

A thematic analysis:  
**WOMEN AT THE  
HEART OF CHANGE**



Development  
and Peace  
CARITAS CANADA

1967 • 2017  
**50 YEARS**  
OF SOLIDARITY

< Woman participating in the 7th Mato Grosso state meeting  
on agroecology, which took place from November 29 to December 2nd,  
2016, in Cuiabá, Brazil) Photo : Gilka Resende/FASE

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 5 Introduction
- 6 Women at the Heart of Protecting their Land  
CASE STUDY: WOMEN DEFENDING THEIR LAND AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES IN HONDURAS
- 12 Women at the Heart of Food Sovereignty  
CASE STUDY: WOMEN PROTECTING FOOD SECURITY  
AND BIODIVERSITY IN BRAZIL
- 18 Women at the Heart of Peace and  
Reconciliation  
CASE STUDY: WOMEN ARE WORKING TOGETHER  
FOR PEACE WITHIN SYRIAN SOCIETY
- 24 Women at the Heart of Democracy and Citizen  
Participation  
CASE STUDY: WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE  
IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO
- 30 Conclusion

## ABOUT DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace is one of the most established international development organizations in Canada. Founded in 1967 by the Catholic bishops of Canada, Development and Peace encourages Canadians to show solidarity towards their sisters and brothers in the Global South who are suffering the injustice of poverty. During its 50 years of existence, Development and Peace has invested \$600 million in over 15,000 development projects in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. It is a strong and diverse movement of Canadians from coast to coast taking action for justice so that the poorest can live in dignity and respect. Development and Peace is also Caritas Canada, a member of Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of over 160 Catholic relief, development and social service organisations.

## CREDITS

This analysis was written by the research and advocacy team at Development and Peace.  
Published by Development and Peace, March 2017

1425 René-Lévesque Blvd West, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor,  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
H3G 1T7

Web: [www.devp.org](http://www.devp.org) | E-Mail: [info@devp.org](mailto:info@devp.org)  
Telephone: 514 257-8711  
Fax: 514 257-8497  
Toll Free: 1 888 234-8533

Cette analyse est également disponible en français.

# INTRODUCTION

Since 1967, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada has been working to change unfair social, political and economic structures that prevent many people around the world from living with dignity. These unfair power structures, which vary according to gender, race, ethnicity, class, education, ability, religion, and language, cause intolerable levels of inequality and poverty. By challenging and addressing the many discriminatory barriers facing women, men and children, we can work to build a world where all people have access to opportunities and resources to lead fulfilling lives.

Although women face discrimination, violence, and injustice every day, they are at the heart of change. As community-builders and leaders, women act as catalysts for change in the struggle for ecological justice, democracy and participation, as well as advancing peace and reconciliation.

While both men and women suffer when they live in poverty, we know that women are disproportionately disadvantaged by their poverty. Gender discrimination means that women have far fewer resources and freedom to challenge and overcome their difficult circumstances. They are likely to be the last to eat, the ones least likely to access healthcare, and are burdened by time-consuming, unpaid domestic tasks. Women have more limited options for education and employment, and they may have difficulty accessing land or property. In addition to these many challenges, a great number also face domestic and sexual violence. While we have seen many advances in the human rights of women around the world, poor women face extra marginalization, and their voices are rarely heard.

Guided by Catholic Social Teaching, Development and Peace puts human dignity, the preferential option for the poor, participation, solidarity, and peace at the heart of our work.

In our programming in the Global South, we are supporting women in all of their diversity by encouraging their inclusion and participation. We contribute to finding more effective, just and sustainable solutions for the greatest challenges we are facing in the world today, including the climate crisis, food insecurity, growing economic inequality, and armed conflicts. By listening to the voices of women and girls, and ensuring that they have access to resources and opportunities, women can play the much-needed role as agents of change in their families, communities and countries.

# WOMEN AT THE HEART OF PROTECTING THEIR LAND

From copper, gold, and silver to cadmium, nickel, zinc, and of course oil, the products of resource extraction are in our cars, our homes, our computer screens, our eyeglasses and our smart phones. Canadians also benefit from the international extractive industry through our investments, including our retirement funds. These benefits for Canadians are often at the expense of poor and marginalized communities, and especially women, in the countries where these companies operate.

In countries that are rich in natural resources but economically poor such as Honduras, Madagascar, and the Philippines, Development and Peace's partners have been documenting how the land, water, and health of their communities have been changing since the arrival of major mining, oil and gas projects in their communities and in their regions. Large-scale extractive projects can bring a variety of negative effects to communities, including displacement of homes, erosion of agricultural land, deforestation, pollution of water sources, conflict, sexual violence, death threats and murders of those opposed to the extractive project.

The benefits of resource extraction promised by mining companies and governments include opportunities for a better quality of life, including jobs, business opportunities, and investment in local community services. These promises sometimes bear fruit for women. For example, some companies recruit women to drive trucks and operate machinery, because they have proven to drive more safely and their equipment ends up requiring less maintenance<sup>1</sup>. When a mining project is implemented in a way that respects environmental standards, and is part of an overall development plan in collaboration with local and national governments, whole communities can benefit.

However, many reports have shown that in extractive industry projects, the positive impacts for the community primarily benefit men, while women bear more than their share of social, economic, and environmental risks<sup>2</sup>. Women, who are often responsible for providing their families with food and water, as well as taking care of the health of their families, are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of the mines. If women lose the land that they farm to feed their families, they lose their autonomy and their livelihood. Mines often create more employment opportunities for men, who suddenly receive cash income, which increases the men's influence. This can often bring unintended negative social consequences such as alcohol and drug abuse, and sexual exploitation<sup>3</sup>.

In many countries of the Global South, local citizens have realized that extractive projects have not brought the benefits that were promised. In response, new models of mining development have been proposed, as reflected in the African Mining Vision, which was adopted by African Heads of State in 2009. This vision is a response intended to tackle the paradox of great mineral wealth existing side by side with pervasive

---

1 "The Impact of Resource Extraction on Inuit Women and Families in Qamani'tuaq, Nunavut Territory" (2014). *Pauktuutit, Inuit Women of Canada and School of Social Work, University of British Columbia*. Available at: <http://pauktuutit.ca/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/assets/Final-mining-report-PDF-for-web.pdf><http://pauktuutit.ca/wp-content/blogs.dir/1/assets/Final-mining-report-PDF-for-web.pdf>

---

2 "Gender in Extractive Industries" (2013). *The World Bank*. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/extractiveindustries/brief/gender-in-extractive-industries><https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/extractiveindustries/brief/gender-in-extractive-industries>

3 "Gender and the Extractive Industries: Putting Gender on the Corporate Agenda" (2016). *Oxfam Australia*. Available at: [https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-PA-004-Mining-and-Gender-report\\_FA\\_web.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-PA-004-Mining-and-Gender-report_FA_web.pdf)





^ Open-air mine, Honduras. Photo: Development and Peace

poverty, and proposes a variety of principles based on respect for workers, communities and the environment, and demands that states collect taxes from the project, and that these gains are used for the social development of the citizens. However, the African Mining Vision has been criticized for not integrating a gender perspective, with no analysis of the impact of mining, oil, and gas exploitation on women<sup>4</sup>.

## Resource extraction: At what cost?

Indigenous and rural peasant women are at the front lines of communities who are questioning, resisting and rejecting

mining projects, because they have learned from experience that the promises of economic development offered by mining companies are not always fulfilled. Traditionally, they place value on their land, which offers their families sustainable livelihoods through agriculture, foraging, and fishing, today and for future generations.

