A Country of their Own:

Women and Peacebuilding

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Abstract:

Research on women and post-conflict reconstruction tends to focus primarily on women as victims and passive targets for aid rather than conceptualizing peacebuilding as a process where greater participation by women may help increase the prospects for success. Here, I argue that women’s social status is a dimension of social capital that is largely independent of general economic development. Societies and communities where women enjoy a relatively higher status have greater prospects for successful peacebuilding, as cooperation by the local population with peacebuilding policies and activities increases. Thus, in the presence of an UN-led peacebuilding operation, women’s status has a direct and independent impact on post-conflict reconstruction. The theoretical claims are empirically assessed by looking at variation in levels of cooperation and conflict during the UN peacebuilding missions within the countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

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**Introduction**

Civil wars destroy physical capital and formal institutions. Post-conflict reconstruction is difficult in weak states; however, local informal institutions and community networks can provide partial substitutes for physical capital and formal institutions (Sawyer, 2005; Goodhand et al. 2000; Belloni, 2001; Pouligny, 1999). I argue that societies with relatively higher social capacity and informal networks have better prospects for successful UN-led peacebuilding missions, because they have more resources that can be mobilized.[[2]](#footnote-2) Women’s social status reflects a dimension of informal social capacity different from, and partly independent of, general economic development as reflected in conventional indicators such as per capita income (Hughes 2001; Caprioli 2003; Melander 2005a; and Gizelis, 2009).

In previous research (Gizelis, 2009) I have examined how higher relative social status of women can influence the prospects for successful UN peacebuilding across conflicts, based on the peacebuilding success criteria and data developed by Doyle and Sambanis (2000). However, in my previous analysis I looked only at whether overall country attributes and final conflict outcomes are consistent with my argument about women’s social status and the prospects for success in UN-led peacebuilding operations. The empirical analysis as such is a relatively indirect examination of the underlying hypothesized mechanisms of how higher female social status can increase the prospects for successful peacebuilding under the auspices of the UN. In this paper, I go beyond the macro-level comparisons and turn to a more direct evaluation of the hypothesized links by examining if the actual responses to efforts within UN missions vary across social contexts. I take advantage of variation in social characteristics within countries with UN missions to test the theory by examining how responses to UN peacebuilding efforts vary by the relative status of women across districts, using new disaggregated event data on UN peacebuilding activities and local actors’ responses. Many new studies stress the value of disaggregated analysis of civil wars (e.g., Buhaug and Rød, 2006), and the added value of disaggregation in the study of civil war highlights the need for and potential contributions of systematic disaggregated analyses of peacebuilding operations.

The analysis here is limited to cases within two countries – Sierra Leone and Liberia, but the basic framework can be easily expanded to understand the dynamics within other conflicts. Sierra Leone and Liberia involve valuable lessons for UN peacebuilding missions. Based on Sierra Leone’s and Liberia’s economic indicators of development alone (HDI report, 2008) one would expect low prospects for a stable long term peace in the wake of the civil wars. Nevertheless, the current situation in both countries is much more hopeful than what one might anticipate from the onset of the UN peacebuilding missions. More important, there is considerable variation within Liberia and Sierra Leone in the responses of local actors to UN policies and actions to empirically assess whether there are more cooperative or conflictual responses by locals in districts where women have higher status controlling for characteristics of the UN mission and types of policies.

**Local Actors, Social Capital, and Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding operations often focus primarily on central authorities. However, in order to achieve sustainable peace, efforts must also address issues of local authority and governance in ways that do not undermine central governance in the country where the UN mission takes place (Dorussen and Gizelis, 2010). Unfortunately, rebuilding formal institutions in war-torn societies is often controversial, since the process creates potential winners and losers. The absence of central authority capacity and competent formal institutions can undermine prospects for peace (Jackson, 1990; Nixon, 2006; Migdal, 1998; Duffield, 2001; and Rotberg, 2002). UN missions often lack the required resources and understanding of local conditions to stabilize and transform societies (Poligny, 2006; Collier et al., 2003).

Doyle and Sambanis (2000) argue that UN operations can do better to ensure successful long term peace than purely domestic alternatives and international involvement without the UN. When state institutions are weak or inefficient, UN led operations can substitute for strong central institutions, and facilitate synergies between top-down and bottom-up post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Their argument raises important questions regarding exactly how such synergies arise between local and external actors in successful peacebuilding, and the the possible mechanisms through which the UN can unlock social capital and foster local participation in peacebuilding.

