fighting in Karabakh during the 1990s, I didn't ever even think that there would come a time when I would not only work with a Karabakhian Armenian – Albert – but also that we would become friends. But now I can proudly say that we are friends in the real sense of the word."

Albert's and Azad's duet is unique

"Albert's and Azad's duet is unique," says Bezhentseva. "The fighters of the past are now propagating peace. For me the best result of peace building was when two young Azerbaijani girls living in Georgia approached Albert and told him that they couldn't imagine that Armenians were so kind. Of course, they are living side by side with Armenians, but Albert is "another" type of Armenian – one from Nagorno-Karabakh."

"From the very first day, Albert and I were housed in the same room. I remember I even thought 'what idiots to put us to-

gether'. The next morning, at breakfast time, the organisers anxiously waited for us to arrive, forgetting even to eat and wondering whether everything was okay. The Budapest event, when an Azerbaijani officer killed his Armenian colleague during an international course, was still fresh in people's minds at the time. It was a dangerous experiment," recalls Isazade.

"We are not ashamed to look in each other's eyes because we did nothing to be ashamed of during the war. Albert, for instance, was busy locating Azerbaijani prisoners of war and missing soldiers in Armenian-held territory," continues Isazade.

Azad Isazade (left) and Albert Voskanyan (right) during a training session of the Mobile Peace Academy OMNIBUS 1325. Photo: OWEN.

"Nobody even heard the word 'gender' in Nagorno-Karabakh until 2006. Our organisation has already been working in that direction for one year now. We aspire to increase the role of women in social life in Nagorno-Karabakh and we want women's resources to be used for peaceful aims so that they can defend their rights and participate in the work of nation building," says Voskanyan.

"Now we sometimes joke with each other in a way that even the best of friends cannot always do. We have many things in common: we are about the same age, 54, were raised in the same city – Baku – almost in the same neighbourhood, and have many

acquaintances in common. We were adversaries during the war, but although it might sound strange, even that unifies us," says Voskanyan.

"I am almost sure that our first meeting was during the war in 1990s. Albert saw me through the sniper's crosshairs, but he liked me, so he missed," jokes Isazade.

(August 2012)

Vahagn Antonyan is an Armenian journalist and correspondent for the Armenpress news agency for the Lori region in Armenia.

Miracles in the Desert and Elsewhere

Chapter 3:
Preventing War by Protecting the Climate, Nature, Food and the Environment

Yin Yuzhen has managed to make it rain again in the desert in Inner Mongolia. Photo: Maren Haartje/PeaceWomen Across the Globe

A Miracle in the Desert – the Butterflies Have Returned

By **Maren Haartje**

Ordos Desert, China. There has been a miracle in the desert: it's raining again. This doesn't happen often, but it's still a very positive sign. When dark clouds gather and the first raindrops fall, Yin Yuzhen is happy. She sees rain as the strongest proof of how right she was to devote all of her energy to greening the desert. Over the past 37 years, Yin and her husband have single-handedly planted hundreds of thousands of trees, bringing back life to an area of land the size of Andorra in the Ordos Desert. The desert was formed when the Kubuqi and Maowusu deserts merged during the 1990s. Previously, they had been separated by a thin strip of vegetation that was destroyed during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.

Yin is a 48-year-old farmer who never learned to read and write. She was born in 1965 and recalls how her father married her to a man in the barren and virtually unpopulated desert when she was 18. The nearest village was many days' walk away. The first years of the marriage were extremely hard. The couple lived in a tiny hut in the middle of the dunes and barely survived. Their water came from a small spring, and Yin's husband had a job collecting dead animals from villages spread far across the region. This provided the couple with a small income and sometimes with dried meat. Yin had to prepare a meal from dead rats on more than one occasion.

A short time after she arrived in the desert 30 years ago, Yin recalls how she saw a person in the distance in the dunes. "I didn't stop to think. I just ran after him." When the man noticed her, he was frightened and started running too. She wasn't able to catch up with him. Yin got the only bowl from her hut and placed it over the man's footprint. She looked at the footprint every day until the wind blew away all traces. Once the footprint had disappeared, Yin wanted to kill herself. Her husband felt the same way.

But then they decided to do something else. They set off across the dunes to the nearest village, a journey of several days. The only money they had was Yin's dowry. They spent it on an old cow, which later gave birth to a calf. Yin sold the calf and used the

proceeds of the sale to buy tree seeds and a sapling, which she planted in front of their hut. This was the couple's first tree.

Since then, Yin and her husband have created countless oases of trees and bushes in an area measuring 26 kilometres in length and 17 kilometres in width. All they need to do now is link these oases. They have planted over 100 different types of plants and learned which fare best in dry conditions. They used to load their donkey cart with buckets of water for their trees in the oases, but they only watered them at night or very early in the morning so that the precious liquid wouldn't immediately evaporate in the sun.

The dew was the first thing to return, then came the rain. Yin now plants potatoes, maize and turnips on small plots of land in the shade of the trees. Every eight years, she plants watermelons. The land belongs to the state, but Yin and her husband leased it some time ago. They now live in a house made of stone rather than their old underground hut. Grapevines even grow on one patch of land. Butterflies, bees and other insects have returned, thus attracting birds.

Yin points to various places in the landscape, and she has plenty to say about it. The couple no longer have a donkey and cart. Instead, they have a lactating sow, two thin dairy cows, and a small herd of goats to keep certain shrubs in check. They also have several wells, which they use to water their new plants. The dew and rain provide enough moisture for the older plants, and the roots of the larger trees reach the groundwater, which does not lie very deep.

For a long time, no one was interested in the desert. That is hardly surprising, as the living conditions are extreme: winters last for up to seven months, with temperatures falling as low as minus 30 °C, and summers can be as hot as 45 or 50 °C. But the government has been funding the greening of the desert for several years now as it is keen to stop the shifting sand dunes that cause clouds of sand to blow across the entire region as far as Beijing, making the sky turn dark and damaging fertile farmland. As a result, Yin and her family now receive a modest income from the state.

Over the years, the couple have had two children of their own and taken in two abandoned children, whom they later sent to Yin's parents-in-law so that they could attend school.

In the meantime, Yin has been awarded several prizes, including one from the Somazzi Foundation in Switzerland. She was one of the 1,000 women collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. Now in poor health, she goes to the oak grove

that she planted for the 1,000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe when she needs to draw strength.

And Yin certainly needs plenty of energy, as now the authorities are ignoring her extensive knowledge of sustainability. For example, she hasn't planted poplars for a long time now. Although these trees grow quickly, they need a lot of water and strip nutrients from the soil. Almost nothing can grow underneath them. Despite this, the government is primarily funding the planting of poplars, as they provide fast-growing wood for the paper industry. More and more people are moving to the desert to grow poplars quickly, and they are using lots of water. But no one knows how long the groundwater will last because no one has measured the table. It may dry up soon, which would put an end to the government's large-scale greening programme.

Sometimes the authorities ask Yin to sign documents. This is worrying, as she is still unable to read and write and doesn't know what she is signing. Despite all that, however, there is no doubt that she has brought about a miracle in this desert.

(2009, updated in 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Maren Haartje was a programme officer with 1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe and visited Yin Yuzhen.

Dr Chhiv Kek Pung.
Photo: Kalinga Seneviratne

A Fearless Fighter for the Rights of her People

By **Kalinga Seneviratne**

Phnom Penh, Cambodia. "Land grabbing has become a big issue in Cambodia as regards human rights violations," argues Dr Chhiv Kek Pung, the founder of the Cambodian League for the Promotion and Defence of Human Rights (LICADHO). "The government calls us troublemakers, [but] what is important for us is to help the people. They support us."

Though perceived as a troublemaker, she is adamant that the work LICADHO is doing will ultimately help the people. The organisation has even gone into multimedia campaigning to take the message to the community locally and internationally, and has produced videos for YouTube showing its protest actions.

LICADHO has also produced a music CD to reflect the suffering of the people in the Boeung Kak community in Phnom Penh, where the government forcibly evicted people to make way for a property development by a local company, Shukaku, which is owned by a senator from the ruling party. This involved emptying a local lake and filling it up with sand for building. The people's houses were flooded by the emptying of the lake; houses were demolished by excavators; and activists were beaten unconscious by the police.

A daughter of Cambodia's first female member of parliament and minister, Dr Pung initially shunned politics and opted for medical studies in France. After qualifying as a doctor in 1968, she returned home and practiced medicine in Cambodia until the 1970 military coup forced her family into exile.

Dr Pung admits that LICADHO is fighting a formidable battle against a well-entrenched government, even though the recent elections saw huge gains by the opposition. "First of all, we provide them [affected people/activists] with medical assistance. If we can, we also give humanitarian assistance and we give people legal assistance for their rights. We never push Cambodians to do something against their will," she says.

"The second thing we want to do is lobby the government to make some reform of the national institutions in Cambodia. Like reforms to the judiciary, the law to respect human rights needs to be improved for Cambodia to be a democracy."

However, the path towards democracy is not paved with roses. On the contrary, "when people work on these land issues, they receive death threats on the telephone. They receive text messages with gun or bullet icons. It's scary."

She is rather stoical when asked about threats to her personally. "If we close our door, what will the victim do? Right now they rely much more on us than on the authorities when they have problems. Most don't go to complain to the police or the authorities – they come to us. Even if we want to give up, we can't because these people need us. We have to continue to find ways, not to create confrontation with the government, but to avoid fighting and try to work and make a soft approach. It's not easy – it's very difficult."

When she returned to Cambodia after finishing her studies in 1968, she found that women had many problems in the home and that domestic violence was increasing. Though women had started playing a certain role in politics, this was very limited.

In 1958, Dr Pung's mother became a "reluctant politician" when she was elected as Cambodia's first female member of parliament. She went on to serve three terms until the government led by Prince Norodom Sihanouk was overthrown by a US-backed coup in 1970. Her father was also in politics, serving as the state secretary for education and later as the minister of information. Both her parents were also involved in educating the children of the royal household, and Dr Pung thus remains close to the royal family.

After the 1970 coup, Prince Sihanouk fled to Beijing, where he lived in exile. Her parents also joined the royal family in Beijing, while Dr Pung went to France where she worked as a doctor and married a French diplomat. Both her links to the Cambodian royal family and the French diplomatic service helped her to bring Prince Sihanouk and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen together in 1991 to hammer out the Cambodian peace agreement.

Dr Pung saw how her parents always helped the people without expecting anything in return. Thus, when the 1991 agreement was signed, she was afraid that the Khmer Rouge – which ruled and terrorised her people between 1975 and 1979 – could return. Along with a group of friends and her two daughters, she therefore set up an organisation in Paris to monitor human rights violations by the Khmer Rouge. LICADHO was registered in Paris in 1990, but when the UN took over the administration of Cambodia in 1992 to prepare for the election the following year, it wanted non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be set up locally. Dr Pung had LICADHO registered in Cambodia and started oper-

ating from Phnom Penh. Today the organisation has 12 offices and over 125 staff in the country.

"I don't want to be too optimistic. I take the middle path," says Dr Pung, perhaps reflecting the country's Buddhist culture. "In 1992, when we came in, Cambodia was not in good shape. No elections, no NGOs, only international and UN, no local [organisations]. UNTAC (UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia) left some legacy such as human rights organisations. Now local NGOs are flourishing like mushrooms. But some are real ones, while others are affiliated to the ruling or other political parties. But it is good to have a very vibrant civil society. We all work on different issues".

Dr Pung says that the media in the country are heavily controlled by the government and the only independent media available are two newspapers, both owned by foreigners, and three foreign radio networks that buy airtime on local radio. Thus, it is local NGOs like hers that have to speak up for the people. Because more than half of the national budget comes from international donors, the government sometimes finds it difficult to silence the NGOs, she argues.

The biggest human rights issue: land grabbing

But the biggest human rights issue in Cambodia at the moment is what is dubbed "land grabbing". Between 2003 and 2012, LICADHO recorded 654 disputes involving land belonging to about 85,000 families and affecting over 400,000 people spread across 12 provinces of the country. The land disputes began in earnest in 2000 when the government opened up the land sector to investment companies. The state can offer economic land concessions (ELC) to companies on a 99-year lease, and most of these have been given to firms to set up the agro-industrial plantations that the government claims are providing a sound model for economic development and poverty alleviation.

Dr Pung points out that while the government has claimed that it has given land titles to two million people, the national elections commission registered over nine million people as voters in the recent general elections, which were narrowly won by Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party. "These [nine million] people have land, a house they live in. Where are they?" she asks.

Under the country's land law, the government must pay compensation to land owners to take over their land under the ELC. "But this is never implemented. They never produce a survey and they never give them fair compensation," argues Dr Pung. "It's

really violent eviction that forces them to go to another place. They give them some land, but in a place with no electricity, no running water, no jobs for them, no school for the children, no market, no facilities, no medical care close by. It's nowhere. So they make a group of people very poor and leave them with no hope of surviving".

LICADHO has started to campaign against these injustices both within and outside the country. "Inside the country, we do advocacy work with the local authorities and the government. We try to network with international donors and we ask international NGOs to help. We know that land was taken for sugar cane and the produce exported to Europe. The EU has its own trade laws and we try to lobby parliamentarians in Brussels to help us," Dr Pung explains, but adds that these activities have not met with much success. However, LICADHO recently managed to convince a law firm in London to file a case against a sugar importer who sources from Cambodia.

But how does the Cambodian government respond to such international campaigns that could be seen at home as unpatriotic? "We don't feel guilty. When a company exports the sugar to Europe, who gets the benefit from that? It's not the people, it's the company. People suffer. They have to work very hard in the plantations to cut sugar cane to earn one or two dollars. [The government says] that if the EU stops importing sugar from Cambodia, people will suffer. We say: No, because they already suffer and they can't suffer any more than that."

(August 2013)

Kalinga Seneviratne is a journalist, radio broadcaster, television documentary maker and media analyst. He has been writing for IPS since 1991.

"Seed Mothers" Confront Climate Insecurity

By **Manipadma Jena**

Bhubaneswar, India. In eastern Odisha state's tribal hinterlands, about 200 "seed mothers" are in mission mode, identifying, collecting and conserving traditional seed varieties and encouraging farming families to use them.

The seed mothers (*bihana-maa* in the local dialect) from the Koya and Kondh tribal communities have reached 1,500 families in the Malkangiri and Kandhamal districts and are still counting. These women are formidable storehouses of knowledge on indigenous seeds and biodiversity conservation.

Collecting, multiplying and distributing local varieties of paddy, millet, legumes, vegetables and leafy green seeds, the seed mothers already have a solid base of 80 converted villages.

