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SSE, Gender, and Sustainable Post-Conflict Reconstruction

Envisioning a different path

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Abstract

This paper examines the possibilities and limits of SSE for addressing the Sustainable Development goals of gender equality (SDG 5) and inclusive peace (SDG 16) through an analysis of women-centered cooperative organizations in post-conflict contexts of South Asia. The failures of neoliberal peacebuilding in achieving gender-inclusive, secure and sustainable peace, and in many cases reproducing the very structures of domination that led to conflict in the first place, have been well-documented. Consequently, many in the scholarly and practitioner community have called for an alternative economic approach, but thus far there has been little attention to what that might look like. This paper responds to that call, offering a model that recognizes the diverse economic landscape of post-war reconstruction with a specific focus on the role of SSE activities in achieving security and social provisioning.

Keywords

Gender, post-conflict economies, cooperatives, peacebuilding, SSE

Bio

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Introduction

Despite nearly two decades of attention to the gender dimensions of peacebuilding in the UN system, post-conflict reconstruction efforts have tended to cement or even deepen the structural inequalities and insecurities that women experience. An emerging feminist literature has highlighted the role played by neoliberal economic policies in creating these negative outcomes, and has stressed the importance of developing new economic approaches to feminist peacebuilding (Bergeron, Cohn and Duncanson 2017; Shepherd 2014; True 2012). Yet to date, there has been little attention to what an alternative model of post-war economic reconstruction might look like. In this paper, we consider the potential of Social and Solidarity Economy (SSE) approaches for contributing to sustainable, gender-equitable peace. The current scholarship on SSE demonstrates its potential for contributing to inclusive, sustainable growth (Amin 2009; Utting 2015), but there has thus far been little exploration of how SSE may contribute to post-conflict economic reconstruction. Using primary data from women-centered cooperative organizations operating in post-conflict contexts in South Asia (Nepal and Gujarat, India) we examine the avenues that SSE may provide in addressing goals of sustainable and equitable peace in such contexts. Finally, we undertake an analysis of both the opportunities and challenges associated with the implementation of this alternative vision for bringing us closer to achieving the SDG goals of gender equality (SDG 5) and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies through an effective, accountable, and inclusive organization of post-conflict economies (SDG 16).

Gendered economic inequities and the WPS agenda

The launch of the United Nation's Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in 2000 provided the first official mechanism in the international system for addressing the security needs of women in post-conflict settings to achieve equitable and sustainable peace. In recent years, WPS attention has shifted much more towards the gendered economic inequities that condition both economic and physical insecurity. This shift reflects a growing understanding that addressing underlying structures of socioeconomic inequality is essential to meeting women's and girls' security needs. Women's lack of access to resources and income renders them extra vulnerable to poverty and violence in post-conflict contexts (True and Tanyag 2017). Further, the shift recognizes that the failure to address gender inequity means that the core goals of peacebuilding may not be met, as the structures of inequality and precarity that led to violence in the first place are often left untouched when gender is not taken seriously (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011)

Despite this increased attention to the economic aspects of gendered peacebuilding, women's economic insecurity is largely neglected (Goetz and Jenkins 2016; Maxwell et al. 2017). The neoliberal policy framework of post-conflict reconstruction – with its focus on privatization, profit and growth – has, in many cases, led to a rise in unemployment, inequality, and precarity, which are the very economic conditions that contributed to conflict in the first place (Cohn 2015; Pugh 2005). The gender dynamics of conflict-affected economies cause these policies to fall hard on women, especially marginalized women. Neoliberal post-war reconstruction favors investments in industries that typically employ men, and also are more likely to provide resources such as land rights and credit to men (Duncanson 2016). What jobs are available to women tend to be highly exploitative (Mallett and Slater 2012). Further, cuts in social spending undermine the ability of households to meet their basic needs, while providing little to no support for the expanded non-market care work, or the work of social provisioning, that falls on women in post-conflict contexts (Peterson 2013). This has left poor women particularly vulnerable to structural violence (True and Tanyag 2017). The UN Secretary General too realizes now that addressing gender-based violence through equitable economic recovery remains a key challenge, in large part because of the priority that profitability and growth have over other economic values, activities, and practices (United Nations S/2018/900 para. 64).