Social capital can be defined as resources embedded in social structures that can be mobilized towards a purposive collective action. This definition incorporates vertical forms of social networks, i.e. formal and centralized, as well as horizontal community-level networks (Coletta and Cullen, 2000). Whereas human capital is often tangible and easily observable, social capital is embedded in the relational interactions among agents. Like physical and human capital, social capital is productive and helps individuals achieve ends they otherwise could not obtain (Lin, 2001; and Coleman, 1994: 302). The influence of social capital in facilitating successful collective action enhances human capital and thus contributes to overall development (Grootaert, 1998; Coleman, 1989; Putnam, 1993, 2000; Woolcock, 1998; North, 1990).

Not all horizontal networks contribute to civil society and are productive social capital. Bonding networks such as family, kin groups, or ethnic based groups can actually increase the risk of conflict compared to more encompassing or bridging networks such as voluntary associations (Coletta and Cullen, 2000). While intrastate wars typically destroy social capital (Collier et al. 2003; Coletta and Cullen, 2000), informal and traditional social structures can provide alternatives that can help local communities overcome challenges in the wake of civil wars.

Civil wars are often localized (Buhaug and Lujala, 2005), and as such the local capacities and informal social networks in conflict areas will be particularly important for the prospects for peacebuilding. Societies that have experienced devastating civil wars such as Sierra Leone and Liberia are unlikely to perform well with regards to human rights, including women’s rights. Still, these countries may still have considerable social capital in the form of local associations and informal networks, and these can have dramatic implications for the prospects for peacebuilding. The large regional variation in how local communities in Liberia dealt with security threats from ex-combatants attests to the role of informal structures. The traditional Poro society network in Northwestern Liberia mediated between armed groups and local communities, while in the southeast where there was no tradition of inter-ethnic clan organization many communities dissipated, fleeing villages and retreating into the rainforests (Sawyer, 2005: 4-5). This suggests more generally that bridging networks or informal organizations transcending ethnic and clan divisions can facilitate post-conflict reconstruction and conflict resolution, thereby contributing to successful peacebuilding.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Resource mobilization theory suggests that elite networks constitute potential social resources that can be mobilized for waging conflict or building peace (see Jenkins, 1983). However, the resource mobilization literature does not consider social capita or the potential role of informal horizontal networks involving women. For example, the Liberian Poro society has a female counterpart in the Sande network. As such, women’s relative social status can in this sense reflect untapped resources and social networks that may help rebuild shattered communities and overcome conflict.

 Existing evidence on social networks have found that gender-mixed networks tend to perform better in terms of collaboration and conflict management (Westermann et al., 2005). Moreover, networks involving women tend to have higher levels of reciprocity (Wellman and Frank, 2001). Women’s networks tend to provide more emergency and everyday support, in particular emotional support, during natural disasters and other social emergencies, even if they do not appear to have a direct impact on central institutions or the main decision makers (Wellman and Frank, 2001: 252-253).

Porter (2007:3) argues that although not all women are natural peacemakers, the social roles of women for nurturing interpersonal relationships often make them effective peacebuilders, typically in informal rather than formal ways. This is particularly the case in countries like Liberia where women traditionally have held central roles as farmers, traders, entrepreneurs, leaders in religious and civil organizations, and matriarchs in complex and large households. Trading roles, for example, allowed women to have contact with rebel leaders and combatants, and the ability to move relatively freely around the country compared to men during the civil war (African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004). Liberian women were able to build contacts with faction leaders and facilitated meetings between Charles Taylor and rebel leaders, as impartial mediators between the fighting factions. Liberian women’s influential role in peacemaking and subsequent peacebuilding has been attributed to informal domestic networks, including transnational contracts through the Liberian diaspora (African Women and Peace Support Network, 2004).

Women’s participation in horizontal networks that target either emergency relief or handling of everyday life concerns can have important effects on the prospects of successful post-conflict reconstruction. In Liberia, women’s organizations campaigning for peace have engaged in dialogue on issues such as HIV/AIDS and female genital mutilation. They have also provided skills training and counselling for women and girls (Kinoti, 2009). In Sierra Leone, women mobilized resources to rebuild schools destroyed during the war (United Nations, 2002: 120).

The role of women in conflict resolution and their relevance to post-conflict reconstruction is likely to be more notable at the local level rather than the national level. A relatively higher status of women indicates better prospects for successful long-term peacebuilding, as this reflects informal institutions and social networks that can contribute in important ways to overcoming conflict. It will be easier for local communities to cooperate with the UN in regions where women have relatively higher status and better functioning social networks improve the prospects for constructive engagement between UN and local actors (Matheson, 2001).