As they spread their message throughout the hinterland, targeting another 140 villages, the women also promote zero dependence on chemical fertilisers and pesticides.

Considering that Malkangiri is Odisha's least developed district, with literacy at a low 50 per cent, and that it is isolated by rivers, forests, undulating topography and poor connectivity, the achievement of the seed mothers is particularly admirable.

Malkangiri farmers' struggle against climate change is visible in Gudumpadar village, where seed mothers are passionately reviving agricultural heritage and convincing the community to continue using local seeds and bio-fertilisers and bio-pesticides.

"This is the best way to cope with erratic rainfall, to ensure the children are fed and to avoid falling into the clutches of moneylenders," says 65-year-old seed mother Kanamma Madkami from Kanjeli village, who has multiplied 29 varieties of local millet and paddy seeds.

Mangu Adari, 35, who owns less than two hectares of rainfed land, some of it on a hill slope, is one of the new converts to local seeds. During the last monsoon he was only able to cultivate paddy, millet, beans and pulses on half of his land due to late and heavy rains. This year he hopes to have a surplus to take to the market to sell for badly needed cash.

"Local plants are products of centuries of adaptation to local climate and soil characteristics, hence, indigenous paddy survives drought for 30 days compared to 15 days for high-yield hybrid varieties," explains Kusum Misra, coordinator in Odisha for

Navdanya, a network of seed keepers spread over 16 Indian states and supported by 54 community seed banks.

Similarly, paddy grown traditionally in the lowland can survive two weeks of waterlogging while highland paddy varieties yield quick harvests in just 60 days, compared to the 125 days for hybrid paddy, Misra says.

Based in the rice-rich Balasore district, Misra has collected and propagated more than 65 varieties of traditional paddy, including strains of aromatic rice, varieties that are resistant to salinity (for coastal farming), floods and droughts, and some types with medicinal properties.

The traditional varieties respond to natural fertilisers and pesticides, and if seeds are preserved properly, farmers have access to no-cost farming. "When they own the seeds, farmers can time the sowing or even resort to a second round of sowing if needed," says Madkami.

"By keeping procurement prices for traditional varieties low, the government discourages their farming, one reason being that rice millers prefer uniform sizes and varieties of paddy. Also, government hybrid seed outlets have sales targets to be met," says Misra.

Omprakash Rautaraya, chairperson of the Organisation for Rural Reconstruction and Integrated Social Service Activities, a non-profit organisation responsible for reviving the concept of seed mothers, says that methodical "seed mapping of local varieties and prioritising them on the basis of usage, cropping patterns and water requirement has made multiple cropping possible".

With a mix of six to 14 crops grown simultaneously, even during the frequent droughts, upland farms now harvest at least two crops.

Seed mothers need little more than a backyard patch to propagate seeds and supplement family nutrition. Kausalya Madakami of Malkangiri's Manga village developed 57 varieties of food plants, which she also exchanged.

Annual community seed fairs, which take place directly after the monsoon harvest, help to promote and exchange traditional seeds and knowledge. During these fairs, the seed mothers cook and showcase various traditional items made from indigenous paddy and millet.

Tribal women are relearning traditional ways of seed preservation from the seed mothers. Vegetable seeds are smeared with wood ash, bitter begonia or neem leaf powder and stored in hollow bamboo poles, while paddy and millet can be safely preserved in jute bags hung from rafters. Pre-sowing treatment may

involve cow dung and cow urine or the use of ivy gum as anti-fungal and pest repellent.

The poor quality of seeds marketed by the government is a real worry. In a status report on seed development released in March 2011, the government's National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) published data showing falling rice production in six eastern states, including Odisha – the rice bowl of the country.

Using traditional crops to fight against climate change.
Photo: Manipadma Jena/IPS

In Odisha, the seed germination rate for regular paddy is just 55 per cent and may drop to as low as 25 per cent. According to the NABARD report, land under cultivation in the state is shrinking and poor quality seeds and increasing floods and droughts are making farming increasingly unprofitable.

Well-known environmental activist and founder of Navdanya, Vandana Shiva, told IPS that "climate-resilient seeds in women's hands are vital to climate security, and corporations that have taken out some 1,600 patents on climate-resilient seeds are bio-pirates".

"Allowing corporations to hijack and monopolise seed supply is a recipe for food insecurity and climate insecurity," Shiva asserts. (July 2011)

Environmental journalist Manipadma Jena reports from India for IPS.

Villagers in Khairpur district, Sindh, are discovering the joy of green construction using local material. Photo: Heritage Foundation

After the Flood, Green Homes

By **Zofeen Ebrahim**

Karachi, Pakistan. Subhan Khatoon's brand new home is nothing like the one that got washed away, along with all her worldly goods, in the 2010 monsoon floods that submerged a fifth of Pakistan and left 2,000 people dead.

Before the deluge, Khatoon, 45, could not have dreamed of owning a well-ventilated house with luxuries such as an attached toilet and a clean kitchen. She was lucky that the district administration of Khairpur identified her village, Darya Khan Sheikh, on the banks of the Indus in Sindh province, as one of the worst affected, and her house as one that had been completely destroyed and therefore merited replacement.

Once the paperwork had been completed, architects and engineers from the voluntary Heritage Foundation began designing Khatoon's new home using locally available materials under its Green Karavan Ghar initiative, which runs a similar reconstruction project in the Swat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The vision behind the Heritage Foundation's initiative is the use of local materials and a workforce backed by students from schools of architecture and engineering.

Established in 1984 by Yasmeen Lari – incidentally Pakistan's first female architect – the Heritage Foundation usually documents historic buildings and works for conservation purposes, but also came forward to help with post-disaster reconstruction.

"These young professionals must learn to respect the traditional ways of building and also get hands-on training that is both technical and humanitarian in nature," Lari says.

They have already handed over 104 homes in two villages in Sindh, all built with bamboo, lime (as opposed to cement) and mud. Not only can these be made quickly, they are cost-effective at 55,000 Pakistani rupees (647 US dollars in 2011) and have a low carbon footprint.

"We showed everyone in the housing business that you can make a home without wood, cement or steel," says Lari, adding that the production of steel and cement consumes high amounts of energy.

Khatoon, who cannot shake off her memories of being rescued in a boat along with 500 other people, worries that her new

house may also end up getting swept away by the next major flood. Her fears are not unfounded. Climate-change experts are predicting an increase in the frequency of floods because even minor changes in temperatures can have huge impacts on the environment and food security, as the 2010 floods demonstrated.

But Naeem Shah, head of the project, assures Khatoon that her new house will last a good 20 years. "Even if waters flood the area, the walls of your home will remain intact. Only the plaster will come off, but you can always apply a new coat."

Shah gains his confidence from having worked in making structurally sound and eco-friendly housing since the massive earthquake of 2005 that rocked northern Pakistan. "The homes that we built in Swat using the same materials have withstood three feet of snow and excessive rains, so there is every likelihood that these new houses can resist the weather in Sindh."

Shah says that bamboo, the basic material used for the homes, is "fast growing, extremely strong and environmentally sustainable". Local stone is used for the foundations and cross bracing, while different mixes of mud and lime provide mortar and plaster.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the insulation provided by mud and lime," says Lari, adding that by using indigenous materials "the locals develop an instant comfort level as they know how to use them even after you leave".

Best of all is the ease and speed with which the new homes can be constructed. "It takes about eight days for a house to be completed by a team of four skilled people and four labourers," Shah says.

That is very fast considering that for six months after the floods, the 56 families of Darya Shah Khan camped out in the open and were dependent on hand-outs. Many in the village say the deluge has come as a boon for them. The use of local materials and workforce has resulted in economic regeneration in the area.

A neighbouring village, where reed panels are made, has become the supplier of the prefabricated roof panels, while items such as bathroom screens made from date palms come from another nearby village.

"All this would not have been possible had we used concrete blocks and galvanised iron sheets to make the walls and roofs," Shah says.

Along with providing clean, structurally sound homes, the Heritage Foundation has brought about a gradual change in the lifestyles of the villagers, nudging them towards cleaner, greener living.

This was possible because the organisation sought the help of architecture students who worked alongside the villagers with great dedication.

"In the evenings, these students would pick up issues identified by the villagers and, through short skits and discussions, try to bring about awareness on things such as hand-washing," Shah recalls.

"No longer will you have to watch your step for fear of stepping on animal dung as you make your way around the village," he points out. The villagers have seen the wisdom of corralling their livestock in a common area instead of keeping them next to their homes.

"The place was littered, and not just with dung. There was rotting fish all over the place. So we showed the villagers the simplest and oldest known preservation method – low-cost salting and sun drying," Shah says.

But if you ask the village women what is the best thing that has happened to them since the floods, they all point to the women's centre, a hexagonal structure on stilts.

"We never had a place of our own and we never got together the way we do now," says 30-year-old Shahun Bibi. "In the women's centre, we listen to each other's problems and try and find solutions to them."

(August 2011)

Karachi-based journalist Zofeen Ebrahim reports from Pakistan for IPS and English-language media.

Karma Tshiteem, secretary of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Commission. Photo: Paulo Filgueiras/ UN Photos

Becoming the World's First Fully Organic Country

By **Ute Scheub**

Thimpu, Bhutan. The small Kingdom of Bhutan in the Himalayas has decided to become the first fully organic country in the world. The country will only allow organic farming in the future, while the sale of pesticides and herbicides will be banned.

Bhutan's former agriculture minister explained in February 2013 that "the decision to go organic was both practical and philosophical". As Bhutan is mostly situated in a mountainous region, pesticides and herbicides flow down the slopes, thus harming water and plants. "We say that we need to consider all the environment," he said. "But we are Buddhists, too, and we believe in living in harmony with nature."

The country's government expects agricultural yields to increase as a result and plans to export surplus food to the neighbouring states of India and China, as well as to other countries.

The Kingdom of Bhutan also made history when it became the first country in the world to include the "pursuit of gross national happiness" of its population in its constitution. The term was coined by the king of Bhutan who first used it in 1972 when a journalist asked him about his country's gross domestic product. This aim has been incorporated in the country's constitution since 2008.

With the support of a further 67 countries, Bhutan's government also persuaded the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution in 2011 calling on all UN member states to identify new ways of promoting the pursuit of happiness and well-being worldwide.

"This does not mean simply promoting happiness on the individual level," explained Karma Tshiteem, secretary of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Commission, during an event held at the Berlin-based foundation, Stiftung Mercator. Tshiteem travels around the world sharing his country's concepts on happiness and well-being. "Gross national happiness is a holistic development approach and a key to sustainability."

He explained that in societies all over the world, people do not become happier as a result of greater economic growth – on the contrary. This is also a danger in Bhutan, he said, so his orga-

nisation asks people how happy they are. These regular surveys allow the Gross National Happiness Commission to identify and solve local or regional problems. "You can follow the impact of political decisions very closely, and that improves sustainability," said the chief happiness surveyor, who laughingly described himself as a "bureaucrat" during the event in Berlin.

Gross national happiness is calculated using a complicated formula in which nine categories determine the population's average level of happiness: standard of living, education, health, time use, psychological well-being, cultural diversity and resilience, community vitality, good governance and ecological diversity and resilience. "The categories of psychological well-being, cultural diversity, and community vitality are particularly innovative," Tshiteem said. Community vitality, for example, involves measuring phenomena such as the willingness to donate to charity, family stability, or feelings of safety.

Every two or three years, officials from the country's Gross National Happiness Commission set out with lengthy questionnaires and ask people questions such as, "How happy are you with the quality of the air?", "How happy are you with the government?", "How happy are you with your children's schools?", "How well do you sleep?", and "Do your family members help each other out?"

Some of the results from 2010 were as follows: About 41 per cent of Bhutanese people are satisfied in six or more of the nine domains and are considered to be "happy", while around 59 per cent are considered to be "less happy" or "not happy". Men are happier than women; people in urban areas are happier than those in rural areas; civil servants and monks belong to the happiest people; and housewives, farmers and staff from the National Work Force are the unhappiest population groups.

Bhutan, which is the same size as Switzerland, has a population of about 700,000. The country was under authoritarian rule until the king announced in December 2005 that he would introduce a process of democratisation. Following adoption of the constitution in 2008, including an article on the pursuit of gross national happiness, the first elections to the National Assembly took place. The elderly monarch abdicated the same year, and Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, who was 28 years old at the time, became the Dragon King of Bhutan. The government was formed by the Bhutan Peace and Prosperity Party.

The second general election was held in July 2013 and resulted in a landslide victory for the opposition People's Democratic Party, which is also loyal to the monarchy. The party's victory was

largely a result of foreign policy issues, including Bhutan's uneasy relationship with neighbouring India, but also of widespread dissatisfaction among the electorate with corruption. The new prime minister has cast doubt on the concept of gross national happiness, saying that it conceals problems with corruption and low standards of living. However, the article in the country's constitution has not yet been repealed.

In the longer term, Bhutan aims to meet all of its energy needs through renewable energies and to become self-sufficient via sustainable products. Gunter Pauli, the founder and head thinker of the worldwide network "Blue Economy", is currently advising the Bhutanese government on installing small wind turbines on existing transmission towers and on setting up ecological breweries.

(February 2013, updated in July 2013 and supplemented with information from The Guardian)

Susan Godwin. Photo: Busani Bafana/ IPS

Teach a Woman to Farm... and She Creates Jobs

By **Busani Bafana**

Nigeria/Swaziland. Give a woman a hand-out and you feed her for a day. But teach her to farm, and how to add value to her product, and you feed her and her family for a lifetime. And if she happens to be Nigerian smallholder farmer Susan Godwin, she in turn will also provide jobs for her community and become a national food hero.

Instead of turning to financial hand-outs when her crop failed four years ago, Godwin went back to the classroom to learn new farming methods, how to add value to her product and how to draw up a business plan to access credit.

"Some of the women I trained with gave up after realising that the training had no financial hand-outs, but I wanted to see it through to the end," Godwin tells IPS.

The following harvest, Godwin's yam and groundnut yield doubled. From the sales revenue she bought a peanut-shelling machine and began processing peanuts into oil and groundnut cakes, something few people in her community have done.

Today, her family has food and financial security. Not many smallholder farmers in her village of Tunduadabu in Nasarawa State in central Nigeria can make that claim. While Godwin employs three women to help her process the peanuts she grows, many farmers in the village are struggling. This is because, unlike Godwin, they have not been educated about adopting new farming methods and still rely on traditional techniques.