The Role and Potential for SSE in Gender-Equitable Peacebuilding

The growing recognition that current economic models are undermining the WPS agenda of creating gender-equitable, sustainable peace provides an opportunity for assessing the role and potential of SSE in post-conflict peacebuilding. Up until now, the mainstream approach to WPS in post-conflict reconstruction has either ignored the diversity of the economic landscape that includes SSE activities or, when SSE is acknowledged, dismisses it as too weak to make a difference.¹ But recent developments suggest that SSE is worth taking seriously in post-conflict reconstruction. SSE was once relegated to the “fringe” and viewed as having marginal economic impact or value, but there has been growing recognition of its potential to organize the economy around values of participation, equity, and provisioning rather than profits (Amin 2009; Utting 2015). Moreover, there has been significant growth and scaling up of SSE activity around the world in recent years that is altering local economic landscapes (Safri et al. *forthcoming*). In searching for an alternative path to achieving the WPS agenda of gender-equitable peacebuilding and related SDGs of gender equality (SDG 5) and inclusive peace (SDG 16), we argue that SSE may play a role. In this paper, we examine two potential contributions specifically.

First, we argue that SSE has the potential to address key issues of livelihood as people cope and recover from shocks in post-conflict contexts. Current neoliberal policies, with their focus on reduction of state supports, markets, privatization and growth, have tended to neglect the interdependent paid and unpaid activities that sustain people through social provisioning. Consequently, the burdens of meeting essential material and care needs of households and communities fall hard on women and girls, who have limited resources to meet these needs (Duncanson 2016). In-depth research on livelihoods in post-conflict contexts demonstrates that women’s options are limited by lack of access to resources and decent work, making it difficult to sustain themselves and their families (Maxwell et al. 2017). This research further demonstrates that the prioritization of donor objectives has resulted in reconstruction efforts that often make little difference in peoples’ lives, underscoring the need for more democratic and participatory approaches (*ibid.*). SSE, with its recognition of the diverse economic practices that make up the economy, including non-market household and communal production as well as economic forms characterized by care and interdependence, **is better able to recognize and nurture the interconnected activities of social provisioning that are essential for sustainable livelihoods** (Gibson-Graham 2006). Further, SSE places the emphasis on achieving social objectives related to the overall quality of life within a community through ethical negotiation, as opposed to the prioritization of profitability in the competitive market (*ibid.*; Wright 2010). Finally, as we illustrate in our examples, SSE organizations can be driven by ethical principles of social equity, participation and solidarity, and are grounded in local contexts, thus creating greater space to address local needs and priorities (Utting 2015, 2).

Second, we contend that **SSE can support the promotion of security in transitional environments, given the mutually interdependent nature of physical and economic security in the aftermath of conflict, especially for women** (True 2012). This is crucial to achieving sustainable development goals related to both gender equity and sustainable peace. Women are more vulnerable to violence within and outside the home in unstable post-conflict periods, and current reconstruction efforts do little to address the material and infrastructural conditions of that violence (Johnston et al. 2005; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Thus, post-conflict environments are in a bind: they seldom have the infrastructure to ensure physical security, and yet physical security is an essential pre-requisite for economic activity and livelihoods generation to occur in the first place. Where women have become the primary maintainers of the household, a holistic understanding of security – which we argue that SSE provides – is especially important. As we illustrate through the examples below, an inclusive SSE can simultaneously provide a path toward physical security for women in their everyday environments in addition to providing avenues by which economic security may be regained in the fraught post-conflict environment.

