

Women's Voice Matters: For the better reconstruction of a society

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During my time as the first U.S. Ambassador for Global Women's Issues, I had the opportunity to meet with women in nearly sixty countries and to work with them to advance the political, economic, and social position of women around the world. In my travels everywhere, I've seen women on the front lines of change. They are leading their communities and exercising their agency and voice to overcome difficult challenges. In countries emerging from conflict and those affected by natural disasters, women are crucial to rebuilding communities.

I have worked with women from the Democratic Republic of the Congo to Haiti and from Afghanistan to Liberia, and I have seen firsthand how conflict and disaster increase women's vulnerability, and how insecurity creates real threats to women's safety and ability to build livelihoods and participate fully in their communities. We know that women are more likely than men to die during natural disasters, and we see how women are targeted, displaced, and marginalized during conflict. Often, fragile communities are affected by both conflict and disaster, deepening this vulnerability. However, women are also leaders in reconstruction, playing key roles in providing assistance to survivors of conflict and disaster, managing household resources, and rebuilding communities.

I am the Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, and we have joined forces with JICA on a collaboration at the nexus of gender, peace-building, and disaster risk reduction. Together, we have sought to understand women's roles in states affected by conflict and natural disaster in order to identify effective policy and programming



options for development agencies working to advance women's participation and leadership in peace-building and disaster risk reduction. Peace-building and disaster risk reduction efforts both seek to rebuild and restructure political, economic, and social systems and address the root causes of conflict- and disaster-related volatility. It is crucial to understand the overlap in both the vulnerabilities that women and girls face but also the opportunities for incorporating women's voices and capabilities into peace-building and disaster risk reduction. JICA has made an invaluable contribution to this effort, bringing together its expertise in these two areas to support women's dignity in times of instability and to lift up women's voices during reconstruction efforts.

Understanding these issues is key to creating smart development and effective conflict management, and it will be only become more important as climate change, urbanization, and population growth increase risk in already-fragile communities. Including women in decision-making at all levels can expand the range of perspectives and solutions which are considered, leading to more creative and more inclusive responses. Including women's needs, experiences, and abilities in addressing conflict and disaster is not only the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do.

Peace-building and disaster risk reduction are both efforts that seek to be transformative in nature, addressing deeply rooted sources of conflict and vulnerability in order to create more inclusive and more peaceful communities; women are vital for these efforts and are powerful actors in reconstructing and reshaping societies.

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Cover: A woman prays during mass at St Joseph's Cathedral in the Ankawa district of Erbil, Iraq, which has become home to thousands of displaced Iraqi Christians. ©Matt Cardy / Getty Images

Photo on pages 2-3: Palestinian women engaged in prayer on the first day of Eid al-Fitr at the Al-Omari Mosque in the center of Gaza City. ©Getty Images



The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is the world's largest bilateral development organization, operating in some 150 countries to help some of the globe's most vulnerable people.