"Training is very important for smallholder farmers, especially in Nigeria, because without the training they would not know about new farming methods. Adopting new methods has helped lift me out of poverty to a new life where I have enough to eat, to give to people around me and to sell. I am now able to send my children to school," the mother of five said.

According to "Oxfam in Nigeria", a March 2012 report by Oxfam International, some 70 per cent of the country's women contribute to the West African nation's agricultural output. But Nigeria is vulnerable to food insecurity despite ranking first in agricultural output in Africa. Only 50 per cent of the country's arable land is farmed.

Godwin now has five shelling machines and employs three women to operate them. She also lets her community use the machines for a small fee. "From the daily takings from the shelling machines I give each woman half of what she makes that day – 200 naira (1.27 dollars) makes a difference when you have nothing," says Godwin, who is also the chairwoman of the United Movement for Small Scale Farmers.

By sharing the profits of her business, Godwin has empowered her employees. Some of them have now been able to start their own businesses. "Smallholder farmers can feed the world if we give them the tools and support them," she says.

A continent away from her village, Godwin was feted as a farming role model at the 2012 Borlaug Dialogue held in the Midwestern US state of Iowa in October 2012. Godwin was also named by Oxfam International as the 2012 Female Food Hero in Nigeria.

Sithembile Mwamakamba, manager of the Women Accessing Realigned Markets project at the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN), deplored the high level of illiteracy among smallholder women farmers in Africa. "With the right support, smallholder women farmers can identify their needs, package relevant messages and effectively communicate them to policymakers," Mwamakamba says.

"There is a need to establish local-level dialogue platforms that capture the voice of women farmers in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Furthermore, there is a need for specially designed extension and training services targeting smallholder women farmers in order to improve their productivity."

Mwamakamba emphasised that these programmes must be complemented with improved access to inputs and markets if they are to have a lasting impact on farmers' livelihoods.

The director of global public policy at CropLife International, Tracy Gerstle, says that women are the backbone of the rural economy, comprising 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and an estimated two-thirds of the world's 600 million poor livestock keepers.

"We cannot overlook the central role of women in global food security and economic growth," she says.

"Within poor households, women are essential to breaking the cycle of poverty, given that women tend to invest a significantly higher portion of their income in food and education for the family. Yet women struggle to reach their potential, given globally persistent gaps in their access to extension (services), agricultural inputs, land and finance vis-à-vis men. [This is] un-

derpinned by persistent inequalities in their basic human rights in terms of access to education, land and equality."

Gerstle says that providing educational support to girls and women through training facilities, scholarships, mentoring, extension services and other forms of technical assistance would help bridge the equality gap.

Fight against food insecurity in Swaziland

Happy Shongwe is leading the fight against food insecurity in her homeland, Swaziland. Shongwe, a commercial seed grower and winner of the FANRPAN 2011 Movers and Shakers Civil Society Award, agrees that smallholder farmers hold the keys to food security.

"Smallholder farmers can feed the world, if you capacitate them and give them all the tools," Shongwe told IPS in a telephone interview from the southern African nation.

Shongwe grows certified legume and maize seeds under conservation agriculture techniques on her farm on the Lubombo plateau in the Siteki region, 150 kilometres east of the capital, Mbabane.

After noticing that farmers were constantly short of seed, she ventured into the competitive, yet lucrative, market of seed production.

"Financial support is important for smallholder farmers. I have the energy and the passion for farming, but not the money to kick-start some of my projects," says Shongwe, a mother of two.

Her income has tripled since she started the business, which in a good season can bring in 2,500 dollars. Her success has even attracted the Swazi royal family, which has consulted her on growing legume seeds.

Shongwe is also passing on her wealth of knowledge to others.

"I am currently mentoring 60 farmers keen to go into seed production and have another group of ten people whom I am training on conservation agriculture because knowledge and information are crucial if smallholder farmers are to contribute to food security," Shongwe says.

(November 2012)

Busani Bafana is a multiple award-winning IPS correspondent based in Zimbabwe, specialising in environmental and business journalism.

Sofia Gatica from the Mothers of Ituzaingó on a speaking tour of Europe to fight against glyphosate genetically modified soybeans.
Photo: Volker Gehrmann

Landmark Ruling against Agrochemicals

By **Marcela Valente**

Buenos Aires, Argentina. After over a decade of campaigning against toxic agrochemicals, a group of women from Ituzaingó Anexo, a working-class neighbourhood on the outskirts of the northern Argentinian city of Córdoba, have won justice in a trial they brought against large-scale soybean growers for the harm caused to health by spraying genetically modified soybean fields close to residential districts with glyphosate.

On 21 August 2012, the court found the soybean producer Francisco Parra and the pilot of the spray plane, Edgardo Pancello, guilty of having put the health of the residents of Ituzaingó Anexo at risk. Both men were sentenced to three years' imprisonment. The third accused, soybean grower Jorge Gabrielli, was acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

The women's group, Mothers of Ituzaingó, waited four years for the verdict. However, they were not happy with the sentences, especially because they were suspended. "These farmers have done so much damage to us and we were hoping for more," said Sofía Gatica, who was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize in 2012 for her activities to protect the environment and the health of the 5,000 people who live in her neighbourhood.

But the women can certainly take credit for the fact that the case has set a precedent in a region where a third of Argentina's soybeans are grown. The country is one of the largest exporters of soybeans in the world. Last season saw a harvest of 50 million tonnes grown on an area measuring almost 19 million hectares. Most of the crop is genetically modified soybean, which is immune to the Monsanto herbicide Roundup Ready. This product contains glyphosate, which kills all plants in a field apart from the genetically modified soybeans.

In 1999, Gatica gave birth to a baby whose kidneys were deformed. Her daughter died three days later. The bereaved mother decided to investigate the cause of her daughter's death and started to keep track of the cases of cancer, birth defects and anaemia in the neighbourhood.

She soon realised that numerous health problems could be linked to glyphosate, the herbicide sprayed on fields of genetically modified soybeans.

Gatica's list contained a large number of severe birth defects, including cases of babies born with six fingers or missing a toe, lower jaw, or intestines.

The Mothers of Ituzaingó had blood samples from local children tested, and carried out tests on the water, air and soil. They discovered that the cancer rate in the community was 41 times the national average. Rates of respiratory diseases, neurological problems, and infant mortality were also far higher than average.

When it was confirmed that the medical conditions could have been caused by glyphosate, the women managed to have crop-spraying banned close to the residential area. In the meantime, spraying by hand is prohibited by ordinance within 500 metres of a residential area, while aerial spraying is prohibited within 2,500 metres.

But aerial spraying continued, and in 2008 the Mothers of Ituzaingó brought legal action against the commercial soybean growers, providing videos showing spray planes flying close to the community as evidence.

The lawsuit was backed by Córdoba's under-secretariat of health, which also filed its own case. The prosecutor's office ordered an investigation, which found that not only glyphosate, but also endosulfan – a controversial insecticide that is being phased out globally – were sprayed in the area.

Campaigning against the use of agrochemicals

After the lawsuits were brought and "stop the spraying" protests were held by rural organisations, environmental groups and community associations campaigning against the use of agrochemicals in virtually every province, the national government decided to intervene. President Cristina Fernández decreed the creation of a national commission to investigate agrochemicals in 2009. "Because there are not enough data in Argentina on the effects of glyphosate on human health, it is important to promote further research," was the report's final recommendation.

In 2009, Andrés Carrasco, a scientist at the molecular embryology laboratory at the University of Buenos Aires investigated the effects of glyphosate on amphibian embryos. "The findings in the lab are compatible with malformations observed in humans exposed to glyphosate during pregnancy," Carrasco wrote in his report, which was published in the journal *Chemical Research in Toxicology* in 2010.

The public prosecutor called Carrasco as an expert witness during the trial in Córdoba. Javier Souza Casadinho, an agricultural engineer also appeared for the prosecution. As he told IPS,

both the judges and the public prosecution showed an interest in "gaining an in-depth understanding" of the impact of agrochemicals on health.

"The problem is that not all live organisms react the same way. There can also be long-term effects. For that reason, I insisted in my testimony that a cause-effect relationship should not be sought, because it is not going to be found."

Souza advocates the precautionary principle, which states that, even if a cause-effect relationship has not been fully established scientifically, precautionary measures should be taken if the product or activity poses a threat to health or the environment.

In the trial, the expert was also asked to describe organic alternatives to monoculture production that is increasingly dependent on chemicals.

(August 2012)

Marcela Valente is the IPS correspondent in Argentina.
She also works for various international newspapers.

Elsy Álvarez and María Menjivar – with her young daughter – planting plantain seedlings in a clearing in the forest. Photo: Claudia Ávalos/IPS

Forest Gardens, the Feminine Art of Reforesting

By **Edgardo Ayala** and **Claudia Ávalos**

San Julián, El Salvador. María Elena Muñoz industriously weeds a clearing in the forest and then digs several holes, where she and another four dozen women are planting plantain seedlings to help feed their families in this poor farming area in El Salvador.

The group is involved in an agro-ecology programme that has two main aims: to achieve food sovereignty, which is at risk in the rural communities of San Julián; and to promote the development of energy forests, which provide local families with sustainable energy and help mitigate the impact of climate change.

"The forest belongs to everyone. It gives us fruit and firewood for cooking," says 42-year-old Muñoz, president of the Association of Communities for Development in the district of Los Lagartos in the municipality of San Julián, which is home to 19,000 people in the western province of Sonsonate.

These communities, and especially local farms, are hit hard by climate swings year after year, says Mercy Palacios from the Salvadoran Ecological Unit (UNES), a local environmental non-governmental organisation.

"During the drought, the crops are scorched, and during the rainy season, they are drowned," she explained when IPS accompanied the local women during their activities in the community forest for a day.

Subsistence agriculture is the mainstay of the local communities, where peasant farmers grow corn and beans on infertile hillsides, and the harvests are steadily declining as a result of climate phenomena.

El Salvador, and Central America in general, suffers heavy rain in winter – the rainy season – which almost inevitably leaves a trail of pain and destruction. In October 2011, for example, the rains claimed 43 lives in the country and flooded ten per cent of the national territory.

The cost of rebuilding in Central America in the wake of the October 2011 storms will amount to 4.2 billion dollars, according

to estimates by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

"We are suffering from climate extremes, something new that we have to adapt to," Palacios says.

"There are very poor families that subsist on what they get out of the forest," says Elsy Álvarez, a 37-year-old mother of two. "For example, they sell tangerines in the town, and get a *cora* (25 cents) for tortillas or to give to their kid when he goes to school."

Tired of losing the family harvest, the women in Los Lagartos decided to do something to ensure food sovereignty, and began to plant an energy forest.

Food sovereignty refers to people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems.

The idea for the project came from UNES environmentalists who were working in the area to establish an "agro school" to teach the basic concepts of agro-ecology. But soon the local women made the idea their own and have made it flourish since then without financing.

The food sovereignty project encompasses a quarter of the 40 rural villages and communities in San Julián, a municipality 60 kilometres west of San Salvador whose ancestral name was Cacaluta, which means "city of crows" in the Nawat language.

The project benefits about 50 families – 300 people – and the energy forest component will be expanded from Los Lagartos to other participating communities.

In Los Lagartos, which has a population of 5,000, the women work in their family gardens, where they grow vegetables with organic compost that they produce themselves. They also use this compost in their plots of corn and beans, staples of the Salvadoran diet, and on fruit trees in the forest.

The compost is helping to change planting techniques in the area in ways that are beneficial to the environment. The women are also planning to start selling their organic fertiliser in the future in order to earn funds for the project.

The forest is less than one hectare in size, but it has special importance for the women in Los Lagartos because they have managed to regain control over the area and to replant it after a sugar mill destroyed it ten years ago to plant sugar cane.

"For ten years we have been fighting for this forest," says Muñoz, a married mother of four. When she and the other women saw that the forest was being cut down, they complained

to the authorities and managed to rescue a small portion – but the damage had already been done.

In response, they began to replant. They planted avocado, mango and nance (golden spoon) trees. And this year they began to grow plantains and trees that can be used for their wood, such as guanacaste (elephant ear tree).

"Now we don't let anyone cut our forest down," Álvarez says during a break in the planting work. "We exploit it ourselves, but only the dry branches and what is cut in the pruning process."

The concept of energy forests followed here is not based on planting trees to cut them down later for lumber, but rather on the sustainable use of trees by using dry branches as firewood and planting fruit trees.

"A tree has a useful life expectancy, and the branches can be used as firewood while maintaining its capacity to regenerate," Palacios explains.

In this country of 6.1 million people, some 400,000 families – 25 per cent of the population – use firewood for cooking, according to official figures.

The poorest ten per cent of households in El Salvador spend more on firewood than on electricity, according to the 2010 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on El Salvador.

The use of firewood represents a major cost for poor families, which means that having a forest that covers their needs is a big help for the family budget.

Consumption of firewood not only represents an important expense in their budgets, but many households also dedicate a significant proportion of their time to collecting it, the UNDP report says.

In El Salvador, 36.5 per cent of the population lives in poverty, and 11.2 per cent in extreme poverty, according to official figures from 2010. But in rural areas, the poverty rate stands at 43.2 per cent, and 15 per cent live in extreme poverty.

Luis González, an environmentalist with UNES, said the Los Lagartos project falls under the concept of climate justice, which indicates that not every region, and not every population group within regions or countries, is affected in the same way by global warming.

"Some sectors are more vulnerable than others, and different studies show that women are among the most heavily affected groups," he says. For example, he explains, when drought dries up a water source, women suffer the stress of having to find a new source further away from their homes.

A gender focus must be included in this kind of environmental project in order to give women a more decisive role, says Ima Guirola from the women's group Cemujer. In this part of the country, she says, it is women who are taking the lead in efforts to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

"The important thing is to see whether women are adopting technological tools and scientific know-how on the environment, and whether they are participating in the decision-making involved in the project," she said.

(April 2012)

Edgardo Ayala and Claudia Ávalos report from El Salvador for IPS.

Moral Courage in Bavaria and Mexico – an Intercultural Meeting between Farmers

By **Ute Scheub**

Xochimilco, Mexico. Indigenous women and men wearing leather skirts and magnificent feather decorations dance to the rhythm of drums and maracas. Smoke from burnt sacrifices rises in the air. And German farmers in traditional Bavarian clothing – the men in *Lederhosen* and the women in *Dirndl* – mingle among the crowd.

In April 2012, Nuria Costa, the Mexican coordinator of 1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe, organised an intercultural meeting between Bavarian farmers and indigenous Mexican people. The two groups have more in common than one might expect: the Bavarians campaign against genetic engineering, while the Mexicans are defending their seeds and their culture.