Case studies of SSE and sustainable gender-equitable peacebuilding: India and Nepal

Fieldwork and methods

These two case studies are based on qualitative research and fieldwork carried out over a period of two months in 2010-11. In India, field research consisted of on-site visits to SEWA Federation and its various cooperatives. Five focus group discussions and twenty-four in-depth interviews, conducted with randomly selected SEWA members. In Nepal, six focus group discussions were conducted with women's savings and credit cooperative (SACCO) members in January 2011, followed by thirty-two individual interviews. Many women's SACCOs are coordinated by the Center for Microfinance (CMF) Nepal – a private body created in 2000 with a non-profit motive – tasked with providing assistance to cooperatives with networking, training, advisory services, advocacy, and research on best practices. Out of 50 SACCOs overseen by CMF Nepal, 12 were selected randomly for on-site visits from the eastern, central, and western districts of Nepalⁱⁱ. In addition, interviews were also carried out with key personnel from SEWA Federation and the SACCOs.

SACCOs in Nepal

Informal community-based savings and credit associations (*dhikutis*) have enjoyed a long history in Nepal. With the growth of microfinance and the Grameen model in South Asia in the 1980s, a new generation of savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) emerged, constituting around 45 percent of all cooperatives in Nepal. Women constitute 52.5 percent of all SACCO members (see Ramnarain 2014). Their ability to function during crises, and their success in supporting women's economic activities as well as forms of social provisioning in local communities, has reinforced their importance in the post-conflict period.

Nepal emerged from a decade-long Maoist insurgency against the monarchical government in 2006. The conflict claimed the lives of tens of thousands and resulted in widespread displacement, loss of property, and destruction of infrastructure. The source of the conflict was attributed to the accumulated grievances of socially excluded groups experiencing rising discrimination, inequality, poverty and deprivation (Thapa and Sijapati 2004; Karki et. al. 2004). In the post-cease-fire period, Nepal embarked on a transition to democracy and peace in a politically unstable and charged setting. Although women's participation in the civil conflict had been significant – around a third of the Maoist cadre were comprised of women – no women were included in the teams that negotiated the peace accords. With a growing realization that greater inclusion was necessary and that women's voices were essential to build sustainable peace, grassroots organizations and women's cooperatives – especially SACCOs – played a role in mobilizing women to ensure their representation in the transition to democracy as well as in rebuilding alternative infrastructures for peace and for economic reconstruction (Shima and Ghale 2007; Ramnarain 2014).

During the insurgency, large and formal institutions – such as state-owned banks or organizations associated with foreign aid or development agencies – and exploitative local moneylenders operating in rural areas – charging interest rates ranging from 36 to a 100 percent (Dhakal 2007: 7 – came under frequent attack for being 'anti-poor.' In contrast, organizations such as women's SACCOs perceived to be inclusive and transparent, were allowed to operate in most conflict-affected areas since they were perceived to be politically non-partisan, not-for-profit, people-owned, non-exploitative and not affiliated with the government, and had established their credibility as inclusive community organizations (Wehnert and Shakya 2003, Hofmann and Grossman 2005, corroborated by field research). The inclusion of disadvantaged groups and women into SACCOs demonstrably addressed the inequality and social exclusion that were drivers of the Maoist conflict; therefore, SACCOs were left alone even during the worst periods of the conflict. Largely driven by member savings, SACCOs were also financially sustainable during this period (Gingrich 2004).

SACCOs worked in three crucial ways to assist local populations, especially women, in the reconstruction period. First, SACCOs allowed women to access financial services where commercial banks and other state institutions had largely shutdown their operations in conflict-impacted rural areas. Remittance incomes are a significant source of economic support for many rural households due to the large scale of male out-migration predating the conflict. SACCOs proved to be a conduit for such remittance incomes to reach households.ⁱⁱⁱ In their study of reconstruction in Angola, Greenberg et al. (1997) find that in the absence of men, women take up more of the tasks related to subsistence farming and become the primary maintainers of their households, although women may not necessarily receive the support they require for farming activities and must deal with general labor shortages due to conflict. In the case of Nepal, women's access to small loans through their local SACCOs enabled them to preserve some of their assets and allowed them to pool their resources for income-generating activities, key services and community needs such as transport, access to the markets, or for their children's education and nutrition.