Resource extraction, by its very nature, is temporary. After a few years or decades of extraction, the resource is exhausted, and destruction is left in its wake. Without rehabilitation of the land and water, communities cannot return to this land which has become uninhabitable.

Rather than accepting mining and fossil fuel extraction as a necessary part of our lives and our economies, more and more people are proposing alternatives for development. These alternatives support democratic, equitable and autonomous societies that are based on respect for the environment so that people and the planet will survive and thrive. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for respect for Mother Earth, which provides for all of us. He warns us that putting profit before

4 S. Valiani (2015). "The Africa Mining Vision: A Long Overdue Ecofeminist Critique". *WoMin – African Gender and Extractives Alliance*. Available at: <https://womin.org.za/images/docs/analytical-paper.pdf>

Creation can be damaging to our common home, and especially to future generations<sup>5</sup>. Although *Laudato Si'* addresses the links between respect for Creation and the fight against poverty, the encyclical does not offer a perspective on the fact that women are disproportionately affected by environmental damage as well as poverty.

In Canada and in the Global South, Indigenous and rural women are key leaders in non-violently resisting mining, fracking, oil extraction and pipelines. In Nigeria, Ogoni women and men have successfully resisted oil exploitation on their territory, but have paid a high price for this resistance. In Canada, leaders of Idle No More, the First Nations movement that was founded by Indigenous women in Saskatchewan, have proposed a shift from the “extractivist mind-set” to systems “designed to promote more life.” In Honduras, Berta Caceres and her Lenca people had successfully protected their ancestral lands by slowing down or stopping a variety of mining and logging projects. Along with other environmental defenders, Berta Caceres had been criminalized and had received death threats, before she was murdered in her own home on March 3, 2016.

Naomi Klein refers to these places of resistance around the world as “Blockadia”. According to Klein, the approach adopted by Blockadia activists is based on the principle that “it’s time to stop digging up poisons from the deep and shift, with all speed, to powering our lives from the abundant energies on our planet’s surface.” Led by Indigenous and peasant women both young and old, these activists take their role as providers for their families seriously, and see themselves as protectors of the land. Women are resisting extractive projects not only to ensure the livelihoods of their families and communities,

but also because they have seen that exploitation of land and exploitation of women often go hand in hand<sup>6</sup>.

Many of the extractive projects women resist are led by Canadian extractive companies<sup>7</sup>. Some Canadian companies have faced accusations of serious human rights abuses at their mines, from gang rape to murder, with complete impunity<sup>8</sup>. Several cases have recently been admitted to Canadian courts on the basis that Canada is the best place for the case to be heard, based on a legal concept known as *forum non conveniens*<sup>9</sup>. These cases offer access to justice for communities affected by violent conflict and environmental harm caused by mining projects.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Women face systemic discrimination throughout the development of extractive industry projects. When company policies and practice do not take gender into account, women end up being excluded from the consultation, decision-making, development, and benefits of projects. When women’s roles in the existing community and women’s interests are integrated in the planning and development of the mine, the project can

6 N. Klein (2014). *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, pp. 261-305.

7 G. Russell (2016). “Canadian Mining Harms Around the World: Criminal and Civil Law Reform Needed Now”, *MiningWatch Canada*. Available at: <http://miningwatch.ca/news/2016/11/13/canadian-mining-harms-around-world-criminal-and-civil-law-reform-needed-now>

8 S. Imai, L. Gardner and S. Weinberger (2016). “The ‘Canada Brand’: Violence and Canadian Mining Companies in Latin America”. *Osgoode Legal Studies Research Paper* No. 17/2017. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2886584>

9 “International Organizations Celebrate Precedent-Setting Step Toward Justice in Civil Suit Against Tahoe Resources in Canada for Violence in Guatemala” (2017). *Mining Watch Canada*. Available at: <http://miningwatch.ca/news/2017/1/27/international-organizations-celebrate-precedent-setting-step-toward-justice-civil>

5 Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home, 190.



< Women from the MASS-VIDA movement came together for a meeting on February 8, 2017.



result in greater equality between women and men. But when they are not, the inequalities can be deepened.

As well, according to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous communities, including the women among them, have the right to free, prior, and informed consent, which is a decisive tool for ensuring that they have a say in whether and how extractive industry projects move forward on their territory.

During consultations, women frequently raise issues and propose solutions that differ from those provided by men, concentrating on improvements that benefit the whole community, and the well-being of families, such as focusing on health and education. Since women often play the role of protectors of the land, they may show leadership and demand that an extractive project not move forward on their territory or in their community. In these cases, their voices must be heard. Indigenous and peasant women are proposing alternatives to large-scale mining on their territory. These alternatives should also be considered, rather than simply following the extractivist model which puts profit before people and the planet.

Women should not only be involved in local-level project consultations, but also in national and international-level policy dialogues on extractive industries to ensure that policies and laws on mining respond to the needs and visions of both women and men. Since women are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual violence as a result of extractive projects, programmes must be developed to prevent these crimes, and when they do occur, women need access to justice<sup>10</sup>.

Development and Peace has been calling for stronger accountability standards for Canadian extractive companies since 2005, along with a diverse coalition of civil society organizations who are members of the Canadian Network on Corporate Accountability (CNCA). Half a million Canadians supported Development and Peace's 2013 campaign<sup>11</sup> calling for the creation of an independent ombudsman for the overseas extractive sector with the power to act on complaints. An independent ombudsperson would offer a path to justice for women as well as men affected by the activities of Canadian extractive companies in the Global South.

---

10 A. Eftimie, K. Heller and J. Strongman (2009). "Gender Dimensions of the Extractive Industries: Mining for Equity". *Extractive Industries and Development Series #8 – The World Bank*. Available at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTOGMC/Resources/eifd8\\_gender\\_equity.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTOGMC/Resources/eifd8_gender_equity.pdf)

11 "A Voice for Justice campaign" (2013). *Development and Peace*. Available at: <https://www.devp.org/en/education/fall2013>



## Women defending their land and natural resources in Honduras

^ Leana Corea is putting her knowledge and skills to use in support of environmental issues and the social struggles of communities in Honduras.

Honduras is rich in natural resources, including gold, silver, copper, lead, zinc, iron ore, antimony, and coal. The mining industry has become a financial windfall for the country, but it has greatly affected the lives of many communities, as well as their environment.

In Honduras, Development and Peace supports people affected by the mining industry to call for respect for their rights and their land. For example, Development and Peace has partnered with the Committee for the Defence and Development of the Flora and Fauna of the Gulf of Fonseca (CODDEFFAGOLF) to support the Environmental and Social Movement of the South for Life (MASS-VIDA)—a grassroots movement for the protection of the land and rights of communities affected by the mining industry in Honduras.

**According to Leana Corea, CODDEFFAGOLF Deputy Director and cofounder of MASS-VIDA, “The support of Development and Peace over the past two years has been essential to our struggle, because like us, they believe that our words have power and that the ‘civilized world’ cannot continue to reject our right to refuse the kind of development that puts our country in jeopardy.”**

The women involved with CODDEFFAGOLF play a very important role in the struggle to protect natural resources. “We have spoken out against the exploitation of our labour in the current mining model, in which we work long underpaid hours. Having witnessed the damaging effects of mining on life cycle regeneration and recognizing that it is our responsibility to preserve it, a large number of us have come together to defend ourselves and our land from the activities of the mining company Electrum Resources. We want to protect the water and the health of our families, while also defending our right to food sovereignty.”