The Bavarians are a delegation from the network Aktion Zivilcourage, which campaigns against genetic engineering and lobbies for the right to farm independently and for farmers to use their own seeds. This meeting on the outskirts of Mexico City provided an opportunity for "people made of hops" to meet "people made of maize" – according to Mexican mythology, the country's indigenous peoples are made of maize.

Aktion Zivilcourage is one of the most influential anti-genetic-engineering and pro-sustainable agriculture movements worldwide. It is based in Chiemgau in Upper Bavaria, where it explains the dangers of genetic engineering and seed patenting to Catholic housewives and members of traditional dress societies and local shooting clubs. The network has been so successful that even leading politicians from the conservative Christian Social Union – Bavaria's governing party – have felt obliged to speak out against genetic engineering. In 2009, Aktion Zivilcourage invited the Indian ecological feminist Vandana Shiva, a Right Livelihood Award laureate and one of the 1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe, to give a speech in Rosenheim to an audience of 3,500 farmers.

Both Vandana Shiva and Nuria Costa regard food sovereignty as a key component of their political strategy, whose primary aim

is to mobilise rural women. They say that communities must have the right to make decisions about their own food supply and point out that if agricultural corporations oppose this right, peace and human security are at risk.

The delegation's visit to Mexico included a trip to Xochimilco to the south of Mexico City, home to the "floating gardens", an impressive network of some 150 interconnected canals that irrigate fertile areas for vegetable cultivation. Xochimilco used to be regarded as the "eighth wonder of the world" and was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

Indigenous people welcome Bavarian farmers with a dance.
Photo: Haiko Pieplow

This indigenous garden culture supplied the densely populated Aztec capital with food before the Spanish colonisers destroyed the city and built Mexico City on its ruins. Tenochtitlan, as the city was called, comprised a huge lake area with floating plant beds. The Aztec gardeners and farmers filled rafts made from reeds with lake sediments, which they fertilised with excrement and then secured to the bottom of the lake using willows. This mud may have produced the most fertile garden culture the world has ever seen. There were several harvests per year. Around 30 square metres could supply enough produce to feed one person throughout the year. In comparison, today's industrialised agriculture needs around 1,800 square metres in tropical climates

and some 2,800 square metres in colder industrialised countries to produce the same amount of food. "We need to go back to having something like this again," was a sentiment several of the German delegates expressed.

The water in Xochimilco is now polluted. Many of the floating gardens have become solid ground and are no longer used for farming. As a result, the world heritage of Xochimilco is threatened. However, lettuce, fennel, spinach and radishes are still grown on the remaining islands. "The fields are magic," a representative of the marketing union of the 1,600 people who farm in Xochimilco tells an attentive audience of Germans. He explains how the farmers' ancestors scooped mud out of the canals and on to the land over the course of centuries. The canals still provide extremely high yields, even without fertilisation. When fertilisers are used – and this is rare – it is just biochar that is added to the soil.

The German delegation had already heard of this ecological method, as scientists recently brought the dark soil – *terra preta* – from the Amazon to Europe and Bavaria. Some of the Bavarian gardeners and farmers had already used it to transform their chicken manure and other organic waste into extremely fertile black soil.

The next stop for the Bavarians was a village in the dry and impoverished state of Oaxaca, where they were welcomed by women from the 120 Mixtec families who live in the village. Each of the women served a bowl of her family speciality, all of which are made from a different type of maize, bean or pumpkin. The Bavarians were deeply moved by this warm welcome by the local women and commended them for preserving their culture and thus hundreds of types of maize. For their part, the hosts were delighted to hear their food praised and said that they sometimes forget how valuable it is. "You're fighting for your seeds and we're fighting for ours. We want to be in charge of our own harvests and food now and in the future," was how the Mixtec women put it.

Mexico used to be a rich country, but as a result of deforestation, rural exodus and the plundering of resources, it can no longer feed its population on its own. It already has to import a third of its staple food, maize. This usually takes the form of genetically modified corn flour from the United States, which is used to bake tortillas. Oaxaca has the highest number of different types of maize in the world, but the region's unique biodiversity is under threat from agricultural concerns such as Monsanto.

"If maize farmers start planting genetically modified or hybrid maize, they get caught in a dependency trap," explains an

agricultural economist who advises the Mixtec people. The foreign maize contaminates local people's true-to-type seeds, so not only do they have to spend money on seeds, they also need to buy herbicides and fertilisers. The soil becomes less fertile, and the microclimate is polluted by the pesticide Roundup Ready, which contains glyphosate. According to studies conducted by Professor of Embryology Andrés Carrasco from the University of Buenos Aires in areas of Argentina where genetically modified soybeans are grown, the incidence of childhood cancer increased threefold between 2000 and 2009, while the rate of miscarriages and birth defects, including grotesque malformations, quadrupled during the same period.

So far, the Mexican government has only allowed genetically modified maize to be grown on "test fields", as the anti-genetic-engineering movement is so strong here, particularly in Oaxaca and other regions with a large indigenous population. However, corrupt or neoliberal government members are pushing for the authorisation of genetically modified plants, including soybeans. The contamination of the countless number of old types of maize by genetically modified and hybrid maize is extremely dangerous for Mexico, where maize originated.

But in villages such as the one visited by the Bavarian delegation, the indigenous people are well organised. During their meetings on the village square they adopt resolutions to reforest their region, to set up their own water supply, and to defend their plant diversity as the basis of their independence. "Our cities are out of control, but the institutions still work in the small villages," explains the agricultural economist. He supports the Mixtec villages by buying their traditional types of maize and serving them in his restaurant.

Down to earth, stubborn and rebellious as both groups are, it doesn't matter whether the people are made of hops or maize – they understand each other even when they don't speak the same language. They agree to work on follow-up projects and to pool their knowledge and experience. So it looks like authentic hops and maize still have a chance of surviving.

(April 2012)

Women as Agents of Change

Chapter 4: Fighting for Empowerment

Not all war damage in Bosnia is visible – many people bear the scars of trauma suffered during the war. Photo: John Isaac/ UN Photos

More Rights for the Survivors of Sexualised Violence

By **Jabeen Bhatti and Nurhan Kocaoğlu**

Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. It started at the cinema. In 2006, a full house in Sarajevo watched *Grbavica*, the story of Esma, a Bosnian rape survivor who is raising a daughter born of that violence on her own. Outside, women's activists began gathering the first of what would become 50,000 signatures to push for greater recognition of and support for women like Esma, the survivors of mass rape during the Bosnian War (1992-1995).

Shortly after the screening, the Bosnian government, spurred on by the petition and UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which calls for greater support for women in post-conflict societies, passed a landmark initiative to classify rape survivors as official "victims" of the war and to make them eligible for benefits.

Activists and experts warned that the initiative was still only a beginning. "This achievement was revolutionary. Worldwide it was the first time that in a post-war country, a parliament included this status into the law," says Monika Hauser, a gynaecologist, women's rights activist and the founder of medica mondiale. Hauser is one of the 1,000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe who were collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. In 2008, she won the Right Livelihood Award, which is often referred to as the Alternative Nobel Prize, for her work with women who were traumatised by the war. "Though we can't talk about complete healing, this is a step forward because the victims don't have to resort to begging."

Although the war ended a long time ago in 1995, Bosnians continue to live in a highly militarised, traumatised and increasingly traditional society. In pre-war socialist Yugoslavia, women were highly visible in the political realm. Since the war, they have been pushed aside and shut out of the reconstruction process. For example, no women were involved in the creation of the 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the war in Bosnia, says Ana Lukatela, a consultant to the former United Nations Development Fund for Women, now called UN Women.

"In terms of building a sustainable and just peace, the problems in Bosnia were there from the very beginning," says Lukatela. "If we look at the Dayton Accords, there is not a single article addressing any type of reparations for sexual violence against women during the conflict."

Support from UNSCR 1325

Women's exclusion from peace-making processes is what UNSCR 1325 intended to rectify when it was adopted in 2000. It was also the first UN initiative to address sexual violence during wartime.

"UNSCR 1325 came at a time when violations against women were beginning to surface and become hugely visible," says Jennifer Klot, a senior advisor on gender issues at the Brooklyn-based non-profit Social Science Research Council who was involved in the creation of UNSCR 1325. "Those working in conflict situations in the humanitarian and human rights movement saw that women were not benefiting enough from the [enormous amounts of aid available from international organisations]."

In Bosnia, that changed in 2006 when Bosnian legislators passed the Civilian Victims of War Act. The law provided 70 per cent of the full disability pension – about 500 Bosnian marks (250 euros) per month – to rape survivors.

Experts say that the law has helped these women to survive and heal. Prior to the pension, the only state assistance certain survivors received was a monthly childcare allowance of 15 euros. However, problems such as eligibility, funding, judicial procedure and a lack of counsellors and other specialised personnel are hindering further progress.

The political division makes reparations more complex

For example, of the estimated 20,000 to 60,000 rape survivors during the Bosnian War, only 1,000 had the necessary documentation to qualify for the pension. Moreover, Bosnia and Herzegovina is divided into two political entities, and only those in the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina are eligible for the pension, while those in the Republika Srpska are not.

Getting justice has also proved problematic. Sexual violence was not a by-product of the Bosnian War, but rather a deliberate war strategy. Experts say that more needs to be done to recognise that through the courts.

"Receiving a pension is not the same as having a judicial verdict, which brings greater psychological relief," says Lukatela. Nevertheless, when the former president of the Republika Srpska, Radovan Karadžić, was charged with war crimes in 2008, the

rape charge was taken out of the indictment to make it easier to prosecute him.

Furthermore, advocates say that those who finally muster the courage to testify against their rapists at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague are forced to relive their experiences as prisoners, as they are kept in isolation and forbidden from contact with their families until after testifying. Furthermore, these women need better protection from retribution when they return home, says Memnuna Zvizdić, director of Žene Ženama, a women's advocacy group that helps rape survivors in Sarajevo.

Fadila Memišević, president of the Society for Threatened Peoples in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a human rights organisation which also works with rape survivors, says that, like Esma in the film, many of the war rape victims continue to live on the fringes of society and lack a strong support network, especially when they leave their hometowns. They need more support services, she adds.

Such assistance helped Marie (a pseudonym) testify against her attacker at The Hague, return home and cope with survival there. Once a judge, Marie was one of the 6,000 prisoners in the Omarska detention camp near her town of Prijedor where she was repeatedly raped. After her release, she, like many others, fled to Zagreb and after the Dayton Accords, eventually returned home. One of her rapists, Miroslav Kvočka, also from Prijedor, was released after seven years in prison. "Today, she sees him walking with his wife in town," says Memišević, whose organisation helped Marie. "Most rape survivors don't have the strength to live in the same town as their rapists."

Rape survivors need more therapists

Another problem is that there are not enough qualified therapists for women rape survivors or their children, says Memišević. Many children, such as Esma's daughter in the film, don't know the truth about their fathers and are at a loss to understand the trauma that their mothers are going through. "These children need the truth and of course they also need the necessary counselling to cope with learning the truth, which is part of the healing process," says Memišević.

Hauser says that this trans-generational trauma is a growing concern, and that more training programmes for therapists are needed: "We need to interrupt and break the cycle before it is passed on to the next generation."

The organisation Medica Zenica, which was founded by Hauser and her Bosnian counterparts in 1992, is trying to do just that. The centre offers medical and psychological support and safe houses for rape survivors. To date, more than 10,500 women have received medical treatment or other forms of help. Many of these women need further medical and psychological assistance to survive, says Hauser: "These women are very prone to illnesses, chronic pain, panic attacks and suicide attempts."

One of the biggest obstacles to the successful implementation of UNSCR 1325 and providing support to rape survivors in Bosnia is financial. Most rape survivors are still of working age but are unable to obtain work because of unresolved trauma and also a lack of jobs in a country where unemployment is reach above 40 per cent. Memišević says that these women need education and retraining programmes, as well as assistance in finding employment. Most, she adds, are barely surviving financially.

National action plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325

The Bosnian government has recognised that it must do more since implementing the pension initiative years ago. In July 2010, parliament adopted a National Action Plan with set initiatives to further the goals of UNSCR 1325, but the legislation lacks teeth. There are few sanctions to force the involved institutions to comply, says Lukatela. Activists add that it is a waiting game regarding promised funding. Budgets are already stretched in a country still grappling with the aftershocks of war. Meanwhile, financial support from the international community is also diminishing as the Balkans are becoming a lower priority for development organisations.

"UNSCR 1325 was a great springboard for setting things in motion for women, not only in getting help for the survivors, but also in empowering women and involving them in conflict resolution," says Pam DeLargy, chief of the Humanitarian Unit at the United Nations Population Fund. "At the grassroots level, implementing UNSCR 1325 has been great. Ensuring the sustainability of these activities at the national and international level is where the bigger challenge lies."

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Jabeen Bhatti and Nurhan Kocaoğlu are affiliated with Associated Reporters Abroad (ARA), which reports on Europe and the Middle East.

It's the Beginning of the End for Female Genital Mutilation

Interview with journalist Mae Azango

By **Rousbeh Legatis**

Monrovia/Liberia. Journalists can play a crucial role in helping to shift traditional attitudes within societies where the cruel practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) is an everyday reality.

Mae Azango, a reporter for the Liberian daily newspaper *FrontPage Africa*, took on this taboo subject in her home country of Liberia, where as many as two out of three girls are affected and the topic itself has been neglected by politicians at the highest level for years.

Her coverage forced her and her young daughter into hiding for weeks, but it also gained international attention and put pressure on the government.

Telling the stories of women and girls

"We were able to show Liberians that the outcomes for girls hugely improve if they stay in school and don't have children until their twenties," says Azango about a series of articles she published with the reporting project New Narratives in 2012.

Up to that time, the topic had not appeared on the public's radar in the West African country. Using different angles, the series detailed the impact of Liberia's rate of teen motherhood – one of the highest in Africa – on national economic development.

Other series pressured the Liberian government to address child prostitution, rape and unsafe abortion. By highlighting the perspectives of victims, "we've helped open Liberians' eyes to the reality of these girls' lives and increased public awareness about these problems," she said.

New Narratives comprises leading Liberian media outlets and journalists who work with international organisations, which provide financial resources and capacity building. The focus is on women reporters and on strengthening investigative journalism.

Mae Azango.
Photo: Glenna Gordon for New Narratives

Most newspaper stories and radio and television shows are produced by men. Only one in 12 Liberian journalists is a woman, according to New Narratives.