Second, being rooted in local communities, SACCOs understood that the provision of financial services was only one piece of the puzzle and expanded their activities in significant ways. In a time when the state was unable to provide essential health services to conflict-affected areas, SACCOs occasionally ran health camps for women and children such as for vaccination or on maternal and child health. Resources were pooled to procure educational materials for school-age children. Less frequently SACCOs provided a venue where informal pooling of child care could occur, so that women could engage in their livelihoods-related activities. Thus, the sense of community imparted by cooperative membership was a source of social provisioning and security in 'changeable times' and in the absence of other resources such as public spending on health care, education, or social infrastructure.

Third, SACCOs were able to draw the link between economic security and physical security, an aspect emphasized by feminist security studies scholars in their work on the essential conditions for sustainable peace (Ní Aoláin et al. 2011; True 2012). As collective organizations, women's SACCOs quickly recognized the value of security as a precondition for their members' economic activities being successful. One SACCO leader in a Western district stated:

'It was very difficult for women to step out of their homes because of the unsafe environment. There were many risks: harassment or assault if they were traveling alone, and we had also heard stories of trafficking from other nearby areas. So, we met the local authorities such as the district officers, police, and army officials and shared our concerns with them. ...I cannot say much was done as response, but there was at least an organization that was able to represent the concerns of women in this area.'

In other places, SACCOs undertook activities to address the root causes of violence through awareness campaigns, community mobilization, and setting up paralegal teams to obtain justice for survivors of violence. During and after the conflict, SACCOs frequently held consciousness-raising workshops, brokered reconciliation conversations between partisan groups in a neutral area, and emphasized social inclusion in their membership practices. Human trafficking and domestic violence became pressing concerns in several communities in the wake of the conflict, especially in Eastern and Central Nepal. Safety concerns led to earlier marriages for young girls and a rise in the practice of dowry in some communities. SACCOs attempted to tackle these issues through campaigns for greater awareness of human rights and gender equality.

A significant challenge in post-conflict contexts is the vulnerability of women to the expropriation of land and property, sometimes by their own kin, after the death of their husbands (Newbury and Baldwin 2000). Women's cooperatives were a crucial source of social support for their members in such cases. One woman who had sought assistance from her cooperative's paralegal team stated:

'After my husband died, my (marital) family would not give me my share of the property. The mental agony was too much to bear. Later on, after counseling in the court, I got my

share of the property. I would not have had the courage to do all that I did without the cooperative's support.'

SACCOs also provided women facing abuse and destitution with financial support and in some cases, safe houses, and access to legal services to reclaim property or seek reparations for violence. Women members agreed that being part of a collective allowed for a greater sense of physical and economic security than may have otherwise been possible.

SEWA Federation in India

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in Gujarat, India, was first started in 1972 as a trade union for women workers in the so-called informal sector.^{iv} 'Self-employed' women workers participate a broad range of occupations: they include home-based workers in textiles, crafts, and petty commodity production (such as weavers, potters, artisans, incense and *bidi* makers, quilt makers, patch-workers, embroiderers, metalworkers, masons etc.), women traders and service providers (such as vegetable and fish producers and vendors, cleaners, home care workers, agricultural and construction workers, health and child care workers etc.) and street vendors and hawkers eking out daily existences through petty trade. These workers typically face precarious livelihoods, and do not have access to welfare benefits or to union membership and protections. As such, they are vulnerable to extreme poverty, exploitation, abuse and social harassment (Rose 1992). The SEWA union sought, therefore, to organize these 'self-employed' women into a union in order to combat common persecutions and for economic self-reliance.

SEWA's various producer and worker cooperatives are organized around a common trade or type of work. The SEWA Federation ((henceforth simply SEWA) was created in 1992 as an apex body to coordinate the cooperatives^v, engage in outreach and marketing, oversee capacity building for growth of the cooperative economy, and negotiate policy interventions with the government (SEWA Federation 2009). SEWA's cooperatives have an explicit commitment to Gandhian principles of non-discrimination and religious harmony. SEWA's growth has been attributed to its careful stance of political neutrality and non-alliance with any political party's objectives (Rose 1992). Rather, its adherence to Gandhian principles of self-reliance, equality and inclusion mean that the cooperatives are an egalitarian space for members, regardless of their caste or religious backgrounds. Non-discrimination is an everyday practice: around a third of SEWA's members are Muslim, several are Christian, and all communities are represented in leadership and membership. Besides stable and meaningful employment, SEWA has also played a significant role in the social provisioning of health care through its health care cooperative, financial services through SEWA Bank (a cooperative bank) and social security through Vimo SEWA (an insurance cooperative) for these workers.