Defending the environment and social justice in Honduras is a major challenge because human rights defenders are continuously threatened, persecuted, and even killed. Nevertheless, the women at CODDEFFAGOLF persevere in their struggle against government and multinationals. What they are afraid of, even more than death, is getting to the point where the earth will no longer be able to regenerate itself and our very existence will be compromised due to climate change. They also fear the loss of their culture and biodiversity, and that we will all live in a world where life has no value other than to generate profit.



< Leana Corea is concerned about the future of the communities and ecosystems of the Gulf of Fonseca.

# WOMEN AT THE HEART OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Throughout the world, women play an important role in food production. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women produce 60% to 80% of the world's food consumed by families, and they represent 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, women's work in farming is often overlooked; they represent barely 5% of land owners in Northern Africa and West Asia. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the figure is slightly higher, 15%<sup>13</sup>, but it is still too low. However, women's contribution to farming is very significant indeed.



Source: "Women Feed the World" (n.d.). Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) | Natural Resources Management and Environment Department. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/x0262e/x0262e16.htm>

12 C. Doss and SOFA Team (2011). "The role of women in agriculture." *The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) – Agricultural Development Economics Division*. ESA Working paper 11(02). Available at: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf>

13 Ibid.

Women are generally in charge of staple crops that are used mainly to feed families, even though a portion may be sold on local markets. Men generally grow cash crops, the proceeds from which serve to pay for the household and other major expenses. In this context, women are the keepers and sustainers of traditional agricultural knowledge. In addition, since the food they grow is used directly to feed their children, they are often more open to new ideas that can help to improve the quality of food and therefore the health of their families.

## The vulnerability of women farmers

Many factors explain the lack of recognition for women's role in agriculture and their vulnerability in this sector, including limited access to land, training, education, exchange, networking, markets and other outlets, and financial and technical resources.

In a number of developing countries, the farming sector performs poorly because women's input, which is essential in farming and the rural economy, is underrated. Whether they are growers, workers, or farming entrepreneurs, almost everywhere in the world, women's access to resources is much more limited than men's. However, research has confirmed that with access to the same services and resources as men, women farmers would be as efficient and would be able to produce as much. Therefore, they have the potential to contribute significantly to improving living conditions for rural but also for urban communities.

This type of gender discrimination is costly not only for women but also for the farming sector, local communities, and society as a whole, which are deprived of an essential resource. The FAO has estimated that eliminating the gender gap would result in a 20% to 30% increase in agricultural production and benefit populations immensely<sup>14</sup>.

14 "Closing the gender gap in agriculture." (2011). *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/52011/icode/>





^ Vanessa and Leocádia's family produces flour, Brazil. Photo: Rosilene Miliotti/FASE

Field studies conducted in Africa, Asia, and Latin America show that when women are given access to additional income, they spend it on items for the family: food, health, clothing, and children's education. This has an immediate positive impact on the physical and psychological health of families, local communities, and society<sup>15</sup>.

## Agroecology: a world of possibilities for women<sup>16</sup>

Agroecology is the science and practical knowledge behind sustainable agriculture. Based on peasant farming knowledge and practices, agroecology takes a holistic approach to food

production. It is a scientific discipline, a set of farming practices, and a social movement all at once. The Via Campesina<sup>17</sup> peasant movement supports the concept of agroecology as a pillar of food sovereignty.

Respect and recognition of women's contribution, labour, and knowledge, as well as the development of more egalitarian relationships between men and women, and a more respectful relationship with the earth and living beings, must also be part of agroecology's three components (scientific discipline, farming practices, and social movement) if it is to empower rural women. This requires reflection and consideration of the power dynamics within the farming sector and within families and communities in general. Moving in this direction also

15 C. Doss and SOFA Team (2011). "The role of women in agriculture." Op. cit.

16 This section is an excerpt from Development and Peace – Caritas Canada publication "Let's demystify agroecology," April 2017.

17 La Via Campesina is an international movement which brings together millions of peasants, small and medium-size farm producers, landless people, women farmers, Indigenous people, migrants, and agricultural workers from around the world. It defends small-scale sustainable agriculture as a way to promote social justice and dignity. (<https://viacampesina.org/en/index.php/organisation-mainmenu-44>)

requires implementing concrete measures to enable women to control certain sources of power, such as land ownership<sup>18</sup>.

Since agroecology values traditional knowledge and practices, which are not dependent on external techniques, such as chemicals and genetically engineered seeds, this approach supports women's autonomy, and facilitates their participation in markets outside of mainstream markets, and values their knowledge and field expertise. By placing social cohesion and the building and sustaining of equal and fair relationships at the heart of farming activities, agroecology helps create the social conditions needed to weaken patriarchy<sup>19</sup>. In this context, women are mobilized and valued for their knowledge and expertise, and relieved of the barriers that limit them to their homes. Agroecology also helps to change the perspectives of decision-makers, traditional leaders, and men in general, as field research has demonstrated in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, leading to improved respect for women's rights, including access to and control over land, access to family property, and increased visibility of women's role in decision-making.

## The situation in Canada

In Canada, like elsewhere, women's contribution to the agriculture sector is not fully valued despite the important role that they play in it. Although the Canadian government has committed to implementing gender equality at all levels of government, no explicit effort has been made to identify the needs of women farmers or to consult them about their vision of an inclusive Canadian agricultural policy<sup>20</sup>.

One of the challenges facing Canada is the creation of a new generation of farmers. According to Statistics Canada's 2006 portrait of Canadian farming, the last to provide sex-disaggregated data, the number of farming operators below 35 years of age has been dropping since at least 1991<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, the proportion of women in this field has increased since 2001, continuing a trend observed since 1991 when the Census of Agriculture started including women farming operators. Out of the 292,795 farming operators recorded

in the 2011 National Household Survey, 80,605 or 27.5% of farmers were women<sup>22</sup>.

Fair remuneration for women farmers is also a significant challenge in Canada. For example, according to the *Fédération des agricultrices du Québec* (Quebec federation of women farmers), for similar work, women farmers get 79% of the pay that their male counterparts obtain<sup>23</sup>. In addition, almost half of women farmers in Canada need to supplement their income and therefore work a second job outside this field<sup>24</sup>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

What does the future hold? Is there hope? Yes, there is hope, because over the years, we have already seen a clear improvement in the recognition of the role of women in farming, increased participation of women in regional and high-level events, and their involvement overall has been more frequent and significant. This said, challenges remain, especially in regards to access to means of production, water, and credit; unfortunately, even in agroecology, men enjoy more privileges in terms of access to land, credit, and other agricultural inputs.

As part of the food sovereignty paradigm, peasant agroecological farming is an appropriate and credible means of protecting the environment and countering hunger, while offering new opportunities for women. This is why Development and Peace works with women farmers around the world to help them feed their families and communities. Development and Peace supports their efforts to overcome challenges caused by climate change, unfair socioeconomic structures, and increasingly difficult access to land, water, and seeds.

Mother Earth is sacred and it is our duty to respect her and to cherish her ecological diversity, beauty and life-sustaining activities. We must support the participation of women in an agricultural model that enables both women and men farmers to live with dignity and to feed their communities, while respecting the Earth, our common home.