**Women’s status and UN peacebuilding missions**

There are two main ways that women can be associated with lower violence and subsequently linked to successful peacebuilding. The first set of arguments directly links women’s status to the absence of violent conflict either at the interstate or the intrastate level. Societies that stress human rights and more egalitarian structures also tend to be associated with lower levels of violence (Melander, 2005a; Melander, 2005b; Caprioli, 2005). Fish (2002) argues that there is a strong link between human rights and democratization, and takes women’s status as his key proxy for respect for human rights. Although not all democracies are immune to intrastate conflict, strong and capable democratic institutions are considered a safeguard against extensive violent movements that threaten state structures (Hegre et al., 2001). Hudson et al. (2008/2009) make an even stronger claim about women’s rights and social status being connected to state security.

The second argument indirectly links women’s status, through its relationship to development and growth trajectories, to levels of violence (Sen, 1999). Higher female status may, thus, contribute to lower internal violence and prevent the recurrence of civil wars. The link between low economic development and civil war is very well substantiated in the civil war literature. The predominant arguments in the existing civil war literature highlight how low economic development leads to better opportunities for rebel recruitment or how have lower capacity to deter or fight a civil war (Collier and Hoefller, 2004; Fearon and Latin, 2003).

Hegre and Nome (2009) argue that the link between development and armed conflict should not be considered as automatic, and that the type of political regime can make a difference as to whether low economic development increases the probability of civil war. They argue that there is an interactive effect between democracy, development, and the probability of civil war onset, and find strong empirical support for this. The combination of economic development and democratization leads to a transformation of social relationships where the cost of violence becomes too high, while peacemaking becomes more desirable.

The feminist researchers have always emphasized the interaction between gender equality, democratization, and economic development, and there is considerable empirical evidence for such linkages (Baliamoune-Lutz and McGillivray, 2009; Buckingham-Hatfield, 2002; Sen 1999; Jacobson 1999; Jaquette 1990; Tinker 1990). Declining faith in central planning and top-down approaches in development and democratization have generated further interest in the potential the role of women’s organizations in bottom-up civil society mobilization. Women’s organizations can create the space necessary for women to articulate their interests and shape institutional structures that allow women to organize more effectively and exert greater influence (Young, 1993; Moser, 1993; Westwood, 1991).

The erosion of the legitimacy of the African state has opened new political space and opportunities for autonomous women’s organizations. In West African countries, gender roles have traditionally been complimentary rather than stratified allowing women the political space to act. Thus, women have cooperated to address common problems in countries with a vibrant tradition of organizations at the communal level, such as Rwanda and Liberia. Moreover, the lack of clear separation between private and public life provides space for women to participate in politics, at least at the community level (Moran, 1989; Kevane, 2004). For instance, in the Northwestern provinces of Liberia, where women have higher levels of education relatively to those of men, women had considerable space to act politically and be active in the labour force. In the decade preceding the civil war twenty five percent of women held technical and professional jobs in the capital city Monrovia. (Fuest 2008: 206-207). Thus, higher relative status of women within a society allows women to acquire relatively higher human capital and mobilize in horizontal social networks.

The women’s organizations emerging in the aftermath of civil wars were often inter-ethnic groupings attempting to amend the mistrust fostered by conflict and provided opportunities to advance the welfare of local communities (Newbury and Baldwin, 2001). In 1994 the Sierra Leone’s Association of University Women (SLAUW) invited women’s organizations to coordinate and expand their networks in preparation for the Beijing Conference on women. Several organizations such as Women’s Forum (SLWF) and Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) provided space for open dialogue on freedom and democracy. The reality of the civil war forced women’s organizations to focus their attentions on the domestic political situation (Jusu-Sheriff, 2000).

In Sierra Leone, the women’s organizations lost their momentum in the late 1990s in part due to their inability to develop a clear vision for the future. Despite lack of political influence, women were able to establish an independent voice on several social issues (Jusu-Sheriff, 2000). The recurrence of violence after the failure of the Lomé Peace Accord gave women’s organizations opportunities to mobilize against RUF and its leader Fodoh Sankoh (Mazurana and Carlson, 2004). After the end of the civil war and the repatriation of many of the women refugees, FAS coordinated with other women’s organizations to incorporate women in peacebuilding, in particular in demobilization programs.

Even more than in Sierra Leone, women’s organizations in Liberia were able to use their extensive social networks and lobby leaders for access to the peace talks Abuja I and II. The Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) mobilized women from the outset of the conflict to advocate a peaceful resolution. The WIPNET helped broker a deal between the rebel groups and President Charles Taylor. The Liberian section of the Mano River Union Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was accredited as participant to the formal peace talks in Akosombo and Accra in 2003. These organizations served as mediators and their involvement was instrumental in facilitating demobilization.