SEWA played a significant role in the local communities they were placed in, in the aftermath of the religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. Gujarat, and in particular, its capital city of Ahmedabad, has had a history of religion-based communal riots in the post-independence period in 1969, 1985-86, 1992-93, 1999, and 2002. The most recent occurrence of communal riots in February-March 2002 was arguably the most horrific, with massive loss of life, destruction of property, loss of livelihoods, and the perpetration of sexual violence against women (Varadarajan 2002). Several hundreds were killed within a few weeks and repercussions of this violence continued into succeeding months with incidents of violence spreading to 16 of the state's 25 districts.

While always pro-business in terms of policy, Gujarat embraced neoliberal reforms in the 1990s with special gusto. In addition to state incentives, special dispensations, and repression of labor that favored businesses (Breman 2004; Sud 2014a), the Gujarat model of development from 2001 to 2014 was, it is argued, 'achieved at the cost of handing over complete control over the economy to corporates, and wholesale privatisation' (Hensman 2014). Besides privatization, this 'Gujarat model' has entailed the heavy subsidization of industries, extensive land acquisitions by the state on behalf of private industry, and reductions in taxes benefiting industry (Lobo and Kumar 2009; Sud 2014a; Sud 2014b; Hensman 2014). Much has also been written about the peculiar nexus

between market liberalization and Hindu nationalism espoused by this Gujarat model (Gopalakrishnan 2006; Sud 2012). Gujarat's commitment to this Hindu neoliberal project has had social dimensions, with the displacement of worker unions by religious ones that sought to provide security and solidarity to workers, the systematic social exclusion of minority workers from the socio-economic mainstream, and the emergence of religious sub-nationalism (Breman 2004; Kumar 2010; Bobbio 2012).

Given this context of a heavily neoliberalized state apparatus, deprivation, persistent discrimination, and communal animosity during and after the riots, SEWA's cooperatives have operated to restore the eroded trust between communities, and to frame an alternative economic discourse in negotiating livelihoods and survival. During the riots, many women living in the affected areas found their homes and other assets stolen or destroyed, and their livelihoods interrupted. Fish and vegetable vendors depend on open marketplaces for their daily incomes. The curfew imposed in many parts of the city during the riots meant the complete closure of markets in affected areas or limited hours of operation. Restrictions on traffic also impacted the timely supply of goods. Women vendors – informal sector workers dependent on each day's earnings – were heavily affected as a result. Muslim women in the artisans' co-operative reported fear of stepping out of the household in the aftermath of the riots to go to the co-operative office or to meetings, given the violence women were subjected to during the conflict. Several Muslim women working in the handicrafts sector had worked from home, but as their homes were burned down in the riots, they were moved to segregated relief camps in Ahmedabad, and their livelihoods suffered.

In immediate response to the 2002 communal conflict, SEWA organized operations in five camps in the most affected parts of Ahmedabad city, to provide not only immediate relief to displaced riot victims, but also livelihoods support, basic health care, child care, and trauma counseling. SEWA's reputation as a community-based, inclusive, and egalitarian organization, capable to providing both physical and economic security to its members, enabled it to gain the trust of the communities it intervened in at a time of suspicion, instability, and insecurity. Over the following weeks, the SEWA Federation generated employment for 805 women riot survivors through the provision of stitching and craft work and organizing them into cooperatives. One such member organizer recalled her experience:

‘After the riots, I went with officials to do a survey of the houses of the victims. I organized (the affected) women into the cleaning co-operative and also supported women by finding them jobs with the stationery co-operative.’