---

18 A. P. Lopes and E. Jomalinis (2011). "Agroecology : Exploring opportunities for women's empowerment based on experiences from Brazil." *Association of Women's Rights in Development (AWID)*. Available at: [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/feminist\\_perspectives\\_agroecology.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/feminist_perspectives_agroecology.pdf)

19 Patriarchy is a form of social organization where men exercise political, economic, and religious power, and hold the dominant role within the family, in relation to women.

20 C. Roppel, A. A. Desmarais, and D. Martz (2006). *La politique agricole canadienne sous le regard des agricultrices. Condition féminine Canada*. Available at: [http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/Farm\\_Women\\_and\\_the\\_APF.pdf](http://www.nfu.ca/sites/www.nfu.ca/files/Farm_Women_and_the_APF.pdf)

21 "Snapshot of Canadian agriculture" (2006). *Statistics Canada*. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/ca-ra2006/articles/snapshot-portrait-eng.htm>

---

22 "2011 Census of Agriculture: Highlights and Analysis" (2011). *Statistics Canada*. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/fra/ra2011/sa>

23 C. Houde and G. Lemarier-Saulnier (2016). "Étude sur le travail invisible des femmes en milieu rural." *Fédération des agricultrices du Québec*. Available at: [http://www.agricultrices.com/wp-content/uploads/filebase/EtudeTravailInvisibleFAQ2016\\_IMP.pdf](http://www.agricultrices.com/wp-content/uploads/filebase/EtudeTravailInvisibleFAQ2016_IMP.pdf)

24 "What is women's role in Canadian agriculture?" (2015). *INAC Services Limited*. Available at: <http://inacservices.com/what-is-womens-role-in-canadian-agriculture/>



States and international organizations should support farmers throughout the world, in particular women. In regards to equality between women and men, there is a need to:

- Strengthen the participation of rural women, and women in general, in all important decision-making stages at the local, regional, and national levels, when drawing up, planning, implementing, monitoring, and assessing agricultural programs and policies;
- Support women and women farmers' movements and associations to make their voices heard;
- Promote access to land and seeds for women practicing small family farming and agroecology;
- Support the development of local food markets where women can sell their products at fair prices;
- Ensure training for rural and other women and promote access to new technologies, as well as capacity building<sup>25</sup>, in other words, provide them with the means to feed their families (transfer of knowledge, training, and access to education, technologies, and credit, among other things)<sup>26</sup>;
- Identify internal and external obstacles to capacity building, such as conflicts related to the attribution of land titles and the lack of recognition for women's domestic work<sup>27</sup>, and provide remedies.

▼ Photos: Rosilene Miliotti/FASE

**There is a great variety of small-scale food production systems which feed the greater part of the world's peoples, using a modest amount of land and producing less waste, be it in small agricultural parcels, in orchards and gardens, hunting and wild harvesting or local fishing.**

– Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* (129).



---

25 Capacity development is a permanent and complex long-term process based on "existing potentialities," which requires involvement and accountability on behalf of local and national actors (Carracillo, 2009, 45).

26 "Capacity development" (2011). *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)*. Available at: [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/capacity\\_building/cd\\_brochureandinsert\\_fr\\_web.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/capacity_building/cd_brochureandinsert_fr_web.pdf)

27 For example, technology capacity reinforcement entails involving women in training on use of equipment and the economic opportunities that derive from it.



## Women protecting food security and biodiversity in Brazil

In Brazil, small family farmers and Indigenous communities are often victims of injustice and abuse in projects that are supposed to provide “development”, while large corporations that lead these mining, monoculture (soy, coffee, and eucalyptus), cattle breeding, and hydroelectric dam projects reap the benefits. Access to land and food security have therefore become major issues in this country where most of the food consumed by the population is produced through small family farming.

^ A daughter of farmers, Joélia Alves is a recognized leader in her community who is proud to continue the family farming tradition in a way that preserves the environment, reduces inequalities, and promotes the dignity of farmers.



The Federation of Organizations for Social and Educational Assistance (FASE), a Development and Peace partner since 1970, focuses on local and community development throughout Brazil. FASE is involved, among other things, in the struggle for agrarian reform and land regularization, food security, expansion of fair trade and solidarity activities, sustainable consumption, and agroecology consolidation. FASE is an important player within the National Agroecology Association (ANA), which denounces the use of pesticides and genetically engineered seeds, and their effects on human health and the environment.

FASE recognizes the key role played by women in small family farming and the negative impacts they bear because of the expanding agro-food industry. The organization believes that encouraging women small family farmers to adopt agroecological practices will also help strengthen their independence and identity as workers whose rights are respected.

Joélia Alves is a 28-year-old woman who practices small family farming and agroecology. Since 2008, she has taken part in FASE-organized grassroots education and training activities, sharing the knowledge she has acquired in her work with the Technical Assistance and Rural Extension (ATER) program. The ATER program teaches the principles of food sovereignty and agroecology to small family farmers who wish to increase their production while protecting the environment and the dignity of rural populations. Every day Joélia fights for the respect of rights, be it by filing claims with public agencies for regional improvement or by helping her neighbours with fruit pulp production. One of the successes of the farmers of the region was to be able to sell part of their produce to local schools.

Joélia is also president of the *Coopeípe* cooperative, which FASE has supported since 2015. Thanks to the *Coopeípe*, farmers can sell their products without depending on intermediaries. Joélia stresses that the cooperative hopes to expand its activities to other regions and that farmers wish to increase their harvests of food that is free of pesticides and genetically-modified seeds.



< Rosa picking acai berries in Abaetetuba, Brazil. Photo: Rosilene Miliotti/FASE

# WOMEN AT THE HEART OF PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

## Women and peace: A historical relationship

Women have long been associated with peace and peace-building around the world. Women peacebuilders have made vital contributions to peace processes in diverse places such as Northern Ireland, Guatemala, the Philippines, Colombia and Liberia, just to name a few<sup>28</sup>. There are countless examples and studies of women's organizations engaging in the process of peace and reconciliation, whether at the national or international level, going as far back as World War I.

In April of 1915, a group of over 1000 women activists from 12 warring and neutral countries decided that they could no longer sit and wait for the end of war so they gathered in The Hague and convened the first International Congress of Women (ICW)<sup>29</sup>. The ICW sent 30 delegates on the first women's peace mission to bring their plan of action to the heads of European states. The ICW president, Jane Addams, met with US President Woodrow Wilson, providing him with many of the '14 points' that he took to the Versailles talks that ended the war<sup>30</sup>. ICW participants went on to form the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), which is still active today. In 2015, the WILPF celebrated its 100 years of working to stop war, making it the oldest peace organisation in the world<sup>31</sup>.

Recently, the impact of women peacebuilders was publicly recognized and rewarded in 2011, when the Nobel Peace Prize

was awarded to three inspiring women for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Liberia), Leymah Gbowee (Liberia) and Tawakkul Karman (Yemen). This decision by the Nobel Committee reaffirmed the centrality of women's contribution to peace<sup>32</sup>.

**"If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."**

— Mother Teresa

Throughout the years, women have challenged militarism, they have opposed nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and they have prevented violent extremism, sometimes at the cost of their lives. By adopting effective, community-based, non-violent approaches rooted in cooperation and trust, and by organizing across political, religious and ethnic lines, women have transformed peace and reconciliation processes on every continent<sup>33</sup>. Whether as negotiators, activists or community leaders, women have contributed to peacebuilding and peace processes through a wide variety of roles<sup>34</sup>.

