

Debate “Women Peace and Security” held by Friends of Europe

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talking points

In line with AVSI’s approach based on the notion of the uniqueness of each person, the kind of work that AVSI conducts in more than 30 countries, and conscious that what works in one context may not work in another, we opted for discussing the role of women in peace and conflicts in the context of a specific case in point. In particular, we discussed the issue with some members of the Women Welfare Agency, a local NGO based in Lakes state, South Sudan, with whom AVSI is partnering on a USDOS-funded project of peace building. Together with those women the team of AVSI South Sudan reached the following conclusions:

1. For sure **women tend to be the strongest advocates for peace and against fighting**. That is because they tend to be the first victims of conflicts and to have a more conciliatory stance. The latter aspect (is not the result of gender weakness, but) is related to the fact that women’s **family relationships are more likely to cut across communities**, including across communities in conflict among each other. This is because, when they marry, women leave their families to enter the families of their husbands, who often live in other communities.
2. **There is no silver bullet initiative that can possibly address a wide set of disputes in a multilevel conflict** such as that one occurring in South Sudan, or other similar places. Multiple interventions on different levels (international, national, local) are all necessary components of any solid plan of action.
3. **Strengthening the role of women from the bottom up, that is empowering local organizations to make them grow up to the national level**, represents a key component of a plan of intervention.
4. (Indeed) **it is at the local level where women, weather they like it or not, do play a prominent role (probably not sufficiently noticed) before, during and after conflicts to avoid, minimize, and recover from hostilities**. Supporting women where they are and doing what they do to bring about peace it is as much important as fostering their presence in fora where they are not sufficiently represented.
5. **Support women collective bodies is key**, because while most progresses have been recorded in the individual position of women (as women become more educated and more involved in the provision of public services) women’ capacity to organize as a group, especially in comparison to men’ capacity, is still lagging.
6. **The economic empowerment of women is another key component of any solid plan**, for it will always be quite ineffective in the medium-long term to shore up the position of women in the context of security and peace negotiations if the role of women, **especially in the economic domain**, is not strengthened as well.

In looking at such conclusions we feel quite proud of what we do at AVSI, for as an NGO engaged in providing humanitarian support, we focus on this **pragmatic, incrementalist, inter-sectorial and of course context-specific approach**.