The work provided to the conflict-affected women was simple – stitching bags, rucksacks, quilts, or mattress covers– so that women could do this work by candlelight and earn up to Rs. 60^{vi} – to purchase essentials such as food and water.

In the medium term after the conflict, SEWA started the Shantipath program, a rehabilitation scheme which provided continued training and livelihoods support for the women who had started working with the co-operatives in the camps. These schemes provided women with incomes that they could use to rebuild their homes. Subsidies were provided for the purchase of productive equipment that was lost during the riots (such as sewing machines or printing blocks). The program was started in the camps and ran for three years. SEWA Bank – a cooperative bank – provided credit at low rates of interest to member-shareholders for their rehabilitation. SEWA carried out workshops and community meetings to address violence, both communal and structural, and unify women for welfare and peace. Talking about one such effort, a SEWA member stated:

‘After the violence subsided, I organized a meeting in my neighborhood for people to reconcile. ... Both sides of the people (Hindus and Muslims) have to meet and sit together. Things have improved a lot since then.’

Besides focusing on the provision of sustainable livelihoods in the post-riots period, SEWA's health care cooperative trained fieldworkers based in relief camps and conflict-impacted communities to provide basic health care. SEWA Bank and Vimo SEWA provided mobile

banking services and insurance respectively to members in the event of a temporary loss of their livelihoods.

SEWA thus embraces an alternative and holistic economics of peace – focusing on social provisioning, social justice, and economic security – which has not only restored women’s livelihoods in the post-riots period, but has also been critical in providing a counterpoint to the pursuit of neoliberal development by the government of Gujarat, even as social safety nets for the poor and vulnerable have shrunk or remain poorly implemented. SEWA has criticized the Gujarat government’s espousal of communal ideologies, with some repercussions for its operations.^{vii} However, since the cooperatives are self-sustaining, they have been able to continue their work and retain ethics, social justice, and solidarity as their guiding principles.

Learning from SEWA and the SACCOs: possibilities and potential limits of SSE and gender-equitable peacebuilding

The experiences of women-centric cooperatives in conflict-impacted contexts in India and Nepal illustrate the possibilities SSE may provide to construct an alternative discourse and practice of gender-equitable post-conflict reconstruction. In both cases, cooperatives focused on the intimate links between structural and material injustices and violence in women’s lives, and centered their activities on helping women achieve sustainable livelihoods and security. Both SEWA and the SACCOs took a participatory, democratic approach to peacebuilding, privileging local agency and the inclusion of marginalized groups. Both provided platforms for reconciliation that were crucial to sustainable peace. Both have sought to mitigate the negative effects of neoliberal post-conflict reconstruction by supporting women’s livelihoods, especially in the self-employed and informal sectors. And finally, both have recognized and supported a range of interconnected market and non-market activities to aid women in their task of social provisioning.

However, the extent to which these alternatives can reach wider populations and/or be replicated in other context remains a question for the following reasons. First, in each of these case studies, SSE forms were well-established prior to the conflict, providing them with significant institutional grounding and credibility through both the conflict and post-conflict periods. The policy lesson we draw from the research is that when such organizations exist, peacebuilding efforts should find ways to support them. But these case studies tell us little about the potential of SSEs starting from the ground up in a post-conflict contexts.

Second, the relationship between community organizations and international donors in post-conflict contexts may pose crucial contradictions for SSE. Many SACCO members in Nepal, for instance, recognized the social role of the organization in the post-conflict environment and outlined longer-term, sustained measures they would have liked to undertake such as community awareness and consciousness-raising programs, or livelihoods generation programs beyond credit provision. The target-based approaches and short time horizons of foreign donors seeking to fund them were, however, seldom amenable to the kind sustainable peace and genuine social transformation these organizations sought to bring about (Ramnarain 2014).