---

28 "Peacebuilding and gender / women" (n.d.). *Insight on Conflict published by Peace Direct*. Available at: <https://www.insightonconflict.org/themes/gender-womens/>

29 E. Rehn and E.J. Sirleaf (2002). "Women, war, peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the impact of armed conflict on women and women's role in peace-building - Progress of the World's Women 2002", Vol. 1. *United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)*. p.75. Available at: [http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/unifem\\_2002\\_\\_women\\_war\\_and\\_.pdf](http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/unifem_2002__women_war_and_.pdf)

30 Ibid.

31 "Annual Report 2015" (2016). *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) International Secretariat*. Available at: [http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Annual-Report\\_2015-WEB.pdf](http://wilpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Annual-Report_2015-WEB.pdf)

---

32 "The Nobel Peace Prize for 2011" (n.d.). *The Norwegian Nobel Committee*. Available at: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/press.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2011/press.html)

33 M. O'Reilly (2015). "Why Women?" *Inclusive Security and Peaceful Societies*, p.3. Available at: <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Why-Women-Inclusive-Security-and-Peaceful-Societies.pdf>

34 P. Castillo Diaz and S. Tordjman (2012). "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Connections between Presence and Influence". *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN)*. p.7-11. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2012/10/wps-sourcebook-03a-womenpeacenegotiations-en.pdf>

## Women's contribution to peace and reconciliation processes

The necessity of women's equal participation in peace and reconciliation processes has been recognized on many occasions, directly and indirectly, in the UN Charter, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century, the Namibia Plan of Action, by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly, among others<sup>35</sup>. On October 31, 2000, the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) thereby urging "all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts"<sup>36</sup>. More specifically, "the resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the

importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security"<sup>37</sup>.

There is greater evidence that shows how women's inclusion helps prevent conflict, creates peace, enhances reconciliation processes, and sustains security after war ends<sup>38</sup>. Recent quantitative and qualitative research and empirical analysis have demonstrated that when women's inclusion is prioritized, peace is more likely—particularly when women are in a position to influence decision making<sup>39</sup>. For example, a 40 in-depth case studies on the role of women and gender during political negotiations and their implementation conducted by the Graduate Institute's Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) revealed that the quality participation of women's group is correlated with positive negotiation and implementation outcomes<sup>40</sup>.

37 Ibid.

38 M. O'Reilly (2015). Op. cit. p. 2.

39 Ibid. p. 11.

40 T. Paffenholz (2015). "Results on Women and Gender from the Broader Participation and Civil Society and Peacebuilding Projects". *Centre on Conflict, Peacebuilding and Development at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID)*. p. 1. Available at: <http://repository.graduateinstitute.ch/record/292671/files/briefingpaperwomen%20gender.pdf>

35 E. Rehn and E.J. Sirleaf (2002). Op. cit. p. 64.

36 "Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security" (n.d.). *Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)*. Available at: [un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/](http://un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/)



< Syrian refugees participating in embroidery classes offered by Caritas Turkey. Photo : Patrick Nicholson/Caritas



## A FEW STATISTICS

When the percentage of women in parliament increases by 5%, a state is five times less likely to use violence when faced with an international crisis.

A peace agreement is 35% more likely to last at least 15 years if women participate in its creation.

When 35% of parliamentarians are women, the risk of relapse into conflict is near zero.

Women made up just 2% of mediators and 9% of negotiators in official peace talks between 1992 and 2011.

Just 2% of funding dedicated to peace and security goes to gender equality or women's empowerment.

Table source: M. O'Reilly (2015). Op.cit. p.3.

Since the impact of armed conflict on women differs greatly from the impact on men, their contribution to peace processes also differs. Women peacebuilders bring different perspectives and priorities than men, so when women are included, the nature of the dialogue changes. Women tend to contribute to a more holistic understanding of peace that addresses short-term security issues as well as long-term needs such as education, health care, jobs and land. Women also tend to share a vision for peace based on respect for the dignity of the individual, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or economic background (even while their governments maintained isolationist or pro-war positions). Most importantly, they share the understanding that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and because of their rootedness in their communities, they play a crucial role in re-establishing the social fabric in the aftermath of conflict<sup>41</sup>. Women can also be a valuable resource for reconciliation initiatives since their social roles in some contexts position them well to lead reconciliation efforts, because they are sometime perceived as being more trustworthy than discredited political or traditional leaders<sup>42</sup>. For example, South African women played significant roles in the planning, development and implementation

41 "Peacebuilding and gender / women" (n.d.). *Insight on Conflict published by Peace Direct*. Available at: <https://www.insightonconflict.org/themes/gender-womens/>

42 "Enhancing gender-responsive national reconciliation processes" (2013). *Peacebuilding Commission's Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL)*. p. 5. Available at <http://www.un.org/en/peacebuilding/wgll/WGLL%20Concept%20Note%20on%20reconciliation21November.ed.pdf>

of the Truth and Reconciliations Commission (TRC)<sup>43</sup>. Their participation as commissioners, staff and witnesses contributed to the success of the TRC and, ultimately, to South Africa's successful transition from a state built upon the subjugation of its majority population to one based on democracy<sup>44</sup>.

## Canada's commitment to women, peace and security

Canada is a strong supporter of international law and mandates on women's rights and empowerment, including UNSCR 1325<sup>45</sup>. In fact, Canada was on the Security Council when the Resolution was adopted<sup>46</sup>. Canada is also a founding member and chair of the "Friends of Women, Peace, and Security" coalition in New York and often convenes forums that promote dialogue on progress and challenges of implementing UNSCR 1325<sup>47</sup>. To ensure the implementation of the principles of UNSCR 1325, Canada created the Canadian Committee on Women, Peace, and Security in 2001. This committee is comprised of parliamentarians, government officials, and civil society representatives<sup>48</sup>. In 2010, Canada launched its National Action Plan (NAP), "Building Peace and Security for All", which includes "Participation-advocating for the active and meaningful participation and representation of women and local women's groups in peace and security activities, including peace processes"<sup>49</sup>. More recently, Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Marie-Claude Bibeau, Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, reiterated Canada's commitment to the issue of women, peace and security since they consider gender equality and the empowerment of women as vital preconditions to conflict prevention, resolution and transition to peace<sup>50</sup>. On February

43 P. Gobodo-Madikizela, F. Ross and E. Mills (2005). "Women's Contributions to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission". *Women Waging Peace Policy Commission*. Available at: [http://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/11\\_women\\_s\\_contributions\\_to\\_south\\_africa\\_s\\_truth\\_and\\_reconciliation\\_commission.pdf](http://www.inclusivesecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/11_women_s_contributions_to_south_africa_s_truth_and_reconciliation_commission.pdf)

44 Ibid.

45 A. Young and M. Mansury (2014). "Assessment of Canada's Action Plan for the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security 2010-2016". *Inclusive Security*. p.5. Available at: [http://www.international.gc.ca/start-gtsr/assets/pdfs/Canada\\_Action\\_Plan\\_Women\\_Peace\\_Security-2010-2016.pdf](http://www.international.gc.ca/start-gtsr/assets/pdfs/Canada_Action_Plan_Women_Peace_Security-2010-2016.pdf)

46 "Women, Peace and Security: Building peace and security for all" (2016). *Global Affairs Canada*. Available at: [http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/world\\_issues-enjeux-mondiaux/women\\_canada\\_action\\_plan\\_action\\_femme.aspx?lang=eng](http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/world_issues-enjeux-mondiaux/women_canada_action_plan_action_femme.aspx?lang=eng)

