

WOMEN NETWORKS FOSTERING HUMAN SECURITY

LOCATION	Wau County, Beselia Payam, Mboro Boma
IMPLEMENTER	Women Development Group (WDG)
CASE WRITER	Rabha Elis

Natalina is 54 years old and a mother of 9 children. She is the leader of a women network in Mboro Boma. Thirty women from Mboro are member of this women network, of which 7 have an executive role. The Women Development Group (WDG) established the network in 2015 and trained Natalina and the other members on the 'Barometer of local women's security'. This approach aims to empower rural women to raise their voice and demand for peace and security, build their resilience to conflict, whilst also taking the lead in promoting peace and security initiatives in their communities.

Women in particular affected by conflict

Mboro Boma is located in Beselia Payam in Wau County. It has been prone to frequent conflicts between the pastoralist and farmers, intra-community conflicts and attacks from armed groups. The most recent conflict broke out in Wau County in June 2016. Mboro was among the most affected localities. To escape the violence, over 90,000 people fled to the Protection of

Civilians camp (POC) and the compound of the St Joseph Cathedral in Wau town. Natalina was very concerned about the situation and mobilized other members of the women network with the idea to rescue the women, children and elderly who were particularly vulnerable to conflict, extreme poverty and hunger. The women of Mboro are vulnerable to conflict because many lost their husbands; either because they died or because the family became separated. At the same time, their houses were burned, their properties looted and their farmlands destroyed. There was also an increase in incidents of conflict related rape and sexual abuse. Furthermore, most basic services like education, health and humanitarian aid became inaccessible.

Barometer of local women's security

In 2015, WDG established women networks in Mboro, Ngisa and Farajala Bomas in Beselia Payam in Wau County. WDG and the women networks work towards localizing the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). They started with a Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment to identify the natural and human induced hazards, prioritizing the need for women. This was the basis for designing interventions to empower the rural women affected by conflict. One of the key interventions is an approach called the



Photo WDG

The women's network from Mboro and Ngisa meet to share experience and discuss the priorities that they identified in the previous meetings.



The chair of the women network now residing in Lokloko PoC camp addresses the women's network to identify the needs of women in the camp. Health services and economic empowerment were mentioned as core needs.

'Barometer of local women's security'. The Barometer builds on earlier training conducted on Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR). As part of the Barometer approach, WDG trained the women networks on topics such as lobby and advocacy, gender and leadership, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), access to justice and human rights. They also supported each network with 15 telephones, solar power devises and bicycles to improve their means of communication and timely response. Local DRR/peace committees, including chiefs and other community leaders, also participated in the trainings. WDG was also able to establish five other women networks in displacement centers in Wau County.

The Barometer empowers vulnerable women to advocate for peace and security. The network members lobby key stakeholders to intervene in resolving the security issues that affect women and their communities. As a result, male leaders have positively changed their perception of the participation of women in decision making. This is quite an achievement in a patriarchal system where female subordination is considered the norm. WDG also built the women's resilience during periods of conflict and inaccessibility of their villages. Aided by the distributed telephones, the network members maintain communication even when most of them are displaced. This helps the timely reporting of security concerns and assures adequate response to existing needs.

A flight to safety

Faced with the consequences of conflict in Mboro, Natalina realized that the best chance for survival of the most vulnerable members of her community was to evacuate them to Wau. She discussed this with the other members of her women network and they all agreed. Together with seven other women, Natalina shared her evacuation plan with the chief and other community leaders.

Most people generally prefer to move at night out of fear of being killed by the armed groups or government troops during daytime. Natalia felt however that nightly travel would expose especially women to sexual violence risks. That is why she convinced the chief to allow them to go to Wau during daytime. She requested that measures be taken to protect them from ambushes and to avoid that they would get arrested upon arrival in Wau because they would come from rebel-held territory. The chief agreed to help them. He communicated the evacuation plan to the County Commissioner of Besilia, requesting protection and support from the government.

Natalina led 35 households to Wau. The group counted 117 people with severe injuries, one disabled man and malnourished women and children. The County Commissioner arranged for a national security vehicle to escort the arriving group of displaced all the way from Mboro to the POC camp. In the camp the group received food, health/hygiene kits, utensils, blankets and tents, and they were referred to other agencies for further support. Natalina's evacuation mission attracted the attention of the UN refugee organization UNHCR who provided humanitarian assistance in Mboro, Ngisa and Farajallah. Thousands of women, children and elderly received clothes, health and nutritional services, sanitary materials and protective items such as lamps.

The benefits of the Barometer: Building resilience during conflict

The Mboro women network shows that women can take the lead in initiatives that enhance the resilience to conflict. Involving the members from the start through Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment (PDRA) gives them ownership over the program. Combining CMDRR and Barometer trainings is appropriate to build women's skills in identifying local peace and security priorities, whilst also empowering them with advocacy and lobbying skills for them to be effective agents of change. Engagement with key (government) stakeholders strengthens effective response to the needs of the most vulnerable. The program finally contributed to a change in mindset of community leaders in favor of women participation and leadership.

Way forward

More women networks should be established and capacitated to advocate and lobby stakeholders on security and peace related issues. There is a particular interest to replicate the CMDRR and Barometer approaches in the displacement centers and Wau town. By this means also displaced women can be prepared how to cope with challenges when returning home. Finally, there is also a need to offer the women groups income generating activities because women play such a significant role in the general welfare of their households and wider communities.