After the completion of the negotiations, WIPNET shifted focus to implementation, focusing on Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs and engaging women in the peacebuilding process. Disarmament became a priority for many of the women’s organizations, in particular the Liberian Women’s initiative (LWI). DDR is more than just a component of a strategic agreement, and is directly linked to security and safety for ordinary citizens, as well as sustainable peacebuilding. Women’s organizations argue that disarmament is essential for the normalization of civilian life, and have active in promoting DDR programs in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. In 2005, A WIPNET campaign motivated thousands of women to register to vote (Bekoe and Parajon, 2007). The conflict in Liberia created new opportunities for women. While women in many post-conflict environments have been pushed back to more traditional gender roles, in Liberia women were able to capitalize on their role in the peacemaking process, intertwined with UN peacebuilding efforts and long-term sustainable development projects, and slowly shift gender roles (Fuest, 2008).

There are two ways by which the process of peacebuilding can benefit from involvement by women’s organisations in post-conflict reconstruction. First, the UN-led peacebuilding operations can foster bridging networks -- such as local women’s organizations -- by enhancing and supporting their resources (e.g. contact resources). In Liberia, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have consistently involved women in post-conflict reconstruction. UNIFEM and UNDP have supported the Government and the Ministry of Gender and Development to gender mainstream agricultural policies and assess the impact of gendered policies in improving productivity, for example the support to the cassava farmers in Nimba county and the implementation of gender sensitive programmes in agriculture. Second, the UN can facilitate linkages between vertical and horizontal networks. For instance, in Liberia the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) acted as deal broker between the rebel groups and Charles Taylor. In Sierra Leone, the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) identified women’s political participation and reforms in the judicial and security sectors as priorities. Under the auspices of the PBC and UNIFEM, a national consultation on women’s engagement has succeeded in integrating women leaders from civil society into the peacebuilding agenda (Klot, 2007; Peacebuilding Commission, 2007). [[4]](#footnote-4)

Although it is difficult to examine directly to what extent the UN help develop and expand horizontal networks and their links to vertical networks, we can examine the implication of UN efforts benefitting from the presence of such networks and women’s status in a region. More specifically, we would expect that UN efforts should be met with systematically less hostility and more cooperation in areas where women have relatively higher social status and they are more politically active. In this article, I will examine the following empirical hypothesis:

H: *Higher pre-war status of women increases the probability of local cooperation with UN peacebuilding efforts.*

The following section discusses the operationalization of the key variables and how the proposition can be evaluated using information from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

**Research Design**

To empirically assess the hypothesis I consider events data on local responses to UN PKO events. The unit of analysis is the individual peacebuilding event. The recorded events are time and space specific interactions between key stakeholders in peacebuilding mission such as local authorities and UN peacebuilders, with a direct effect on the provision of public goods and services. The value of the dependent variable is the actual responses of local actors to the specific events, which are then related to the social content of the specific locations or district where the event takes place. The empirical domain is UN PKO events in Sierra Leone during the first and the second UN Missions (UNOMSIL in 1998 and UNAMSIL in 2000 respectively) and in Liberia during the UNOMIL mission (1993-1997) and the UNML mission (2003-2005).

*Dependent Variable: Responses to UN Peacebuilding*

For my dependent variable I look at whether local responses to individual UN PKO governance events are cooperative and/or conflictual. The event data are taken from the ‘UN Peacekeeping and Local Governance’ project (Dorussen and Gizelis, 2010), which collects disaggregated information on the policies implemented as part of UN peacekeeping operations, identifying the specific time and location of events (Dorussen and Gizelis, 2010; Ruggeri et al., 2011). The recorded conflict and cooperation events are not mutually exclusive, since a given PKO event can elicit both support and resistance. The project relies primarily on information from UN reports, in particular the Secretary General Progress reports to the Security Council. These reports often contain information on how locals respond to particular UN actions and policies. UN reports tend to be quite elaborate and well-balanced, partly due to the bureaucratic administrative structure of the UN, and partly due to the need to maintain a balanced and fairly objective description of events on the ground so the missions will not be jeopardized, and are thus unlikely to be systematically biased towards overstating or understating conflict and cooperation. The data were collected simultaneously and independently by two coders and the data collection process was scrutinized to minimize problems with inter-coder reliability and measurement validity (see Ruggeri et al., 2011).[[5]](#footnote-5)