Working with experienced editors, managers, commentators, photographers and reporters through every step of the reporting process, female journalists are producing high-quality contributions for different media outlets in print, radio and television.

"The effect is that we make our reporting more investigative and objective in getting as many sides as possible for every story. And they help us see stories in subjects we had not seen before," says Azango. In her work with the project, she has seen at first hand "the power the media can have if used right".

New Narratives started as a pilot project in Liberia and will be expanded to Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana.

Azango, who won the International Press Freedom Award 2012, spoke with UN correspondent Rousbeh Legatis about how the media can make a difference and improve the situation of the few female journalists in Liberia. Excerpts from the interview follow.

Looking back on your work, you said: 'I knew if we started to talk about [FGM], and they knew the truth, many parents would choose a different path' for their daughters. Did they?

Azango: No, parents haven't chosen a different path for their daughters yet because they still feel it's the clean and just thing to do. As an ancient tradition, it isn't going to be changed overnight. We know that. As I'm talking to you, the practice is still going on in secret, even though the government has suspended such activities.

But what we have done is start a conversation at a national level that will allow this practice to be debated for the first time ever in our country. I'm very pleased about that.

More and more political leaders and victims have felt confident about coming forward and saying, 'This practice is outdated. It is wrong.' Many parents will hear that debate for the first time and think twice about cutting their daughters. It's not the end, but it's the beginning of the end – and many little girls will be spared. But in the long run it will take the sort of long-term, intensive awareness campaign that the government has promised to really stamp it out.

Why is FGM such a taboo subject and how difficult is it to cover as a journalist?

It's a taboo subject in Liberia and Sierra Leone because it is a ritual practised by traditional secret societies in those two countries. Girls as young as two spend months in the bush learning how to be wives and at the end there is a ceremony where they are cut. There is also a school for boys.

The people who run these schools make a lot of money from them and they want to protect that income.

People know that if you are initiated into the societies you must never speak about what goes on there. If you do, they will kill you, mostly by magic. So people are very afraid to speak about it.

But affected women who went through this ritual of cutting are often very bitter and resentful. I was able to persuade a woman to speak to me, but she was extremely anxious about it. We had to hide in her hut and use a false name. She was still traumatised from the experience when she was held down by four women when she was 13 and cut by a fifth with a blade that had been used on 25 other girls. She has lived with the trauma and the medical consequences ever since.

She has faced a lot of attacks since the story came out, but she says she is glad to have done it because she hopes it will spare other girls what she went through. She is very brave.

What is the situation for female journalists in Liberia and what do they need?

There are not many female journalists in Liberia, but the few that are there are trying to make a difference.

Many male journalists feel we are only good enough to go after soft news stories. I'm very lucky to work for *FrontPage Africa* – a paper that sees women reporters as assets. I'm also part of a U.S. project called New Narratives that is supporting women reporters in Liberia.

My fellow New Narratives reporters and I have won nine national reporting awards in the last two years and have written for media around the world. We have forced the government and other leaders to act on a range of issues, including police abuse of rape victims, child prostitution and teen pregnancy.

We are proving the men wrong because we are really making waves in Liberia and having the sort of impact they want to have.

We are also proving that not all news has to be politics and scandal. There are so many issues that are plaguing women and children in particular in Liberia and we are proving that these are valid news stories which people want to know about.

Why do you think your reporting resulted in political action when other articles and messages never brought any change?

What was different about this reporting was that it was told in a very compelling way.

It was on the front page of the major newspaper in Liberia on International Women's Day, when other media were doing light pieces about women's advancement.

It had graphic photos that showed how young girls were being initiated even though the societies claimed girls had to be of marriageable age when they went to the schools. It also told the story through the eyes of a victim. People were able to really relate to her story because everyone had been through the same thing or knew someone who had suffered like that woman.

It's so rare that reporters actually use real people to tell their stories in Liberia. Usually it's just a rewritten press release or the words of a single leader being reproduced. There is no reporting. Readers really responded to this, because the overall presentation was so compelling. It got everyone's attention and it was discussed for months on radio talk shows. (January 2013)

Rousbeh Legatis is a researcher on peace and conflict studies and the UN correspondent of IPS in the UN bureau in New York.

A Women's Village without Violence

By **Hannah Rubenstein**

Umoja, Kenya. No man, except for those raised here as children, lives in Umoja village in Kenya. This has been the case for two decades. Umoja is a village for women only – women who have been abused, raped and forced from their homes.

In the culture of northern Kenya's Samburu district there is a saying: "Men are the head of a body, and women are the neck." The neck may support the head, but the head is always dominant, towering above. But in this remote village, located in the grasslands of Samburu County, this mantra does not ring true. In Umoja, as one female resident says, "We are our own heads."

Umoja, which means "unity" in Swahili, holds a unique status in the country: it is a village populated solely by women. For more than two decades, no men have been permitted to reside here.

The rule is one of the requirements of a community that has fought against overwhelming odds to become a place of refuge for women. It is a sanctuary where men – who have been the cause of so many problems for these women – are simply not welcome.

In the 23 years since its foundation, the village has had a significant impact not only on the women who choose to call Umoja home, but also on the communities that surround it. The example that Umoja has set, coupled with the outreach efforts of its residents, has touched the lives of women in the region.

Celena Green, who is the Africa programme director for an organisation called Vital Voices that works with the women of Umoja, tells IPS: "The existence of Umoja has allowed women's groups in other surrounding villages to learn from the empowerment and pride of the Umoja women."

Women from nearby communities attend workshops in the village that are aimed at educating women and girls about human rights, gender equity and violence prevention. When the women return home, Green explains, "they begin to change the culture, demanding a safe, violence-free community where women and girls are valued and protected".

"Ideally, no woman or girl should ever have to flee her home to come to Umoja in the first place," she adds. "But ultimately, the aim of Umoja is to provide an emergency safe haven for those

women who are in distress, and more importantly to contribute toward building communities where everyone is valued and can succeed."

Umoja's history began in 1990, when a collective of 15 Samburu women, who called themselves the Umoja Uaso Women's Group, began selling beadwork and other goods to raise money for themselves and their families. As their work became more financially lucrative, the women found themselves facing increasing harassment by men in their communities who felt that economic growth was not appropriate for women, who traditionally play a subordinate role.

In response, the women, led by matriarch Rebecca Lolosoli, decided to break away and found their own village in order to ensure security and cooperation for themselves out of the reach of those who sought to undermine them.

Today, Umoja is home to about 50 women who have come from all over the country. Their stories vary – some were young girls fleeing forced marriages to old men, others were raped or sexually abused, and several were widows who were shunned by their communities. Several residents are Turkana women taking refuge from the tribal violence currently raging in the central region of Isiolo.

The villagers, who rely on the sale of beadwork and profits from a nearby campsite and cultural centre, pool their funds as a collective to support themselves. In addition to providing food and basic necessities for village residents, profits are used to cover medical fees and the operation of a school that serves both the village's children and its adult women who wish to learn basic skills and literacy.

"We share everything, including our problems"

Lolosoli, who founded the village, wears the traditional clothing of the Samburu, but has otherwise completely abandoned her cultural traditions. "The gates to the village are locked at night," she says. "We protect each other. We share everything, including our problems." Each new arrival is given her own livestock: six goats and a buck. This is revolutionary, as Samburu women are usually regarded as the property of their husband and are not allowed to own livestock or land. The women in Umoja live on the meat and milk provided by their animals. They buy corn and rice, as there is very little rainfall in the region.

Nagusi Lolemu, an older woman with delicate hands and a melodious voice, is one of the village's original founders. Sitting in the shade, her nimble fingers deftly string red beads in a single

fluid and unthinking movement, as she speaks rapidly in Samburu.

Lolemu's story echoes a recurring theme in the village: she was widowed after years of marriage and subsequently rejected by the community she called home. "There were too many single women," she says through an interpreter. Single women, who are not permitted to hold property in Samburu culture and are generally not educated, are viewed as a financial drain on the community. When her husband passed away, she was no longer welcome in her home.

Umoja Women's Village in Kenya. Photo: Hannah Rubenstein, IPS

Lolemu, who has been living in Umoja for 22 years, has two adult children. She does not question her decision to leave her home for Umoja.

"My children are educated, working, and giving back to the family and the community," she says. "In a regular village, this could not happen."

In her village – like any other traditional community – there is little opportunity for women's education and the financial benefits this brings, she explains. Her daughter would have grown up as she did, illiterate and dependent on men for all her basic needs.

"Here," Lolemu says simply, "everyone is equal."

Green echoes this statement, explaining to IPS: "In a traditional village, women may not have had the opportunity to exercise leadership or to be in control of their wealth or resources. They would more likely experience domestic violence, female genital mutilation, child marriage and other traditional practices

that discriminate against and physically harm women and children."

In addition to barring men from residing in the village, the women of Umoja live by a set of self-imposed rules, which, as Lolemu explained, are based on ensuring equality and mutual respect within the village.

Preserving their cultural heritage

Residents are required to wear the traditional clothes and intricate beadwork jewellery of their people at all times in order to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. The practice of female genital mutilation is not permitted. And the only males allowed to sleep in the village are those who have been raised there as children.

One of the most striking aspects of Umoja is the women's attitude towards men. In a place where men have been the root cause of so many hardships and, in most cases, the reason the residents fled their homes, it is tempting to think that the victims want nothing more to do with men and are happy to live the rest of their lives surrounded by other women. This is not the case at all – in fact, most of the younger women in the village plan on marrying and raising families.

The difference is that they are going to do it on their own terms.

Judy, a 19-year-old resident who fled an arranged marriage to a much older, polygamous man five years ago, is planning on getting married some day. She dates outside the confines of the village, which is not only permitted but is also encouraged by the older residents, and is raising a six-month-old named Ivan, who squirms and coos in her arms as she speaks. One day, she will marry and leave Umoja for her husband's village. But, until then, she is happy here.

When asked if there is anything she misses from her previous life, any element of living in a women's only village that she finds lacking, she laughs.

"No. We have everything here," she says, and smiles.

In Umoja, women are not only their own "heads" – each is her entire body.

(April 2012, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Hannah Rubenstein works as a freelance journalist in Kenya, where she reports for IPS.

Rural Women's Banks Ease Tough Times

By **Wambi Michael**

Wakiso, Uganda. For most Ugandan women, it has been very difficult to obtain a commercial loan to start a business. Many do not have the required collateral of land title deeds and many cannot afford the interest rates charged by commercial banks.

But six women-led rural banks have begun changing the lives of women in rural Uganda, easing their access to credit and enabling them to start small businesses and improve their food security.

Wakiso is a town located about 20 kilometres from the Ugandan capital, Kampala. The African Woman Food Farmer Initiative, a cooperative savings and credit society, is one of the six rural banks run by women in the town. It has over 1,600 savers and borrowers and is supported by The Hunger Project, an international organisation promoting a sustainable end to hunger.

"It is a unique bank because it is run by women and it supports women, especially those engaged in agriculture. We mobilise women and encourage them to fight hunger and poverty by saving, as well as by accessing small loans," says Rose Nanyonga, the bank manager.

Nanyonga explains that unlike commercial banks, this village bank is owned by women who have a stake in its growth.

"Our members buy shares in the bank, so they own it. And they get dividends at the end of every year." All seven of the bank's board members are women.

The bank does not merely provide clients with access to credit. Outside the banking hall, agricultural equipment, lanterns and even solar panels are available for sale to the bank's clients.

Joel Komakec, a project officer with The Hunger Project, explains that the idea is to ensure that the bank's borrowers buy the right seeds and equipment with the money loaned to them.

"With the current energy crisis in the country, everyone is rushing to buy solar panels. But the chances are that a borrower will access a loan only to buy a substandard one. So we make sure they get the right one," he says.

Daisy Owomugasho, country director of The Hunger Project Uganda, explains that the village bank microfinance programme

is part of a strategy being promoted in Uganda and eight other African countries.

"The credit that people get in the form of microfinance is supposed to help communities to grow food, access inputs, or buy better seeds or anything else they might need. We look at it as a holistic approach to ending people's hunger and poverty," says Owomugasho, adding that men are also free to borrow from the bank.

She explains that communities are trained in how to manage and use credit effectively in order to escape poverty.

"But we realised that to empower women, they also have to be in charge of credit. They are taught book-keeping and banking skills, and they are able to manage the rural banks themselves," she says.

"All six banks are not only making a profit, but have had a high rate of loan repayments because their members feel that they own the banks."

A Ugandan farmer uses water from her own tank to irrigate her land. Photo: Wambi Michael, IPS

Fourteen kilometres from Wakiso is a blue metal kiosk that provides banking services to the rural areas around Kikandwa Parish and beyond.

It is run by Aisha Nansuna, who collects the daily deposits and facilitates withdrawals from clients who cannot travel to the main branch.

Nansuna says that the location of the kiosk has helped to instil a culture of savings among rural women in Wakiso. "You see women bringing even the smallest amount of money for saving because the bank is nearby," she said.

Nansuna is also a beneficiary of the rural bank. Behind the kiosk is her well-stocked pharmacy.

"I have benefited a lot from our bank," she says. "I started with a loan for poultry. Then I applied for 1,500 dollars, which I used to establish this pharmacy." With the money she makes from her business she has been able to send one of her children to university.

Fifty-year-old Dorothy Kabajungu is another beneficiary. She tells IPS that rural banks have lower interest rates compared to commercial banks.

"We are now paying 20 per cent interest and they give us a period of ten months to repay that amount. But I'm told the other banks are charging over 30 per cent for loans," she says. "This bank is very good because it is our own bank. We, the villagers, we like it very much because we are not put under too much pressure to repay loans."

Kabajungu began with a 125-dollar loan, which she invested in poultry. Once it was repaid, she was given access to a larger loan of 500 dollars, which she has once again invested in poultry, but is also using to start a firewood business.