47 A. Young and M. Mansury (2014). Op. cit. p.5.

48 Ibid.

49 "Women, Peace and Security: Building peace and security for all" (2016). *Global Affairs Canada*. Available at: [http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/world\\_issues-enjeux-mondiaux/women\\_canada\\_action\\_plan\\_action\\_femme.aspx?lang=eng](http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/world_issues-enjeux-mondiaux/women_canada_action_plan_action_femme.aspx?lang=eng)

50 "Canada renews commitment to women, peace and security" (2017). *Government of Canada*. Available at: [http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1186059&\\_ga=1.129508558.358005455.1486504390](http://news.gc.ca/web/article-en.do?nid=1186059&_ga=1.129508558.358005455.1486504390)



7, 2017, the Government of Canada tabled its response to the third report of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, entitled “An Opportunity for Global Leadership: Canada and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda”. The Standing Committee made 17 recommendations, including:

- increasing the number of women members of the military, of police officers and of civilians it puts forward to fill senior UN positions;
- taking a leading role on peace operations issues and women, peace and security through forums at the UN;
- increasing the number of women employed in peace operations; and
- including women in peace processes by supporting local civil society organizations and women human rights defenders<sup>51</sup>.

## Challenges

Women’s participation in peace processes, and in peace operations in particular, remains unfair and unequal. Since the passage of Resolution 1325, many other important resolutions regarding women, peace and security have been adopted, but unfortunately, only marginal progress has been made with regard to the number of women in formal peace processes or the design and conduct of peace talks in ways that would give greater voice to women, particularly from civil society<sup>52</sup>. Endemic discrimination, marginalization by decision-makers and gender-based violence are still significant barriers to achieving the goals of Resolution 1325 and of those that followed. Tradition and cultural practices also present formidable obstacles to the inclusion of women in peace and reconciliation processes or post-war governance unless a formal mechanism, like the use of quotas, is in place to support this<sup>53</sup>. The lack of resources available is also a major challenge faced by women peacebuilders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives to remain sustainable in the long term, women must be included in all levels and phases of the peace and reconciliation process, whether it’s directly at the negotiation table or through various other mechanisms. Organizations like Search for Common Ground (a partner of Development and Peace in the Middle East), International Alert, the US Institute for Peace and many other groups have been providing training for women to develop

negotiation skills and leadership<sup>54</sup>. International groups can become facilitators and help to bring together groups of women so they can develop strategies as well as learn new leadership skills. It is not enough simply to increase the number of women involved. The ability of women to exercise influence also needs to be increased.

**Peace is not merely an absence of war; nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies; nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called an enterprise of justice.**

**– Second Vatican Council,  
Gaudium et Spes, 78**

Conflicts and wars can exacerbate women’s marginalization, but they can also be used as an opportunity for women’s empowerment because when women are included, it increases the chances of a peaceful outcome for the entire community<sup>55</sup>. This is why Development and Peace calls for the full participation of women and for the full integration of women’s concerns and needs in all peace processes, agreements and transitional governance structures – in which equality between women and men should also be specifically addressed. Without peace there can be no development. It is the foundation for building a better society. We believe in promoting dialogue and tolerance through common projects that are focused on community building and on the inclusion of women.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> P. Castillo Diaz and S. Tordjman (2012). Op. cit. p. 2.

<sup>53</sup> E. Rehn and E.J. Sirleaf (2002). Op. cit. p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p.79.

<sup>55</sup> M. O’Reilly (2015). Op. cit. p. 2.



## Women are working together for peace within Syrian society

The war in Syria has resulted in extreme internal conflict, segregation of communities, mass trauma and death, the destruction of the Syrian economy, landmarks and infrastructure, and the internal and external displacement of its people. All these factors have led to the collapse of peaceful social bonds within and among communities. House of Peace (HOPE), a peace-building organization supported by Development and Peace, aims to build a solid foundation of peace for the future of Syrian society. HOPE provides social peacebuilding workshops in Syria and Lebanon for local community groups and humanitarian NGOs to ease social tensions and establish pathways towards peaceful co-existence and reconciliation. The workshops

^ Carla (centre) is from Aleppo. Even though she came from one of the most conflictual cities in the world, she continues to work to find peace and believes peace begins with all of us.

enable participants to gain new perspectives and develop community-based initiatives. HOPE also has launched a regular publication entitled *Syrian Voices* in order to share Syrian voices, perspectives, and stories to promote a peaceful society.

At HOPE, women play a central role, both as project leaders and participants. Three out of the six HOPE staff members are women, and 81% of the participants are women. These women are peacebuilders in their daily lives. Carla Boulos, a Syrian woman who is the project manager of HOPE and who is also one of the main trainers for the workshops, captures exactly the qualities that it takes to be a peacebuilder, which is to be “optimistic and realistic at the same time”. Carla feels that most people define peace as a grand and paramount idea, “but peace can be defined just as one feels it, and can be found in our everyday lives”. Carla sees the true essence of a peacebuilder in their passion for it: they do not see the word “peacebuilder” as a slogan, or as a job, they view it as their purpose. Peacebuilders must be open and transparent so that they can relate with and connect with local participants. When the HOPE project staff enter high-conflict areas to work with people, they explore all the dimensions of each new context and conflict, because peace is not about taking sides.

Project participants are seen as an extension of the HOPE team, because these individuals have the power to make real changes in their society. The workshops give women a platform to express themselves, to use their analytical skills, and to cast aside social barriers and stereotypes. Women leave the workshops empowered with the knowledge and skills to initiate a project in their community that promotes social peace among people who they usually avoid. By leading a project themselves which requires skills, persistence, and hard work, women see their own potential. Carla emphasizes the transformative power of women in their communities: “when we target the women, we are targeting the family, and when we target the family we are targeting the entire society”.

▼ Carla is promoting World Humanitarian Day.



▼ Syrian refugees participating in embroidery classes offered by Caritas Turkey. Photo : Patrick Nicholson/Caritas





# WOMEN AT THE HEART OF DEMOCRACY AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

## Women make democracies more equitable and sustainable

Women's participation in democratic life is essential to inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. According to the International Parliamentary Union (IPU), the global average of women in national parliaments has nearly doubled, from 11.3% in 1995 to 22.8% as of June 2016<sup>56</sup>. The world's highest ranking countries for women's participation in government, historically dominated by European countries, have also become more diverse as important progress was made in Sub-Saharan Africa

and in Latin America<sup>57</sup>. In fact, the only two countries in the world to have 50% or more women in parliament in single or lower houses are Rwanda with 63.8% and Bolivia with 53.1%<sup>58</sup>. Fortunately, real social change is not solely created through formal democratic institutions, it is also created through social movements: movements in which women are generally actively engaged and even leading.

Even though progress has been achieved over the past decades towards the equal participation of women and men in political processes and institutions, women continue to be under-represented as voters as well as in leadership roles, whether in elected office, the civil service, the private sector or

---

<sup>56</sup> "Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation" (2016). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

---

<sup>57</sup> "Women in Parliament: 20 years in review" (2015). *Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)*. p.1. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/WIP20Y-en.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> "Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation" (2016). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

▼ Women in line. Photo: Mocuso



▼ In the DRC, women and men who are part of the animation team receive training and educational materials.





academia<sup>59</sup>. As of January 2017, only 10 women were serving as Heads of State and 9 women as Heads of Government. As of January 2015, only 17% of government ministers were women, with the majority overseeing social sectors, such as education and the family<sup>60</sup>.