 As stated in the codebook (see Dorussen and Gizelis, 2010), responses to UN peacebuilding events are coded as conflictual or cooperative based on a three point scale developed by Sharp (1971) to classify non-violent actions. A value of 1 corresponds to low levels of cooperation and conflict, usually symbolic support or resistance rather than active responses. A value of 2 indicates acts of omission that involve passive resistance to policies, such as boycotts or refusal to participate for the conflict scale, and refugees returning or normalization in cases of cooperation. A value of 3 is the most intense level of either cooperation or conflict. This denotes specific acts of commission such as violence or resistance to UN efforts for conflict, and a value of 3 is assigned for cooperation when locals consent and willingly participate in elections or power-sharing plans.[[6]](#footnote-6) A given event can produce both cooperative and conflictual responses.

To provide a specific example of the coding scheme, consider the event in November 1999, when UNOMSIL targeted ex-combatants by building a new demobilization centre in the Liberian city Daru, in the Eastern Province Liberia. This activity was received with cooperation, as the ex-combatants willingly worked with UNOMSIL. Therefore, the event was coded as a 2 on the cooperation scale and as a 0 on the conflict scale. In another case, in 2002 in Freetown UNAMSIL forces inspected human rights provisions in prison facilities. This governance event generated a cooperative response from political detainees (reported as 2 in the cooperation scale), but also created protest animosity from the prison administration (assigned a value of 1 at the conflict scale).

Events that elicit cooperation in Liberia and Sierra Leone often include policies such as DDR where women’s organizations have been particularly involved. For instance, the initial phase of disarmament and demobilization starting on 7 December 2003 in Liberia is recorded as a cooperative event with value of 2 on the cooperation scale. Similarly, in 2003 the campaign ‘back to school’ was launched, a collaborative project between the UN, UNICEF, the government, and local groups. This is also recorded as a 2 in the cooperation scale. Facilitating education has been another area where women’s organizations have been fairly active. In the case of Sierra Leone in 2001 a group of previously abducted women were participating in community based reintegration projects, an area where women’s organizations have been particularly active in Sierra Leone.

Many of the policies during UNOMSIL involved decommissioning and reintegration programmes where women’s organizations played a primary role even though they are not specifically identified in the UN reports. Thus, most of the recorded cooperative events involve activities and projects at the community level where horizontal social networks are the most active, rather than formal political processes linked to hierarchical structures, such as participation in elections process or the government. There are few level 3 cooperative events in Sierra Leone – only 5 – of which all take place in the Freetown area. Pooling countries help increase variation and the ability to compare responses across UN PKO policies and conflict characteristics on a broader basis than a single conflict would allow.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Independent Variables*

*Women/Total Education Attainment Ratio*

Several indicators of women’s status have been suggested (see Melander 2005a; Caprioli 2000, 2003). The specific indicator used here is the ratio of female to male educational attainment, for individual regions or district, based on data the 1985 Sierra Leone and 1984 Liberian Censi. Note that the data for both countries were measured prior to the civil wars and subsequent UN missions, and hence cannot reflect the impact of the civil war on female status. Table 1 reveals significant variation in female to male attainment across districts, ranging from a low of a ratio of barely above 0.27 in Rivercess country in Liberia to a high of 0.84, or near equality, in Freetown in Sierra Leone. It is certainly possible that relative female social status may have deteriorated over the course of the civil war. However, this would generally make it less likely that we should find support for the theory of a relationship between relative social status on cooperation and conflict rather than create bias in tests of the theory. Hence, the test here should be regarded as conservative.

[Table 1 about here]

The ratio of educational attainment is an appropriate measure of female social status here on both theoretical and practical grounds. The ratio of female to male educational attainment reflects relative differences in societal attitudes to women’s education rather than absolute development. Developing countries tend to underinvest in female education since the cost of educating girls is private while the benefits are public (King and Hill, 1993: 2). The female to male educational attainment gap highlights the relative difference between female and male status (Hausmann et al., 2007). Educational attainment is also appropriate as a proxy for human capital, given the role of education in theories of growth (Barro, 1997).

Before proceeding to the analysis, I briefly discuss some common alternatives and why they are less appropriate for this study. Data on female political representation in national institutions such as legislatures do not vary within countries, and neither Liberia nor Sierra Leone had representative institutions prior to the war. There are a number of composite indices of female social status, such as the gender-related development index (GDI) --- based on three dimensions, namely life expectancy, education, and the proportion of earned income that corresponds to women and the gender empowerment index (GEM), which reflects gender inequality in political and economic participation. However, these indices are also not available for districts in countries. Moreover, they reflect absolute female social status only and hence make it difficult to assess this relative to male status (Walby, 2005), and pre-war data are not available. The Global Gender Gap (GGG) index attempts to capture the gap between women and men based on four categories of outputs of gender equality: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health survival, and political empowerment (Hausmann et al., 2007).[[8]](#footnote-8) However, neither Liberia nor Sierra Leone is included in the GGG rankings.