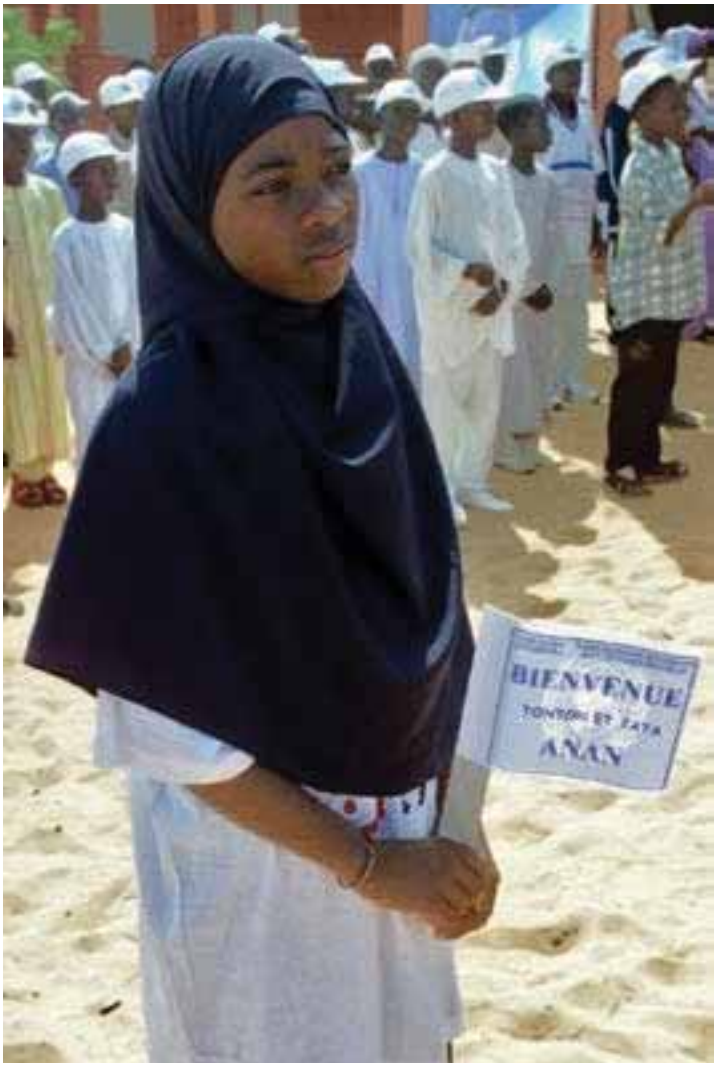
"I have just taken on the firewood business because charcoal is very expensive and there is demand for firewood," she says, explaining that through the skills training she learned how to identify and follow a need.

"The training taught me how to survive even amid hard economic times."

(January 2012)

Wambi Michael is a Ugandan journalist who works for IPS and local radio stations.

Young Muslim Woman in Senegal.
Photo: Evan Schneider, UN Photos



Grandmothers Taking the Lead against Female Genital Mutilation

By **Soumaila T. Diarra**

Bamako, Senegal. In the southern Senegalese village of Kael Bessel, female genital mutilation (FGM) is no longer a taboo subject. Sexagenarian Fatoumata Sabaly speaks freely about female circumcision and girls' rights with her friends.

"We've found it necessary to abandon cutting. Abandoning the practice has advantages for women," she tells IPS. "Female circumcision has consequences such as haemorrhaging and it can even lead to death."

In Senegal, as in other West African countries, grandmothers such as Sabaly are generally the ones who decide that girls should be circumcised. A 2008 survey in Vélingara, also in the south of Senegal, found that nearly 60 per cent of older women supported FGM. But a 2011 survey carried out by the Grandmother Project found that 93 per cent of the same group now oppose the practice.

The Grandmother Project, an international non-governmental organisation which promotes community dialogue about cultural issues, has helped organise regular meetings in some thirty villages around Vélingara in order to enable people to discuss questions relating to local traditions and values, particularly *koyan* – the rite of passage associated with FGM.

Religious leaders, traditional chiefs, local officials, young people and elders all take part. The public debates allow people to talk openly about the advantages and disadvantages of their cultural practices.

"Since excision has more disadvantages than advantages, people are slowly abandoning the practice," said Falilou Cissé, a community development advisor at the Grandmother Project in Vélingara. "People have stopped the practice themselves. We have never asked people to stop it," she stressed.

The meetings emphasise the educational role of grandmothers in African societies, but beyond that they also help break the silence around taboo subjects such as FGM.

"I was for excision, personally, like many people, but the public discussions have helped me to change my position, to accept that in our culture, there are some values to preserve and

others to abandon," says Abdoulaye Baldé, the imam of a mosque in Vélingara.

Today, thanks to Baldé's participation in the meetings, people around Vélingara know that FGM is not a religious obligation for Muslims. The involvement of opinion leaders has had a huge impact on changing the outlook on excision among grandmothers.

Fatoumata Baldé, a nurse and midwife in Kandia, a village near Vélingara, says that she can't remember coming across a case of excision in the area since 2010. "Previously, we were used to handling lots of cases of cutting gone bad at the clinic, because it's done without medical assistance," explained the nurse, who is also a regular participant in the debates.

Boubacar Bocoum, a Malian consultant who has studied FGM in several countries, sees grounds for hope in the Vélingara experience that the practice could be definitively abandoned across West Africa.

"The projects fighting against this practice generally target those who conduct the excisions, but it's really a community problem," he said. "If only one part of the community abandons it, the practice persists because the rest of the people are not engaged."

According to a study published by the non-governmental organisation Plan International in 2006, FGM is practiced throughout the West Africa region. "In Guinea, in Sierra Leone and in Mali, practically all women are excised," said the report. "In Niger and Ghana, the practice is limited to particular geographic areas and the national prevalence is less than ten per cent."

(December 2012)

IPS correspondent Soumaila T. Diarra is a Malian journalist.
He works also as a freelancer for various media.

Women Lead the Charge

By **Emad Mekay**

Egypt/Tunisia/Yemen. Asmaa Mahfouz, a 26-year-old Egyptian woman who previously had only one name, now boasts at least three. These include "a woman worth 100 men", "the girl who crushed Mubarak" and "the leader of the Egyptian Revolution".

Mahfouz, who began online political activism in 2008, is now credited with launching a video call that sparked the revolution against the autocratic military rule of US-backed President Hosni Mubarak.

She is one of a new wave of female Arab activists who are shedding their typically conservative image to lead or inspire a wave of pro-democracy protests that are reshaping the political future of several countries in the Arab world.

Mahfouz made a YouTube video in mid-January 2011 in which she urged "all young men and women" to leave their computer screens and converge on the streets of Egypt to protest against the brutal and corrupt rule of the then 82-year old Mubarak.

"I am a woman and I am going out on 25 January and I am not afraid of the police," she said a few days before the unrest broke out. "For the men who brag of their toughness, why exactly are you not joining us to go out and demonstrate?"

Her message reverberated, she says, "beyond the wildest of dreams".

The 4.5-minute video was shared widely by Internet activists and posted on many blogs and websites. Young people forwarded it to mobile phones – a communications tool that some 65 million Egyptians use. Shortly afterwards, the government blocked all mobile phone networks.

"I had hoped 25 January would gather 10,000 people at best, but I later realised after the police force withdrew and collapsed that our day of protests had turned into a popular revolution," she said on a Facebook page created for her by her supporters.

"My family was so worried about me and they told me women are not tough enough for that kind of confrontation," Mahfouz said. "They now tell me they are so proud of me. I knew that if I get scared and everybody gets scared, then this country will be lost for good."

Mahfouz's words resonated not only in Egypt, but also across the whole region. "Asmaa's words were sincere and came

Women on Tahrir Square.
Photo: Mohamed Omer/IPS

from the heart," wrote Reem Khalifa, a columnist for the Bahraini newspaper *Al-Wasat*. "Her words turned into a tsunami, wreaking havoc with despotism, tyranny and injustice."

Mahfouz is among millions of women taking the lead during protests in Egypt and elsewhere in Arab countries.

In Cairo, women with sticks and iron bars in hand patrolled some of the streets with their male relatives during the days of looting and vandalism that swept the city after the collapse of the Egyptian police force.

The mothers of several people who died in the initial days of the protests have refused to receive condolences or hold funeral ceremonies until the revolution achieves its main goal of ousting Mubarak's regime.

The mother of Khaled Said, an internet activist who was beaten to death by police officers in Alexandria in June 2010, joined the protesters in Tahrir Square and repeatedly urged them not to go home before Mubarak leaves office.

Women have visibly been in the forefront in demonstrations at Tahrir Square and other places – in a society where women traditionally have taken a back seat. Many volunteered to do body searches of other women taking part in the protests, as it had become clear that the regime could sneak in weapons to be used against the protesters.

Across the Arab world, women have stepped into the forefront of dangerous anti-regime protests.

In Tunisia, human rights leader and blogger Lina Ben Mhenni was among the first to get word out about the Tunisian protests early in December 2010 through her tweets and blogs – despite police threats.

The mother of Mohamed Bouazizi, the young street vendor who set himself ablaze, thus starting the Tunisian revolution in mid-December 2010, has also been doing her share and calling for change. Her sincere tears and wishes for justice galvanised hundreds of thousands of impatient Tunisians to eventually remove the country's long-time dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The video of her tears went viral in the Arab world.

In Yemen, another country that has seen major anti-government protests, young female activist Tawakul Abdel-Salam Karman was leading the charge. It was 30-year-old Karman's arrest by President Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime that set off days of major street demonstrations which threatened his hold on power. Karman, who was released after 36 hours, remains one of the country's most outspoken critics of the regime.

"The Arab world is in revolt against dictatorships," says Magda Adly from the El Nadim Centre for the Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence in Cairo. "That's why we see women, Islamist or not Islamist, veiled or not veiled, coming together and leading what's happening on the ground. This is real equality and we'll never go back to square one."

(February 2011)

Emad Mekay is IPS' trade and finance correspondent. Based in Washington, he also reports widely on the activities of the anti-globalisation movement, both in the US and elsewhere in the world.

Women protesting against sexual assault.
Photo: Khaled Moussa al-Omrani/IPS

Women Rebel against Harassment

By **Mel Frykberg**

Cairo, Egypt. Egyptian bullies who sexually harass women in the streets, often taking advantage of mob or crowd situations and the anonymity these provide, are getting a taste of their own medicine – and they don't like it.

Due to the plague of sexual harassment, which the Egyptian authorities have appeared unwilling to address so far, Egyptian women have been taking matters into their own hands by organising anti-sexual harassment campaigns. Their efforts are being supported by the growing number of young Egyptian men who have formed anti-harassment squads.

A young Egyptian man, dressed in faded blue jeans, his hair fashionably slicked into spikes with gel, is suddenly surrounded by a group of Egyptian men dressed in fluorescent green jackets emblazoned with anti-sexual harassment logos.

Several of the anti-harassment squad put the startled young man into a headlock. He is then lightly slapped on both sides of his face, leaving huge black grease marks that make him stand out in the crowd. After a dressing-down for his sexual misconduct, his particulars are recorded and he is then released, as a crowd of curious onlookers gather around the highly embarrassed youth.

This is just one of many cases that have been documented and videoed recently in downtown Cairo. Some of the detained men had already been marked with mercurochrome, which was sprayed at them by young women carrying water pistols filled with the liquid and tear gas.

While sexual harassment is a daily occurrence in Egypt, there is a sharp increase in the number of assaults during holiday periods.

Hotlines have been established for women to phone, and groups from the anti-sexual harassment squads patrol hotspots in downtown Cairo. Activists have reported several cases of mobs of men targeting women. In one incident, a group of 40 men attacked 50 girls.

Sexual intimidation has long been a problem in Egypt. According to a survey issued in 2008 by the Egyptian Centre for Women's Rights, 83 per cent of Egyptian women and 98 per cent of foreign women had been exposed to sexual harassment at least

once. In a survey by UN Women published in April 2013, 99.3 per cent of the respondents said that they had experienced sexual harassment. Three-quarters of them said that this was an everyday occurrence.

According to this survey, almost 60 per cent of these women said that they had been groped; some 55 per cent said that they had been harassed verbally or by being whistled at; 48 per cent had been the target of obscenities; and over 30 per cent had been raped.

More than 82 per cent of the respondents said that they did not feel secure or safe in the street, while nearly 79 per cent indicated that they did not feel safe even in a taxi.

Conservative Muslim women who cover their hair have been targeted, as have women dressed in a burqa which covers their entire body, leaving only their eyes visible. According to the study by UN Women, hardly any of the victims reported their attackers to the police, either because they were afraid of damage to their reputation or because they thought that the police would ignore them or blame them for the assault.

Some Islamists also blame women for being attacked. Reda Saleh Al al-Hefnawi, a member of parliament for the Muslim Brotherhood, said: "How can the Ministry of the Interior protect women when they stand in a group of men?"

Members of the Catch a Harasser movement and members of the Egyptian Democratic Institute in Bahariya held a silent protest against sexual harassment in the western Nile Delta city of Damanhur in anticipation of the holiday of Eid-Ul-Adha, the Islamic Festival of Sacrifice, in October 2012.

They held placards reading, "If you dislike my clothes or my walk, is that an excuse to molest me? If that is so, why do you still harass me when I'm veiled or fully veiled?"

During the Egyptian Revolution and subsequent protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square, groups of men were also seen attacking female protestors, taking advantage of the lack of a police presence and the anonymity of the crowd.

Activists told the media that some of these attacks were deliberately organised by members of the former regime of Hosni Mubarak to intimidate female activists. Other mobs of sexual predators, however, appeared to have been acting spontaneously.

A number of foreign female journalists have been attacked in Tahrir Square. The infamous sexual assault on CBS correspondent Lara Logan as she was reporting from Tahrir Square in February 2011 made international headlines. Sonia Dridi, a correspondent for France 24, was attacked after being surrounded by a

gang of young men as she reported from the Egyptian capital in October 2012.

After being groped for several minutes she was eventually rescued by a fellow reporter, who dragged her to safety.

Despite its reluctance to take action, the growing number of attacks forced the government's hand. In October 2012, then Prime Minister Hesham Qandil said that his government was preparing a draft law which would impose harsher penalties against the perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Furthermore, officials have announced that they are planning to create a network of surveillance cameras along the main streets and squares of Cairo to clamp down on sexual harassment in the city. They added that the faces of perpetrators would be broadcast on TV and shown on the internet.

A small female police unit was set up in Cairo in June 2013 to tackle violence against women. However, this has not led to a decrease in the number of attacks.

Activists have complained that the police fail to take action even when given the details of the perpetrators, saying that often the authorities questioned the identity of the attackers without taking any legal actions against the harassers.

(November 2012, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Mel Frykberg reports for IPS and other media from the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, Beirut, Cairo, Tripoli and Amman.

Dr Alema at work in her office.
Photo: Andrea Bernardi

Wading through Violence for Peace

By **Andrea Bernardi**

Kabul, Afghanistan. Peaceful conflict resolution in a strife-torn country such as Afghanistan sounds Utopian. But precisely that is the goal Dr Alema Alema has set herself both as a native of Afghanistan and as coordinator of the Civil Peace Service (CPS) in Kabul, a joint undertaking by civilian and state actors that is funded by Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Dr Alema is aware that the road to building a culture of peace and fostering reconciliation between diverse ethnic groups at daggers drawn is littered with obstacles which Afghan society has to overcome at multiple levels. But she is committed to contributing her share as she has always been, and bases her work on the aim of "defending the rule of law and human rights".