Third, in both Nepalese SACCOs and SEWA, an explicit commitment was made to build inclusive organizations and include the most marginalized, which was crucial to their success. But in the absence of focused attention to diversity and inclusion, even women’s cooperatives can sometimes reinforce rather than challenge hierarchies (Rankin 2002). Thus we acknowledge that SSEs can only be successful if they avoid the sorts of religious, ethnic and political divisiveness that characterizes conflict-ridden societies, and/or avoid the forms of “elite capture” of resources that too often marks the reconstruction process. Expansion and scaling up is also a crucial one in contexts of resource scarcity. Another factor to be considered is the scale and scope of such organizations. SEWA is an extensive and established organization, and also well connected with other networks, which contributed to their success. The SACCOs that were not as well established faced more challenges in their attempts to “scale up” and there was also greater variability in the

degree to which each SACCO had been able to implement an alternative vision for reconstruction, depending on how established they were.

Finally, and related to the previous point, we also note that in these cases, particularly in Gujarat, the cooperatives took on social reproductive and livelihoods support work formerly provided by the state while also addressing other negative effects of neoliberal restructuring. We are not suggesting, however, that the role of cooperatives should be to fill the social cracks of neoliberal peacebuilding, especially through relying on women's work in building and sustaining these organizations where they do exist. Rather, we provide these examples to show that the current model is not working, that SSE is providing a viable alternative path, and that policy frameworks should shift to enable and enhance SSE organizations.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that the recognition and nurturance of SSE activities provides a potentially viable alternative to the achievement of gender-equitable, sustainable peace. Through the two case studies of women-centered cooperatives, we provided examples of the ways that SSE was able to meet the particular challenges of gender equity in post-conflict societies. The grassroots character of these organizations made them attentive to, and thus able to meet, local women's needs in rapidly changing contexts of instability and insecurity. Also crucial to their success in meeting women's needs was a holistic view of the economy that centers social provisioning for livelihoods. While the neoliberal approach to development has the stated goal of improving well-being, its focus on the means – through expanding markets and privatization, industrialization, and GDP growth – rather than the ends, has the effect of assuming or even severing the connection to achieving sustainable livelihoods (Graham and Cornwell 2009). Further, the cooperatives examined in these two case studies recognized that diverse activities and needs - including non-market production, secure housing, health and education supports, and inclusion efforts for marginalized groups - contribute to social provisioning.

In examining the efforts and activities of these cooperatives, then, a different picture of the economy emerges. What has typically been viewed as “outside” of the economy is now figured prominently within the economic frame. This alternative figuring of the economy makes space for addressing the interconnections between women's physical and economic security in post-conflict contexts. While we are cognizant of the challenges and potential limits of implementing SSE in such contexts, we believe that the route to sustainable, equitable peace they can offer make them well worth considering as an alternative path for the WPS agenda and moving towards simultaneously achieving SDGs 5 and 16.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ See, for instance, the 2018 UN Security Council's WPS report's dismissal of cooperative forms of production and lending as marginal to peacebuilding efforts (United Nations S/2018/900 para. 65).

ⁱⁱ Cooperatives in Kathmandu, Chitwan, Dhading, Tanahu, Kavre, Morang, Saptari and Siraha districts were visited.

ⁱⁱⁱ That Nepal's economic growth rates did not, on average, appear to suffer much during the conflict is attributed to its robust remittance economy. The volume of remittances from overseas workers (mostly in India, Arab countries and Malaysia) jumped from USD 139 million in the year 2001 to USD 808 million in the year 2004: this was almost 14% of GDP and 55.8% of total foreign currency reserves. Around 25% of all Nepalese households receive remittances (Hofmann and Grossman 2005).

^{iv} The ‘informal sector’ consists of unorganized enterprises as well as workers who participate in the unorganized sector. Around 94 percent of the female labor force in India participates in the unorganized sector.

^v At the time of field research in 2011, SEWA Federation coordinated 103 cooperatives. By 2016, the number of cooperatives coordinated by SEWA Federation had increased to 106.

^{vi} About a dollar a day.

^{vii} See <http://www.thehindu.com/news/the-india-cables/gujarat-tried-to-use-sewa-for-communal-propaganda/article1591969.ece>. Previously, when the SEWA union spoke out against caste-related atrocities, it was expelled from the Ahmedabad Textile Labor Association (TLA), of which it had been a wing.

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