*UN Mission Characteristics*

Conflict and cooperation may be systematically related to type of policies and UN investment, which in turn could be associated with district characteristics such as relative female status. As such, I control for characteristics of UN missions and specific policies. The first control variable emphasizes UN type of policies, using data from the Dorussen and Gizelis, 2010 UN PKO project. In this project, ‘policy’ is defined as the type of public goods provided by the UN. The UN policies are divided into 18 distinct categories. I have collapsed these policies into three major types: i) policies that target economic development, such as building infrastructure, ii) policies that target security and order, such as decommissioning and policing, and finally iii) policies that involve emergency relief, such as humanitarian aid. Unfortunately, even though policies on economic development might be particularly relevant to this project, there are few of such policies in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Therefore, in the current analysis, I use emergency and security to control for the type of policies that the UN has been performing and may be systematically different in terms of conflictual and cooperative responses.[[9]](#footnote-9)

 The second variable captures the depth of the UN mission, that is, whether the UN is just a facilitator or governs instead of the country’s central authority. The variable is constructed based on Ratner’s (1996) typology of UN missions. Ruggeri et al., 2011 identifies five possible functions by the UN: supervision, monitoring, education, conduct, and control. The first three are primarily supportive and the later two consist of active replacement of central government. I construct a dummy variable for whether the UN engages in any of the three supportive functions.

The next independent variable is mission duration, which is the time in days lapsed until the recorded events since the start of the mission. If UN PKO missions enjoy an initial honeymoon and later raise more contentious issues, we might see more conflictual responses from locals in the latter stages of a mission. Thus, for events that occur under the first UN mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) I measure the duration of the operation since July of 1998. Similarly, for events that occurred after the initiation of UNAMSIL (starting date 2000) I measure the duration since the beginning of the mission.

I also include as a control the distance of the district capital from the country capital to examine whether responses or UN policies in the periphery tend to be systematically different from those that take place closer to the national center. The events for both countries are recorded by district, which leaves a total N of 840 incidents to assess the impact that women’s status has on conflictual and cooperative responses to UN peacekeeping activities.

**Empirical Analysis**

Since the dependent variable is categorical, I use multinomial logit to assess how female/male attendance ratio predicts more or less conflictual and cooperative responses to the UN PKO missions. Although the scales for the dependent variable perhaps could be seen as ordinal, an ordered logit model is only appropriate if one assumes proportional odds, or that covariates have a constant effect β on the log-odds of all the outcomes, and only differ by constant intercepts or cut-off points. The proportional odds assumption does not seem reasonable in this case since one would not expect constant effects on the odds of the different types of cooperative or conflictual responses, even if ordered. The Brant test provides a possible way to test whether proportional odds seem consistent with the data, and this test suggests that the proportional odds assumption is clearly untenable. I have also considered possible violations of the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA, i.e., the odds between two alternatives should not depend on the presence of other categories), but a formal statistical test does not suggest that IIA is violated in this case.

 I estimate two separate models for the cooperative and conflictual responses to each event. The results for the conflict equation are shown in Table 2. Each column of coefficients indicates the effects of the covariates on the log odds of observing each particular level on the conflict/cooperation scale over the reference category of a value of 0 or no conflict/cooperation responses.

[Table 2 about here]

As can be seen from Table 2, a higher female to male education attainment ratio actually increases the probability that conflict events recorded will be at the lowest level (i.e., category 1) over the reference category. However, as suggested by the theory, a higher female to male attainment ratio significantly decreases the likelihood that we will see more intense conflictual responses or acts of omission over the reference category. These results are highly statistically significant, and they hold even after controlling for various other characteristics of the peacekeeping process. The duration of the mission and the role of the UN as a supportive institution also have a dampening effect on high levels of conflict. However, this is not the case for specific UN policies, such as policies that target security, law and order, and emergency relief. So even though both the pre-conflict status of women and the overall presence of the UN PKO appear to be beneficial for peacebuilding, specific UN policies fail to capitalize on whatever advantages the presence of the UN might entail.

