

Women give a voice to civil society



Kvinna till Kvinna

Many women's organisations in conflict zones are fighting to strengthen women's visibility and rights. They play an important role in the process for sustainable peace and democracy by sharing their knowledge and experiences with the community at large.

Women's organisations working for women's rights exist all over the world, in war and conflict, and they play a very important role. Their work is primarily about strengthening women's self-confidence, putting women's rights on the agenda, and creating forums where women can meet, debate and exchange knowledge and experience.

Having a forum is essential if you want to express needs and formulate opinions. There, activists can strengthen each other and obtain tools for their work through education and by sharing experiences. Together, they formulate political demands and organise themselves.

Additional functions

Women's organisations in conflict zones have many different functions. They offer protected accommodation for women who are vulnerable to violence, help women who are victims of sexual violence to receive trauma processing therapy and medical care, and give women in war zones the opportunity to meet and share ideas and experiences across conflict borders. Women's organisations also provide legal aid and inform women about their rights.

Many women's organisations work specifically with young women. They do this in order to strengthen their self-esteem and self-confidence so that they gain the courage to be visible and express their views, and feel in control over their own destinies and bodies. It is important to give the new generation the prerequisites for being able to participate in, and change, society.



Vedrana Frasto from the Bosnian organisation Fondacija demonstrates against violence towards women and for gender equality. Photo: Imrana Kapepanovic

In wartime, it is generally the women who keep the community running when the men go to war. Women take over responsibility for the family and the local environment, and take care of refugees. Many women in conflict zones get support and aid from local women's organisations.

Violence is such a taboo theme. We needed ten years before we dared to start working on it." Fatima Naza, co-founder of the Center for Roma Initiatives in Montenegro.





Many women's organisations organise actions to communicate their messages. The picture shows a manifestation in Belgrade in memory of the genocide in Srebrenica. Photo: The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation

1979

The year that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted. CEDAW contains 30 articles dealing with women's rights in all areas of society.



Gender perspective on an international level

In 2000, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. As a result of this Resolution, UN Member States have agreed to apply a gender perspective to all aspects of peace work. For women's organisations, Resolution 1325 provides a great deal of support.

Practical peacemakers

Women's organisations work to change discriminatory laws and they are often the first to speak of peace and to set up meetings across the borderlines of a conflict. At the same time, they rarely gain access to the corridors of power where peace is discussed and established. Even though sustainable peace is predicated on everyone's participation from all parts of the community. In virtually all cases, it is men who start wars and it is men who negotiate the end of war.

Women's organisations often cooperate with other organisations working for human rights, such as LGBT organisations (lesbian-, gay-, bisexual-, and trans). Women are also active in major social movements that are not limited to women's rights. This became apparent during the democratic uprisings of the Arab spring in 2011, for example.

Progress in Montenegro

One women's organisation that makes a big difference in the local community is the Center for Roma Initiatives in Nikšić in central Montenegro. During the ten years that the Center for Roma Initiatives has been operating it has done much to strengthen the Roma minority population, which has been subject to widespread discrimination in the region. Virtually all Roma people now have ID cards and 'exist' in the official systems, Roma women have their babies in hospitals rather than at home and Roma children are vaccinated. Roma children go to school and more and more of them complete compulsory school.

Also, ambulances now come to the Roma quarters.

The Center for Roma Initiatives spends more and more time on political lobbying. In 2012, it has been lobbying intensively for a national Roma Action Plan and for a new gender equality plan in which the needs of Roma women must be included. In 2012, the center also took up the issue of men's violence against women through inter-active theatre with young people.

"Violence is such a taboo theme. We needed ten years before we dared to start working on it", says Fatima Naza, one of the founders of the Center for Roma Initiatives.

In 2012, the center was awarded the Anna Lindh Memorial Fund's prize.

Stronger civil society

Women's organisations in conflict zones have a great deal of knowledge about what is needed in their communities. They can draw attention to what is lacking and shed light on areas into which men have no insight.

Power structures in the society that fuel inequality, oppress and marginalise groups and individuals have to be challenged if a sustainable peace is to be created. Sustainable peace is founded on a strong civil society in which people participate on equal terms, irrespective of gender, social, ethnic or cultural identity, or sexual orientation.

Women's organisations have strategies for achieving change — change that means that women gain power over their own bodies, the power to make decisions and the right to access community resources.