This has been the internal calling to which this petite woman has devoted herself ever since her school days when she became aware that "many girls were forced to give up their studies and stay at home because they got married young, or because there were far fewer schools for girls than for boys in Kabul, or because they had to do domestic chores while their brothers were able to play".

Dr Alema is happy that fortunately she was an exception to the rule Afghan. She is committed to reforming Afghan society, which has been deeply affected by the Taliban, and to transforming it into a society in which women and men can live in dignity without being deprived of their rights as human beings. In pursuit of this simple though ambitious goal in today's Afghanistan she can draw on her experience at the Democratic Organisation of Afghan Women, as a peace journalist and as a co-founder of the Afghan Women's Solidarity Committee.

Her association with Germany dates back to 1988 when she was awarded a scholarship to study at the University of Leipzig in what was then East Germany. She did her doctorate on relations between Germany and Afghanistan in the period between 1919 and 1929 – a work that became a book in 2011 – and did research on Afghanistan between 1914 and 1945 at the renowned Centre for Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin.

In 2001, after the expulsion of the Taliban, Dr Alema was shocked at what she saw when she returned to Afghanistan. "We

took a taxi and asked the driver to take us around Kabul. When I saw the destruction I began to cry and got out of the car. I couldn't recognise the city in which I had grown up."

Ten days later she was back in Germany. Her conscience impelled her to find work which would help Afghans "in the field". In 2002, with a new German passport in her pocket, she was sent to Kabul by the German Development Service (DED), which has meanwhile merged into the GIZ, an organisation set up by the German government.

Dr Alema's work since 2008 as coordinator of the GIZ's CPS programme does not involve building roads that everyone can see and celebrate, but rather changing society from within, keeping in view the fact that building democratic structures and imbibing a culture of peace is a lengthy process.

Part of this process includes the dialogue forums and workshops that the CPS has been organising in six pilot villages around Kabul, targeting not only women, mothers, widows, young girls and elderly women who are well respected in society, but also young men, fathers, teachers and decision makers in the community such as mullahs, elders and peace council members.

Best practice cases on peaceful resolutions of conflicts

Discussions in such forums relate to the role of women, violence against women and traditional role models, as well as to the ways and means of replacing these by role models based on humane values, which are very much in accordance with Islamic beliefs. "We demonstrate 'best-practice' cases that focus on peaceful resolution of conflicts within families and communities for the benefit of marginalised groups such as women," explains Dr Alema.

Issues such as vendettas, "honour" killings, child marriages and forced marriages are openly discussed, and the role of both mothers and fathers in bringing about necessary changes in thinking and implementing such changes is stressed. "It's about sensitising both women and men," says Dr Alema, adding that contrary to general belief Afghan men are eager to learn. She is convinced that an increasing number of women and men are realising the important role each one of them can play in reforming traditional Afghan society and in doing away with traditions that violate human rights in general and women's rights in particular.

And evidence of this is that the CPS is currently working with 12 civil and state organisations, which in turn exercise a positive influence on finding lasting solutions to local conflicts. Together with local partner organisations, CPS experts have de-

veloped culturally appropriate methods for resolving conflicts and influencing the conflict dynamics. Project work focuses on giving special support to women and girls.

The unflinching commitment of Dr Alema and the CPS has resulted in an informal network made up of representatives from the spheres of politics, the arts, the media, universities, non-governmental organisations and international donors. Eight years ago, the CPS supported the foundation of the national peacebuilding network Afghan Civil Society Organisations Network for Peace.

Most of the Afghan non-governmental organisations engaged in peaceful conflict resolution and peace building are united under the banner of the network. Every year, the network organises high-impact public events to mark the International Day of Peace on September 21.

A CPS expert advises the Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan in Mazar-i Sharif which aims to reduce violence against women and girls and to strengthen their role in society. A women's shelter of the Cooperation Centre offers refuge to women and girls and gives them legal advice and psychological counselling. "Girls and women hardly have an alternative to living in a family. Without male protectors, women are regarded as 'free game' and become victims of human trafficking and renewed violence," says Dr Alema, underlining the importance of the women's shelter.

"Moreover, only a few women have had an opportunity to receive any vocational training. Between 80 and 90 per cent of women are estimated to be illiterate," she adds. "Whereas the situation is improving in the urban areas, things remain unchanged in rural parts of the country."

The CPS is also associated with the National Centre for Policy Research in the Peace and Conflict Studies Department of Kabul University, and helps to shape peace processes and support them in the long term by way of university studies. It also establishes links between teachers and students in 14 Afghan universities. The majority of the population accepts the university as a neutral space, making it a suitable venue for addressing sensitive themes in research, teaching and dialogue forums.

The CPS also advises and supports the Mediothek, an independent media centre with branches in Kabul, Kunduz, Khost, Mazar-i-Sharif and Feyzabad. These information hubs for professional journalists are now recognised as contact centres for Afghan journalists where journalists can attend seminars on current topics and network with other journalists.

Amid efforts to build mental and intellectual roads for a culture of peace, Dr Alema believes in showing respect for others. This respect is evident when she talks about the veil. "I grew up in Kabul and I have never worn one. I think it is a personal question that each woman has to decide for herself." She puts on a veil only when she is travelling in the provinces, where if she were to enter a meeting with local officials unveiled, they would get up and walk out, or as a form of respect for other women when not wearing a veil might lead to punishment of the other women.

And if today Dr Alema has become an example for many Afghans, both women and men, she says she owes it all to "[her] family, friends and literature". Reading has opened her to other cultures and given her role models. Gandhi and Mandela are two of the great leaders who have inspired her. "At the end of the day," she says, as if this were the simplest thing, "the fact that they were able to achieve their objectives shows that one has to insist in order to get what one wants."

(August 2013)

Edited with additional information by Ramesh Jaura.

Malala and Other Girls Determined to Fight Guns with Books

By **Ashfaq Yusufzai**

Peshawar, Pakistan. "Malala is a source of inspiration for all of the students in Swat," Shazia Ramzam told IPS at the Combined Military Hospital in Peshawar where she was being treated. She is one of two other girls injured in the assassination attempt on Pakistani schoolgirl Malala Yousafzai and says that the Taliban were trying to silence a very influential schoolgirl. "Malala encouraged us to get an education when the Taliban banned it."

Malala speaking at the "Malala day" UN youth assembly on 12 July 2013. Photo: Rick Barjonas/UN Photos

Fourteen-year-old Malala Yousafzai sustained life-threatening gunshot wounds to her head and neck in the attack in Swat on 9 October 2012. A bullet pierced her head and lodged in her shoulder. She was flown to the United Kingdom for medical treatment a few days later where she underwent several operations at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, including one to fit a custom-made titanium plate over a hole in her skull. Malala has

since recovered from her ordeal and is planning to write a book about her experiences.

"Her articles on the BBC gave us hope and enhanced our love for education. It was because of her that thousands of girls attended schools despite the Taliban's opposition," Shazia Ramzam told IPS.

Mian Iftikhar Hussain, minister of information of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, told IPS that Malala had helped the government bring girls back to school when the Taliban were trying to slam the doors of education on them. Despite being on the Taliban's hit list, she never missed school, and this encouraged female students in violence-wracked Swat, he said.

Swat, one of the 25 districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, was under Taliban control from 2007 to 2009, during which time they destroyed about 500 schools, depriving some 80,000 students of an education. The Taliban were ousted following a military offensive in 2010.

"Every day, the Taliban hanged the bodies of their opponents from electricity poles after executing them," lawmaker Bushra Gohar told IPS. "The residents of Swat kept silent due to reprisals by the Taliban, but Malala proved a blessing not only for men but also for women."

Imran Khan, chairman of the political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, visited Malala in the hospital on 10 October 2012 and said that Malala was braver than all men. "When all the people went into hibernation due to fear of the Taliban, she remained steadfast and served as a beacon of hope for her fellow students," Khan said. "Her outspoken criticism of militants earned the wrath of the Taliban but she refused protection, which speaks of her matchless bravery."

Threats to Malala's life increased dramatically when she received Pakistan's National Youth Peace Award in December 2011 in recognition of her services to education and peace. She was also among the nominees for the International Children's Peace Prize, and is the first Pakistani girl nominated for that award.

Malala joined her father Ziauddin Yousafzai, an educationist and social activist, in supporting a peace deal in 2009. But instead of laying down arms, militants began to operate from the adjoining Buner District. Malala and her family were among those displaced in the violence.

She wrote a blog about her experiences in that period for the BBC under the pen name Gul Makai, which means corn flower in Urdu.

The minister of information of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has announced a ten-million rupee award for information leading to the arrest of the individuals who attacked Malala. He said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had offered to bear all expenses for her treatment in Pakistan or abroad.

"We will trace the terrorist who shot Malala and will bring her attackers to justice. They will not survive for long," he said. The Taliban militants, he said, had started attacking children, which was a sign of weakness and desperation. He said that the government would provide her family with protection because the terrorists could hit them any time.

School students all over Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province have been moved by the attempt to kill Malala. A large number of demonstrations has been held condemning the barbarism of the Taliban.

"We are deeply shocked by the attack on Malala, who is our sister. We would follow her in the struggle against militancy and for the protection of schools," Spogmay, a student of University Model School in Peshawar, told IPS. Holding a banner to condemn the incident during a protest demonstration, she said that students would stand like a rock to safeguard their schools. "Militants can attack the schools with bombs but they cannot weaken the student's beliefs," she said.

The Taliban have been targeting schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the adjacent Federally Administered Tribal Areas since 2008. "Those getting English and modern education in the schools are not Muslims. Girls' education is not allowed in Islam, therefore, the Taliban does not allow these schools," Taliban spokesman Ihsanullah Ihsan told reporters.

Some attacks on school buildings have continued. "The schools are mostly destroyed during the night. They plant explosives which damage the schools," Khyber Pakhtunkhwa education minister Sardar Hussain Babak told IPS.

He said that the government will build "100 new schools for every one that the militants destroy" and that the government had allocated the equivalent of 460.4 million dollars for the promotion of education over the next two years.

The government is particularly promoting education for girls, he said. "We are paying more attention to female education, as girls have suffered at the hands of Taliban militants."

About 200 schools damaged by the Taliban have been reconstructed in Swat while students from other schools are currently being educated in tents.

Since the assassination attempt, Malala has been awarded various prizes for her courage in championing girls' education. She was also nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Malala gave an impassioned speech at the UN headquarters in New York on her sixteenth birthday on 12 July 2013 in which she called for education for every child in the world. "Let us pick up our books and pens. They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one pen and one book can change the world." UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon described Malala as a "heroine", and said that the UN has set a target of organising educational opportunities by 2015 for the 57 million girls and female teenagers who currently do not attend school. The UN plans to celebrate 12 July as Malala Day in the future.

(October 2012, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Ashfaq Yusufzai reports for IPS from Pakistan.

Survivors Help Survivors

By **Rousbeh Legatis**

Port-au-Prince, Haiti. In Haitian refugee camps, women are still crammed under plastic or cloth tarpaulins that provide no security and quickly become overheated by the sun. Sexual abuse, harassment, assault and rape run rampant, while political responses to these dangers have stalled. But KOFAVIV, a women's organisation founded by and for rape survivors, offers a glimmer of hope.

"Women are living in harsh and degrading conditions in the displacement camps," says Eramithe Delva, a co-founder of KOFAVIV (Commission of Women Victims for Victims). She explains that the lack of sanitation infrastructure forces women to walk long ways to reach bathrooms and showers, even when it's "pitch dark after sunset" as some camps have no lighting at night. "Women are scared to walk by themselves at night because of that; they are scared that people will walk into their tent and rob or hurt them," she adds.

Other problems relate to children, education and income. Mothers "have the choice of staying in or around their tents to stay with their children, or leaving them behind with a friend or a neighbour to be able to try and make a little bit of money".

IPS spoke with Delva about how a women's organisation founded "by and for rape survivors" is trying to make a difference while most political decision makers remain idle.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

In a recent report, you shed light on survival sex, a problem for displaced women and girls that has gone neglected. What has changed since that report?

Delva: "Survival sex" occurs when women and teenage girls have no other option but to sell their bodies to make a little bit of money to provide for themselves and their families. Although they are similar, we consider "survival sex" to be different to prostitution or sex work, because the person engaging in the sexual act does not choose to do it willingly.

Most, if not all, of the women and girls engaged in survival sex have told our outreach workers that they don't like doing it and that they would stop if they found another way to provide for themselves and their family members.

Since the report, nothing has really changed. Reports aren't going to change anything by themselves; it is through direct work and activities within the affected communities that we can start seeing changes.
Our network of outreach workers lives in the camps and in the poor communities, so this is part of their daily lives, and they will tell you that not much has changed. KOFAVIV has provided shelter for young women and young mothers who are (or have been) engaged in survival sex, but a lot more needs to be done to change the situation.

What are the main causes of this problem and what must be done to tackle them?

Delva: There are many different causes. We consider poverty, the lack of access to economic opportunities and all the accompanying complexities to be the main ones.

Eramithe Delva.
Photo: Courtesy of KOFAVIV

It will be very difficult to solve this problem because it exists on so many levels, but we think that an infrastructure needs to be created to support and provide relief for the young women engaged in survival sex.
First of all, they need to be able to finish their studies. A lot of the young women and girls who come to the KOFAVIV

Centre have told us that they are engaging in these activities to be able to pay their school fees.

They need to be taken out of the camps and placed in secure housing. There need to be programmes and activities where they can receive counselling and medical services and opportunities to participate in training courses and classes to learn skills that they could apply to income-generating activities.

Fighting sexual violence is high on the political agenda in Haiti, at least in a rhetorical sense. What kind of governmental support have you observed reaching out to women in camps, including those engaged in survival sex?

There has been talk about combating sexual violence, but I have not seen any concrete plans or activities being implemented by the government. As a grassroots organisation working directly in the affected areas, we have not seen much change. Most people displaced by the earthquake are still living in horrible conditions.

Where you have seen major progress being made?

In terms of our organisation, KOFAVIV has been able to make a lot of progress and to make a difference for survivors of sexual violence.

We provide legal services and accompany victims of gender-based violence, with the support of the Bureau des Avocats Internationaux, which works with victims of human rights violations. Through this partnership, our legal unit of outreach workers accompanies the survivors to report her attack, to file a complaint and to go to trial to pursue her aggressor.