Under international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) (which calls for a 30% minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies), men and women have an equal right to participate fully in all aspects of the political process<sup>61</sup>. Unfortunately, in practice, profound obstacles remain that restrict women's leadership, representation and political participation from the local to the global level. As the 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation notes: "Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women."<sup>62</sup>

Despite women's proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and the right of both women and men to participate equally in democratic governance, women within political parties tend to be overrepresented at the grassroots level or in supporting roles and underrepresented in positions of power<sup>63</sup>. The obstacles to women's autonomy and empowerment as citizens exist in the most private aspects of our lives, as well as in the most public. In many societies in which traditional or patriarchal values remain strong, women continue to be discouraged from taking on public and decision-making roles, and instead play supporting roles in the private sphere such as child and family care<sup>64</sup>. According to a 2012 global survey by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), women surveyed cited "cultural beliefs/social attitudes/patriarchal mentality" as the number one factor obstructing

advancement in women's participation<sup>65</sup>. In addition to dealing with these obstacles, women are often more likely than men to face practical barriers to entering politics (such as a lack of financial resources, less access to information and support networks, and greater family responsibilities)<sup>66</sup>. Lastly, violence against women during elections is still a reality in some countries such as Pakistan and Nigeria, where women (as voters and candidates) are being attacked for daring to enter or participate in elections<sup>67</sup>.

## Women's contribution to social movements and democracy

When women are supported and empowered to take action in democratic life and to be active citizens, they have a profoundly positive impact on communities, and provide tangible improvements to people's lives. As activists, community leaders, politicians, elected officials and constituents, their contributions are crucial to building a strong, inclusive and representative society<sup>68</sup>. Many great women leaders have contributed to transforming our world to make it a better place to live: Mother Teresa, Eleanor Roosevelt, Rosa Parks, Wangari Maathai, Benazir Bhutto, Malala Yousafzai, Rigoberta Menchú, Carmen Quintana, Aung San Suu Kyi, Berta Cáceres, and Vandana Shiva, to name a few.

Women have always found ways to challenge or fight inequalities and hierarchies as individuals, in local and national movements, in international women's organizations, as political leaders, and in global forums such as the United Nations<sup>69</sup>. For example, women played a central role in the American civil rights movement as well as in the South African anti-apartheid movement. Even under hostile governments, countless women across the globe have risked imprisonment, harassment, torture, and death to defend human rights and are still at risk today<sup>70</sup>. For example the Afghan Women's Network in

---

59 "Women's leadership and political participation" (2013). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*. p.1. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2013/12/un%20women%20them-briefuswebrev2%20pdf.ashx?v=2&d=20141013T121456>

60 "Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation" (2016). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

61 P. Fernando (2012). "Working with social movements". *Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA)*. p. 4. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/povertyreduction/50157985.pdf>

62 "Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2011", *United Nations General Assembly*. Available at: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/130&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/66/130&Lang=E)

63 "Women's leadership and political participation" (2013). Op. cit.; J. Ballington et al. (2012). "Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation". *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and National Democratic Institute (NDI)*. p.1. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/files/Empowering-Women-Full-Case-Study-ENG.pdf>

64 J. Ballington et al. (2012). Op. cit. p. 8.

---

65 "Violence Against Women in Elections" (2015). *International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)*. Available at: <http://www.ifes.org/news/violence-against-women-elections>

66 C. Perelli (2005). "Women & Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections". *Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI)*. p. 34. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter3.htm>

67 "Votes without violence: A citizen observer's guide to addressing violence against women in elections" (2016). *National Democratic Institute (NDI)*. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/votes-without-violence>

68 "Gender, Women and Democracy", *National Democratic Institute (NDI)*. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/gender-women-democracy>

69 F. de Haan, M. Allen, J. Purvis, and K. Daskalova (2013). *Women's Activism: Global Perspectives from the 1890s to the Present*. Taylor and Francis Group | Routledge. 212 pages.

70 "Women's Human Rights Defenders". *Amnesty International*. Available at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/women-s-rights/women-s-human-rights-defenders>

Afghanistan and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina (among many other women social activists) have showed fierce determination in their respective fights for social justice. Women are also significant leaders on environmental justice such as in India with the Chipko Movement or in Kenya with the Green Belt Movement<sup>71</sup>. In Canada, Indigenous women from Saskatchewan started the Idle No More movement to oppose federal bill C-45 in November 2012<sup>72</sup>. Idle No More has quickly become one of the largest Indigenous social movements in Canadian history and is continuing its fight today to assert Indigenous rights to sovereignty, reinstitute traditional laws, Nation to Nation Treaties and to protect territorial land and water from corporate control<sup>73</sup>.

## WHEN WOMEN WIN, THE WHOLE SOCIETY WINS!

The participation of women in politics and the inclusion of their perspectives can contribute to good governance and are prerequisites for democratic development<sup>74</sup>. Research shows that the proportion of women members of parliament has a great influence on the nature of the debate in politics, often resulting in the parliament being more likely to address women's priority issues such as the elimination of gender-based violence, parental leave and childcare<sup>75</sup>. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), women's involvement is strongly linked to positive developments in education, infrastructure and health standards at the local level<sup>76</sup>. For example, research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62% higher than in those with male-led councils<sup>77</sup>. In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found<sup>78</sup>. Experts also agree that women's participation in decision-making structures has implications for promoting equality between women and men within society as a whole<sup>79</sup>.

For example, women in France and in South Africa have played an important role in writing and amending constitutions that address the issues of equality between women and men. Thanks in part to women leaders who took up this issue, the eradication of violence against women in both the domestic and the public sphere has gained momentum as a global movement<sup>80</sup>.

## What is the situation in Canada?

After the federal election in 2015, Canadian Prime minister Justin Trudeau's named a cabinet that for the first time in the country's history was equally balanced between men and women with 15 women out of 30 cabinet ministers<sup>81</sup>. In the election, a record 88 women were elected, up from 76 in 2011<sup>82</sup>. Even with these gains, women now account for only 26% of the 338 seats in the House and this figure places Canada 63rd in a recent international ranking of women in parliaments in 193 countries<sup>83</sup>.

Since Minister Bibeau was appointed Minister of International Development on November 4th, 2015, the human rights and health of women and girls have been placed at the heart of Canada's international cooperation agenda. As well, advancing democracy is one of Global Affairs Canada priorities and Canada's approach to democracy support abroad has focused on promoting the full participation of citizens in decision-making that affects their lives, rules-based governance, respect for human rights and the emergence of effective and accountable institutions<sup>84</sup>.

71 S. K. Aditya (2016). "Role of Women in Environmental Conservation", *International Journal of Political Science and Development* 4(4): 140-145.

72 W. Larivière et al. (2016). "À la rencontre des femmes autochtones du Québec". *Conseil du statut de la femme*, p. 17. Available at: [https://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/femmes\\_autochtones\\_web.pdf](https://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/femmes_autochtones_web.pdf)

73 "The Story". *Idle No More*. Available at: <http://www.idlenomore.ca/story>

74 J. Ballington et al. (2012). Op. cit. p. 7.

75 J. Ballington et al. (2012). Op. cit. p. 8.

76 "Gender, Women and Democracy" (n.d.). *National Democratic Institute (NDI)*. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/gender-women-democracy>

77 *Women's leadership and political participation* (2013), Op. cit. p. 2.