Since the coefficients in a multinomial logit model depend not just on the odds of one outcome over the reference but the likelihood of all the outcomes it is helpful to consider the implied effects from the model. Figure 1 displays the predicted probabilities for each of the conflict outcome category outcomes based on the results in Table 2 across differences in the female to male attainment ratio, with all the other variables held at their median value. The solid line in Figure 1 indicating the predicted probability of low levels of conflict increases with higher is female to male attainment ratio. However, the dashed line indicating the predicted probability of severe conflict strongly declines the higher the female to male attainment ratio, and falls below the likelihood of less severe conflict when the female to male attainment ratio exceeds 2/3. Taken together, the results clearly suggests that we are much less likely to see severe conflictual responses to events in districts with higher female social status, and the conflictual responses that we see to events is more likely to be less severe in such districts. By contrast, the probability of acts of omission does not seem to depend notably on the level of female to male attainment ratio, reflecting the high intercept and overall low likelihood of such responses in these data.

[Figure 1 about here]

Table 3 provides the multinomial regression estimates for cooperative responses to UN peacekeeping events. As can be seen, a higher female to male education attainment ratio significantly increases the likelihood that responses to UN peacebuilding events will be cooperative, and the effect is particularly pronounced for the highest level of cooperative responses. In terms of the implied effects, Figure 2 shows that the predicted probabilities of both low and high level cooperative responses to UN peacebuilding event increase with higher female to male attainment ratios, while the likelihood of acts of omission decrease in the female to male attainment ratio. Taken together, the findings in Tables 2 and 3 provide strong support for the conjecture that responses to UN peacekeeping events tend to be more cooperative and less conflictual in districts where women have higher social status, consistent with the idea that higher female social status and social capital in horizontal networks can facilitate successful peacebuilding.

[Table 3 about here]

[Figure 2 about here]

The findings for the other control variables are mostly as expected. UN support generally has a positive impact and increases the chances of more cooperative responses, primarily at the lower and moderate levels of cooperation. This finding is also substantiated by large N studies that compare integrative UN peacekeeping missions in multiple countries (Gizelis, 2009; Sambanis and Schulhofer-Wohl, 2007). Security and even emergency related policy events are less likely to be met by cooperative response from local populations.

The empirical analysis indicates that women’s status can be important in increasing local population’s cooperation or at least decrease the probability of conflict responses towards activities in peacebuilding missions, while the UN presence as a supportive actor to the local authorities has a positive impact, as one would anticipate from the Doyle and Sambanis framework. However, the mechanisms through which UN can improve the prospects for successful peacebuilding are not easily identifiable. Some policies, especially with regards to security, are particularly contentious. Other policies such as economic development cannot be included in this analysis, because of lack of such observations in this particular sample.

To examine the robustness of the results to alternative measures of female relative social status I have re-estimated the model using the sex ratio of women to men in a population as an alternative. Female to male sex ratios can be seen as a measure of relative female status since women should outnumber men if provided comparable conditions, given their longer life expectancy. If provided equal treatment and access to services, women tend to live longer men, on average 5-8 years longer and should outnumber men overall. Differences by gender in features such as access to healthcare or sanitation can lead to lower female life expectancy compared to male life expectancy, which in turn would be reflected in lower sex ratios. In societies with a bias in favour of men, there are often fewer women than men (Hudson and Den Boer, 2002). The data on sex ratios are provided by the censuses of Sierra Leone in 1985 and of Liberia in 1984. Although I do not report these results in the paper due to space limitations, the model estimates based on sex ratios yields substantively similar results to the estimates reported in this paper based on educational attainment for both the cooperation and the conflict equations.

An alternative hypothesis for the responses to peacebuilding events may be that variation in the intensity of conflict in different districts leads to different constraints when it comes to peacebuilding. Using the Armed Conflict Location and Even Data (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010), I add the count of events in a district to the previous model does not change the effects of the female relative status variable, and the number of conflict events has no statistically significant impact on the degree of conflictual or cooperative responses to peacebuilding events (results not shown). Moreover, it is not the case that districts with more prior conflict have lower relative female status in the first place (indeed, the correlation between the number of prior conflict events and the relative female status is positive rather than negative).

**Implications and Concluding Remarks**

This paper has examined the relationship between women’s social status and successful peacebuilding operations. I have argued that women’s social status is a dimension of social capital that is largely independent of general economic development. Societies where women enjoy a relatively higher status have greater prospects for successful peacebuilding, as cooperation by the local population with peacebuilding policies and activities increases. Thus, in the presence of an UN-led peacebuilding operation, women’s status has a direct impact on post-conflict reconstruction. The theoretical claims are empirically assessed by looking at regional variation in levels of cooperation and conflict during the UN peacebuilding missions within the countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

There are several implications that emerge from this study. It appears that there is significant regional variation within countries when it comes to both pre-war women’s status and incidents of cooperation and conflict in response to UN PKOs. The role of women appears to be more relevant and evident at the local level rather than at the state-level. In Liberia and Sierra Leone women’s networks have been active primarily at the local rather than the level of national high politics. In both countries, in particular in Liberia, women were able to capitalize on their pre-war social networks and mobilize women to demand and foster peace in the wake of devastating civil wars. Women’s organizations were not always active at the highest echelons of state power, with the sole exception of WIPNET in Liberia.