From 2004 (KOFAVIV's inception) to 2010, we barely had ten cases make it to the justice system. Since the earthquake, from 2010 to 2012, we have had about 200 cases that made it through the justice system, five of which are awaiting a ruling.

It might not seem like a lot compared to the number of women and girls that have come forward, but to us that is a great accomplishment.

Because of our presence in the camps and throughout the communities, rape survivors know about us and the type of work that we do. They are coming forward and talking about their attacks.

Survivors of sexual violence (rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, etc.) are sometimes humiliated and shamed by their communities, so they often kept their abuse a secret. But now, it is great progress to see women and girls come to our centre or phone in to our call centre to report abuse and to seek help and justice.

Furthermore, our emergency shelter in the centre is open to survivors of sexual violence if they feel it is too dangerous for them to go back to their home or tent. They can stay safely at the shelter and participate in all the services and activities offered by KOFAVIV."

(March 2012)

Rousbeh Legatis joined IPS' UN Bureau in New York in 2010, following a stint as a freelancer with IPS' Berlin office. He writes on UN peacekeeping and peace-building, human rights, conflict management and South-South cooperation.

Change Dawned with UNSCR 1325

Brazil's Grande Dame Clara Charf

By **Alexandre Sammogini**

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Clara Charf is well over 80, but she is still fighting for women's rights and peace as she has done throughout most of her long and eventful life. Born in 1925, the president of the non-governmental organisation Women for Peace is pleased that her country now has its first female president, Dilma Roussef.

Clara Charf is also known for being the widow of veteran leftist Carlos Marighella, who was murdered by agents of the Brazilian dictatorship in 1969. Her history of militancy in the feminist and pacifist movements began well before she experienced Brazil's armed resistance to the dictatorship. As early as 1945, Charf took part in protests against the participation of the Brazilian army in the later stages of World War II. During the late 1950s, she was involved in the foundation of the Women's League of the State of Guanabara, thus starting her activism at the very beginning of the feminist movement in Brazil.

Forced to go into exile in Cuba during the dictatorship, Charf only returned to Brazil following an amnesty in the late 1970s. She worked in the office of the mayor of São Paulo, Luiza Erundina (1988 to 1991). "She is one of the few people who became a reference for many diverse currents in the women's movement in Brazil because she brings many different tendencies of feminism into the fold," explains Vera Vieira, executive director of Women for Peace.

In 2003, Charf was chosen to coordinate the selection process for the Brazilian women who would be part of the group of 1,000 women collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. She was asked by the Swiss non-governmental organisation PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) to carry forward the process that culminated in the selection of 52 Brazilian women to compete for the prestigious Prize. Although the 1,000 PeaceWomen were not awarded the prize, which instead went to the International Atomic Energy Agency, this was not reason enough for the network that had been constructed by women to disintegrate. Charf and a group of women expanded their activities in Brazil with the aim of combating violence against women.

The group's main inspiration came from UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which it applied to a wide range of situations, and not merely to armed conflicts. "We began to understand that the struggle wasn't restricted to war situations, so we turned to defending values of human security and justice," explains Charf. Immediately after the Nobel initiative, the group started touring the country with an exhibition that narrated and spread the story of the Brazilian women nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Clara Charf, president of Women for Peace.
Photo: PeaceWomen Across the Globe

This led to Charf's foundation of Women for Peace in 2008. She remains president of the organisation. "In 2005, already aged 80, she demonstrated impressive levels of energy, travelling to all parts of the country and abroad. She went to Switzerland and other countries to represent the Brazilian women's network," Vieira recalls.

Female Leaders nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize mentored young people

Only at the start of 2010 did Charf slightly reduce the pace of her activities because of a health problem (she fractured her femur), but she can't wait to return to her work. In August 2009, she took part in a seminar in São Paulo to bring together the activists of the most recent campaign promoted by her organisation. The Women for Peace campaign, which started in 2008, is one of the examples of how UNSCR 1325 has been implemented in Brazil. Many female leaders nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize each mentored three young people, who underwent a process of training and received support on developing projects.

The journalist Mara Régia di Perna was one example. She mentored three young people to help them develop workshops and produce radio advertisements on the topic "peace is a way to combat violence against women". The group is active in Brazil's nine Amazon Basin states and broadcasts the advertisements on Amazonas National Radio and local stations. Another example is Raimunda Gomes da Silva from Tocantins state who recruited youngsters from the region to promote forest protection and development of extraction as a means of family income.

Women for Peace is now getting ready to launch a new campaign targeting domestic violence. "It is the first time that we will take action involving both women and men, action to combat domestic violence. This is a very serious cultural problem that involves both genders. On average, a woman is beaten every 15 seconds in Brazil," Vieira says.

"UNSCR 1325 represents a new stage in the history of humankind," says Charf. "I come from a time when the UN didn't even exist. At that time, arguments were discussed in terms of war or peace. From the year 2000 onwards, when UNSCR was adopted, new ideas emerged. The struggle for peace began to integrate other elements. The struggle widened, and we began to understand that it wasn't only a matter of combating violence against women. The struggle was against all forms of violence and inequality. It is a wider concept. We are talking about human security and justice."

(October 2010, updated in August 2013 by Ute Scheub)

Alexandre Sammogini, who is based in São Paulo, is editor-in-chief of the international press agency Pressenza.

Dora Huancahuari weaving.
Photo: Milagros Salazar/IPS

Indigenous Women Weave New Community Ties

By **Milagros Salazar**

Lucanamarca, Peru. Fuchsia, green and turquoise yarn shuttles swiftly across the wooden loom Dora Huancahuari has learned to use. Together with other craftswomen, she has started a small weaving business which is helping to rebuild their lives in this remote, poverty-stricken Andean community devastated by Peru's history of armed conflict.

It is Saturday afternoon and hardly anyone is about in Santiago de Lucanamarca, the capital of the municipal district of the same name, perched on the eastern Andes highlands at an altitude of 3,490 metres above sea level, among deep valleys and steep mountains in Huanca Sancos province in the southern Peruvian region of Ayacucho.

Most of the local people are still working in the fields, but three women have got together to weave colourful woollen blankets, sweaters and bags.

"We're gradually making a start on our woven goods, which we will sell later on in Huamanga (another name for Ayacucho, the regional capital) to make money for our children," Huancahuari, a 42-year-old mother of five, tells IPS as she weaves steadily without missing a beat.

Lucanamarca, which has a population of 2,700 and an average monthly family income of barely 62 dollars, is in the category of extremely poor municipalities and has the lowest human development index in Huanca Sancos province according to the 2005 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report.

Ninety-five per cent of the townspeople are indigenous Quechua or Aymara speakers; only 2.4 per cent have indoor plumbing; only 480 households own radios and only 84 have a television. Farming and livestock are the economic mainstays, especially potato and alfalfa cultivation and sheep-rearing.

On top of this litany of unmet needs, an episode of Peru's armed internal conflict between 1980 and 2000 has left Lucanamarca with grief and unhealed wounds.

Ayacucho was the region most heavily affected by clashes between the Maoist guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the Peruvian armed forces, and Lucanamarca was the scene of one of the worst massacres during the conflict.

On 3 April 1983, a group of Shining Path guerrillas murdered 69 townspeople with axes and machetes, including men, women, children and elderly people, in revenge for the town's refusal to follow the insurgent group's orders.

Twenty three years later, Shining Path founder and leader Abimael Guzmán – already in prison since 1992 – received a second life sentence for ordering the slaughter.

"After events of such cruelty, the community wasn't the same. People didn't want to participate in community work and were indifferent to any initiative," Ángel Huamanculí Matías, who became the mayor of Lucanamarca in January 2011, tells IPS.

The women's weaving project in Lucanamarca is a struggle against that apparent apathy, which many of the townspeople say stems from a desire to forget and bury painful memories.

The first stage of the project is being carried out in Lucanamarca and the nearby community of Carmen de Alanya, where women have formed a legally recognised association for the sale of their woven goods and are building up a small cooperative.

"During the period when violence reigned, the social fabric was destroyed. That's why the weaving project was devised, so that women could unite around a common aim, as well as improve their lives," historian Carola Falconi of the Human Rights Commission (COMISEDH), a Peruvian non-governmental organisation, tells IPS.

Every woven thread is a step towards rebuilding their lives and the life of the town.

To guarantee the viability of the project, COMISEDH has been working since 2010 with beneficiaries of the government social programme Juntos, which provides the equivalent of 36 dollars a month to mothers living in extreme poverty.

There are more than 50 beneficiaries in Lucanamarca, ten of whom have become involved in the weaving project. "We mended some looms that had been abandoned, and we brought in a weaving teacher to train the women," says Ramiro Valdivia, the area head of COMISEDH.

The plan is for the women to form a registered association so they will be eligible for microcredits. Then they will be able to manage their own resources and sell their products directly in Ayacucho, which is an arduous six-hour journey along a winding road from Lucanamarca, although it is only 180 kilometres away.

At present, COMISEDH acts as the intermediary for sales of bags embroidered in the Peruvian capital, 360 kilometres northwest of Lucanamarca and an eight-hour journey by road.

"By weaving my own blanket, I save 60 soles (22 dollars), which helps pay for schooling for my two children," says 29-year-old Vilma Matías.

Like most of the people in the town, she lost a family member in the 1983 massacre. "My brother is still buried up on the highlands. They told my mother: 'Don't bring his body down or they'll kill you.' So that's where my brother still is," she says as she organises her brightly coloured yarns.

Matías was very young when the massacre took place, but she has managed to reconstruct what happened from the accounts of other townspeople. Her mother never spoke about the dreadful episode.

"Now we want to get ahead – and here we are," she says, adding that her husband is not upset by her interest in weaving and the association she is creating with other women, but does not encourage her either. "He doesn't say anything, so I just come," she says in halting Spanish, since her mother tongue is Quechua.

However, the project faces quite a struggle. Machismo is the rule in Lucanamarca, and the women who benefit from the Juntos programme are seen by some men as neglecting their responsibilities and even as unfaithful, according to a 2010 study by COMISEDH that was part of a broader social assessment of the area.

"They are accused of disregarding their husbands' wishes and not fulfilling their domestic responsibilities. In the view of the (municipal) authorities, the Juntos programme has caused family separation on a mass scale, as well as increased adultery," says the study, pointing to the predominant sexist attitudes in this region.

Community decision-making is still in the hands of men, and there is only one woman on the municipal council.

Family and gender-based violence is the main social problem in the area. In 2009 and 2010, two women were killed by their partners or former partners, and a young woman was raped and killed, the COMISEDH study says.

"Because of the complexity of the situation, the plan was to take some small steps forward with a project that connected directly to these women's needs and gave them the opportunity to socialise together more. Little by little, the way is opening up," says Falconi.

The concentration and dedication with which the three women weave on their looms on an ordinary Saturday afternoon seems to bode well for the project.

(June 2011)

Milagros Salazar is a Peruvian journalist who reports for IPS.

The Publishers

The **Heinrich Böll Foundation** is part of the Green political movement that has developed in Germany and worldwide. Its basic tenets are ecology, sustainability, democracy, human rights, self-determination and justice. It places particular emphasis on gender democracy – that is, emancipation and equality of women and men – and is also committed to the social and political participation of immigrants.

The Foundation is named after the late **writer and Nobel laureate Heinrich Böll**, who personified the values for which it stands: defending freedom, civic courage, tolerance, open debate, and the valuation of art and culture as independent spheres of thought and action.

Further Information: www.boell.de

Dr Ute Scheub is a Berlin-based political scientist and widely published book author. As a freelance journalist, she particularly enjoys publishing good news and writing about success stories for media entities such as the futurzwei website from Stiftung Zukunftsfähigkeit (the German Foundation for Sustainability). In October 2010, she set up the website www.visionews.net with Joanna Barelkowska and Karina Böckmann. The reports in this book are taken from the site, which was awarded the Alternative Media Prize in 2012. Dr Scheub does voluntary work for various non-governmental organisations: she co-founded the Women's Security Council in Germany and the Scheherazade association, which works in Afghanistan, and is also the Western Europe coordinator of the network 1000 PeaceWomen Across the Globe.

Further Information: www.visionews.net & www.utescheub.de

Partner Organisations

Inter Press Service Deutschland is a non-profit press agency funded by the Global Cooperation Council, which was set up in 1983 as the North-South Forum with the aim of promoting international understanding. IPS Deutschland is part of the worldwide IPS group. The news agency was founded in 1964 and reports in over 20 languages on global topics, the UN, development policy, poverty eradication, indigenous groups, the environment, peace, and gender. IPS aims at "fair globalisation", that is, giving a voice to the voiceless.

Further Information: www.ipsnews.de & www.ips.org

PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG) is a global network of the 1,000 women who were collectively nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. These PeaceWomen campaign all over the world for peace and for social and ecological justice. They do so creatively, courageously, and using a wide range of methods. The organisation's central office in Berne (Switzerland) works with a team of 21 regional coordinators as well as with six regional offices that help to improve cooperation with local organisations.

Further Information: www.1000peacewomen.org

The **Women's Security Council** in Germany is a voluntary network of female peace activists that was set up in 2003 in response to the Iraq War and Germany's appointment as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. The Women's Security Council regards itself as a non-partisan lobby for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 ("women, peace and security") in Germany and abroad. The Women's Security Council works closely with several other organisations, including the Gunda Werner Institute in the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

Further Information: www.frauensicherheitsrat.de

OWEN – Mobile Academy for Gender Democracy and Peacebuilding is a Berlin-based non-governmental women's organisation that was founded in 1992. It campaigns for the strengthening and development of civil society, gender democracy and peace and organises civic education courses and events in Germany and abroad. In 2010, OWEN was awarded the UNIFEM Germany Prize for its mobile peace academy, OMNIBUS 1325, which it set up in the crisis-stricken Caucasus region.

Further Information: www.owen-berlin.de

Other Organisations

Peace and international disarmament:

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (IFFF/WILPF):
www.internationalefrauenliga.de
www.wilpf.de

IFFF's Geneva office:
http://wilpfinternational.org

PeaceWomen project at the UN in New York:
www.peacewomen.org

UN Women Germany:
www.unwomen.de

UN Women international:
www.unwomen.org

Environment, climate, food sovereignty:

genanet – Focal Point for Gender, Environment and Sustainability:
www.genanet.de

LIFE – Education, Environment, Equal Opportunities:
www.life-online.de

Women in Europe for a Common Future:
www.wecf.eu

Women's Environment and Development Organization:
www.wedo.org

GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice:
www.gendercc.net

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