78 Ibid.

79 "Equal Participation of Women and Men in Decision-Making Processes, with Particular Emphasis on Political Participation and Leadership - Report of the Expert Group Meeting" (2005). *United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)*. p.23. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eqm-men/FinalReport.pdf>

80 Ibid.

81 J. Ditchburn (2015). "'Because it's 2015': Trudeau forms Canada's 1st gender-balanced cabinet". *The Canadian Press*. Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-trudeau-liberal-government-cabinet-1.3304590>

82 "50% population, 25% representation. Why the parliamentary gender gap?" (2015). *CBC News*. Available at: <http://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/women-politics/>

83 "Women in national parliaments" (2016). *Inter-Parliamentary Union*. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

84 "Advancing Democracy" (2016). *Global Affairs Canada*. Available at: <http://www.international.gc.ca/development-developpement/priorities-priorites/democracy-democracie.aspx?lang=eng>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The role of women in political parties is a key determinant of their prospects for political empowerment, particularly at the national level<sup>85</sup>. However, political participation extends beyond parties, local councils and parliament. Women can also become involved in the electoral process through independent action—particularly at the local level—and by joining civil society organizations<sup>86</sup>. Women’s networks, universities and schools, trade unions, community centres, faith-based groups, non-governmental organizations, and the media can all provide avenues where women’s untapped potential to assume leadership positions can be supported<sup>87</sup>. The most meaningful strategies to overcome the multitude of challenges that women are confronted with when it comes to political participation simultaneously combined reforms to political institutions and the provision of targeted support to women activists, candidates, and elected officials<sup>88</sup>.

### WHAT ABOUT THE USE OF QUOTAS?

The use of quotas has been one of the most effective methods in addressing the under-representation of women in parliament and in government positions. As of June 2016, 46 single or lower houses were composed of more than 30% women and out of those 46 countries, 40 had applied some form of quotas - either legislative candidate quotas or reserved seats - opening space for women’s political participation<sup>89</sup>. Furthermore, in over 50 countries, major political parties have voluntarily set out quota provisions in their own statutes (party quotas)<sup>90</sup>. However, it is important to keep in mind that quotas are a temporary solution to increase gender balance and support women’s leadership: long-term projects that address the socio-economic constraints that keep women from participating in the political process are also needed<sup>91</sup>.

In order to achieve development that is equitable and where people have the ability to influence decisions that affect their

lives, it is essential to build societies that are based on social justice and human rights. Without equal rights, women are marginalized and made vulnerable. All people are entitled to participate in their communities and in decisions that affect their lives, and cannot be excluded for any reason.

**“The characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation, which is expressed essentially in a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of a civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and a view to the common good.”**

**– Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No 189**

That is why Development and Peace – Caritas Canada is working to ensure that women and men benefit from the same rights. In order to generate hope for transformation, improve social justice, counterbalance the exercise of excessive authority by governments and help democracy deliver, Development and Peace – Caritas Canada strongly supports women’s engagement in civil society organizations and in political life.

Women must be equal partners in democratic development. Equitable participation of women in politics and government is essential to building and sustaining democracy. Funds should be made available for innovative programs that empower women, strengthen women’s political skills and help them acquire the tools necessary to be engaged in political parties, legislatures, and civil society as political leaders, activists and informed citizens. Women must be informed and provided with the appropriate political space and freedom so that they can participate meaningfully in every facet of civic and political life; make good policy choices; exercise their rights; hold public officials accountable; voice their interest collectively; advocate on matters of policy, run for political office, be elected and govern effectively<sup>92</sup>.

85 J. Ballington *et al.* (2012). Op. cit. p. 2.

86 C. Perelli (2005). Op. cit. p. 33.

87 M. Tadros (2011). “Women Engaging Politically: Beyond Magic Bullets and Motorways”. *Pathways Policy Paper - Pathways of Women’s Empowerment Research Programme Consortium*. p. 10. Available at: <https://open-docs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/5835/Women%20and%20Politics%20Policy%20Paper%20final.pdf?sequence=1>

88 J. Ballington *et al.* (2012). Op. cit. p. 17.

89 “Facts and figures: Leadership and political participation” (2016). *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)*. Available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

90 M. Tadros (2011). Op. cit. p. 1.

91 E. Rehn and E.J. Sirleaf (2002). Op. cit. p. 82.

92 “Citizen Participation”. *National Democratic Institute (NDI)*. Available at: <https://www.ndi.org/citizen-participation>; “Gender, Women and Democracy”, Op. cit.



## Women participating in the democratic life of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Over the last several decades in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), conflict, violence, and the sociopolitical situation have prevented women from engaging fully and constructively in the country's civic and political life. Despite the provisions included to this end in the national constitution, few women participate in decision-making, i.e. 9.4% of members of parliament and six out of 37 members of the Congolese government are women.

Development and Peace is currently working closely with the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo (CENCO) to implement a large-scale nation-wide civic and electoral education project designed to promote participation in democratic life and electoral processes and to foster the emergence of responsible citizenship among Congolese women and youth in particular. The 2016 education campaign, the first of three campaigns, resulted in the training of 10,031 community facilitators who conducted 166,383 brainstorming sessions in 47 dioceses throughout the country. Over 4,087,000 Congolese are now better informed about their roles and responsibilities as actors of democratic life.

^ As a community facilitator, Rebecca Dembo plays an important role in civil education and awareness-raising campaigns. She encourages women to participate in democratic life and change existing power structures.



The project includes a number of measures to promote the political participation and representation of women in post-conflict DRC and to broaden the role of women in democratization and peacebuilding processes. A large number of women are taking part in this project: 40% of trained facilitators and 53% of participants in sessions are women.

Rebecca Dembo is one of these community facilitators. A childcare educator and mother of four, she is dedicated to countering the prevailing lack of information and influencing the behaviour of her fellow citizens through training and discussions on civic education in her parish. Her love for her country inspires her to be active: she wants to engage in the democratization process and encourages her friends and family, especially the women, to do likewise. "In their role as children's primary educators, as counsellors, and pillars of the family, women's involvement in raising awareness is essential. They have the ability to come together and to exert influence over elected officials to put forward projects that prioritize medical care and education for women," says Rebecca. In a nutshell, women's involvement in awareness-raising campaigns and electoral processes is a key ingredient of social progress in the DRC.



< Presidential and Legislative elections in DRC, Walikale, November 28, 2011. Photo: MONUSCO/ Sylvain Liechti



< Women in Walikale, DRC. Photo: MONUSCO/Myriam Asmani

# CONCLUSION

For the past 50 years, women have been vital actors in Development and Peace's international programs as well as in our movement here in Canada. From experience, we know that when diverse women are supported and enabled to participate in and take leadership in the development and implementation of projects, programmes, and policies in their communities and in their countries, a multiplier effect is witnessed, with their contributions making a much bigger impact on poverty reduction and development.

However, there are many obstacles in the path to justice for women, so this goal requires action on all fronts and at every level. Each of us needs to be advocates for the inclusion and participation of women, to ensure that our actions are guiding us on the path to justice.

As the leadership and contributions of women become more recognized, and their inclusion and participation is prioritized, the positive impacts are very clear. As women participate in

the democratic process, as they protect the land and water from damage, as they harvest food sustainably and efficiently for their families and communities, and as they contribute to building more peaceful communities and countries, they lead the transition from a world based on inequality to a more sustainable world based on a foundation of equality and dignity for all. And together, we begin to see a world of peace, a world of justice, and a world of love.

> Women in DRC. Photo:  
Development and Peace