The empirical analysis presented in this study strongly attests to the significant role that women can play in post-conflict reconstruction. As the empirical analysis based on disaggregated data from the UN peacebuilding missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone suggests programs like DDR and community projects elicit more cooperation by the local populations towards the presence and the role of the UN. Thus, women’s organizations, especially in countries like Liberia with a long history of women’s activism, can be involved both in the planning and implementation phases of a project to increase the probability of success.

However, the empirical analysis cannot identify if and to what extent external actors incorporate women’s organization in the process. The evidence provided in this paper suggests that women’s organizations have been active in peacebuilding at the local level; yet, international organizations have often failed to engage women in the post-reconstruction process undermining well meaning programs and projects. Despite the well established role of women’s organizations in decommissioning, in the initial stages of preparing the DDR programs women’s opinions were sidelined, while experts from other regions such as Kosovo, had more input in the planning and implementation of the programs (UNIFEM, 2005). Part of the problem is the absence of women from formal networks. Therefore, any analysis of the role of women and its impact on peacebuilding should be done at the sub-state level to get more accurate inferences about the interaction of these variables and their impact on the probability of success of peacebuilding operations rather than at the state level or the UN mission level.

Despite the supportive evidence regarding the role of women provided in the current analysis, it is important to include additional social and economic variables to control for regional variations and alternative hypotheses as to why higher social capital can facilitate successful peacebuilding, when appropriate data is available. Further studies might be able to identify different phases of the PKO missions. For instance, at this point the analysis includes both the first and the second PKOs in Sierra Leone and Liberia, although the first PKOs were unsuccessful in both countries. Therefore, differences between the two PKOs could also explain the variation in UN performance and peacebuilding. Despite these limitations, this study illustrates the need for more systematic research on the role of women in peacebuilding missions.

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**Figures and Tables**

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of conflict categories by female to male attainment ratio



Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of cooperation categories by female to male attainment ratio



**Tables:**

 Table 1: Female to male attainment by district

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Region** | **Female to male education attainment** |
| Bo | 0.6847 |
| Bombali | 0.5848 |
| Bomi | 0.4370 |
| Bong | 0.4463 |
| Bonthe | 0.8162 |
| Freetown | 0.8411 |
| Grand Bassa | 0.4828 |
| Grand Cape Mount | 0.4369 |
| Grand Gedeh | 0.4083 |
| Kailahun | 0.5497 |
| Kambia | 0.4433 |
| Kenema | 0.6766 |
| Koinadugu | 0.4807 |
| Kono | 0.6084 |
| Kru Coast | 0.3814 |
| Lofa | 0.3217 |
| Maryland | 0.5682 |
| Montserrado | 0.6013 |
| Moyamba | 0.7013 |
| Nimba | 0.4550 |
| Port Loko | 0.5858 |
| Pujehun | 0.6469 |
| Rivercess | 0.2714 |
| Sinoe | 0.3580 |
| Tonkolili | 0.6049 |
| Western Rural Area | 0.4940 |

Table 2: Multinomial regression estimates, conflict scale



Table 3: Multinomial regression estimates, cooperation scale



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2. I use the term peacebuilding to refer to second and third generation peacekeeping operations after conflict with extensive mandates, including decommissioning and public goods provision. See Goulding (1993) for further details on types of peacekeeping. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Horizontal networks reflect organizational capacity that also can be used to mobilize resources in cases of violent conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Many successful cases of UN peace-building pursuing integrative policies such as Mozambique and Namibia also prominently involved women as valuable partners (see Howard, 2002 and Griswold, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a detailed discussion of possible biases in the data collection process and intercoder reliability see Ruggeri et al. (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The factual accuracy of the event descriptions in the UN reports was subsequently cross examined by looking at other independent sources such as relief web (<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/dbc.nsf/doc100?OpenForm>). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The detailed data are available upon request. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Alternative indicators such as the Gender Equality Index (GEI) and Gender Inequality Index (GII) are an improvement over GDI and GEM, yet the data are not available for the time period preceding the onset of the conflicts. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Security includes DDR programs. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)