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# Social Identity-Based Threats to Human Security: Gender Practice in Sustainable Development and Conflict Transformation

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# SOCIAL IDENTITY-BASED THREATS TO HUMAN SECURITY

Social Identity-Based Threats to Human Security: Gender Practice in Sustainable  
Development and Conflict Transformation

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SIT Graduate Institute, PIM 73

Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation: Sustainable Development Focus

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Student name: Emmi W. Bevensee Date: 05/09/2015

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**Abstract**

I seek to advocate for practitioners in conflict transformation and/or sustainable development to build awareness around the peoples who, according to the status afforded them by their identities within a social context, experience threats to their own sense of human security within situations of violent conflict and/or underdevelopment. This capstone does so by examining gender -- that is, the context-specific distinctions between men and women-- as a social context that influences an individual's feelings of human security. The capstone then expands a practitioner's means of addressing gender-based threats to human security *in situ*. I will first define and situate human security, which describes the working concept of being free from fear and from want, and then will shift focus to social identity as a determinant of human security. As an example, the capstone will use gender contexts, defining the scope and outlining the history of gender practice in the fields of conflict transformation and sustainable development. Using the "Gender Continuum Tool," this capstone will explore the positive and negative incentives for performing gender practice, relating such reasons back to human security. It will then explore some practical implications for gender practice, relating to examples from my practicum experience at an international development consulting firm in the Washington, D.C. area. Last, the capstone will re-situate the implications of gender practice back into consideration for social identities and social contexts as they relate to human security. Altogether, the considerations in this capstone can help practitioners in conflict transformation and sustainable development take into account those who suffer the deepest threats to human security, thus furthering practice that is effective, self-reflexive, sensitive, and human-focused.

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose**

I seek to advocate for practitioners in conflict transformation and/or sustainable development to build awareness around the peoples who, according to the status afforded them by their identity or intersecting identities within a social context, experience threats to their own sense of human security in situations of violent conflict and/or underdevelopment. This capstone does so by examining gender -- that is, the context-specific distinctions between men and women and other genders-- as a social context that influences an individual's feelings of human security. The capstone then expands a practitioner's means of addressing gender-based threats to human security *in situ*.

I will first define and situate human security, which, defined simply, is the "absence of insecurity and threats," or, "to be free from both fear (of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, violence, persecution or death) and from want (of gainful employment, food, and health)" facilitating growth beyond just the successive meeting of basic human needs, to which we are all entitled to as human rights (Tadjbakhsh, 2005). Then, I will shift focus to social identity as a determinant of human security, defining social identity and intersectionality and relating them to human security. As an example of social identity as a factor of human security, this capstone will look into gendered social contexts, defining the scope and outlining the history of gender practice, or, the methods of integrating consideration for vulnerabilities to human security specifically related to one's gender identification, for conflict transformation and sustainable development practitioners. It will then look into one guiding theory behind gender practice, exploring first its conceptual framework using the "Gender Continuum Tool,"

which demonstrates the positive and negative incentives for performing gender practice, and then relating such reasons back to human security. The capstone will then explore some practical implications for gender practice, relating to examples from my practicum experience at an international development consulting firm in the Washington, D.C. area. Last, the capstone will re-situate the implications derived from the exploration of gender practice back into practitioners' broader approaches to social identities and social contexts as they relate to human security, using an additional example from my practicum experience. The conclusion will then emphasize the humanity inherent in human security, along with its necessity in our practice. Altogether, the considerations in this capstone can help practitioners in conflict transformation and sustainable development take into account those who suffer the deepest threats to human security, thus furthering practice that is effective, self-reflexive, sensitive, and human-focused.

### **Background**

In coming to SIT, I hoped to equip myself with skills and knowledge to be an international practitioner in non-governmental sustainable development- to influence positive change in the lives of those who needed it most, the marginalized and the poor, all over the world. I had had a long and even a nuanced history with service, learning from one mentor, for instance, that service should be an exchange and not a donation, and learning from another mentor that the practice of a volunteerism needs to support continued engagement and advocacy. Furthermore, through learning about diverse friends' lived experiences--and also re-framing my own—through the critical theory coursework at my undergraduate college, I held an understanding of oppression and marginalization in terms of its effects on people's lives.

These considerations came to a head during a gap year stint of several months as a volunteer teacher and orphanage caretaker in Ghana, West Africa. My work was short-term, unspecialized, unprepared, and even unaccredited, and the weight of what I was not then capable of changing in the lives of the children I worked with weighed heavily on me. In Ghana, I recognized that I did not understand the contexts behind the poverty I encountered every day, nor the gender, ethnic and religious divides that dictated social life there. Such an incomplete understanding was diminishing most of the positive benefit to others of my presence there: I was not delivering relevant teachings to the lived reality of these students. Even more, I came to understand that my operating without an understanding of my position of influence, as a white outsider U.S. American working with children, I was potentially putting others at risk, reinforcing neocolonial structures of power. I, and those I wished to be of service to, could not afford more such hands-on learning if it was at the expense of others already vulnerable.

Entering graduate school, I sought to accelerate my means of comprehension of local settings, to minimize the potential negative impact of my future heuristic learning, to fill in the gaps of my understanding of how I could proceed as a practitioner, and, with this understanding, be of better, positive service to others. Thus, I matriculated at SIT Graduate Institute, eventually specifying my degree into Conflict Transformation with a focus on Sustainable Development. Through coursework in Social Identity and Post-War Development, I uncovered new methodologies and conceptualizations to help understand the social and power contexts in which Conflict Transformation and Sustainable Development practitioners practice. I deepened my study by examining the gendered aspects of violent conflict, likely because I myself am a woman and felt personal

resonance with the narratives of women being targeted or overlooked, specifically at-risk<sup>1</sup>. All the while, I understood that gender was not the only social determinant of human security in a situation of violent conflict, and I sought to complexify my understanding to be inclusive of the many social identities each individual may hold.

My interest in gender and conflict led me to seek out practicum opportunities that specifically practiced gender integration in post-violent conflict work abroad. I seized an opportunity to be the gender practice intern at an international development consulting firm based just outside of Washington, D.C., Social Impact. It was there that I began to build a practice in addressing social contexts that leave some more vulnerable to threats to human security than others, encountering diverse methodologies and participating in projects that addressed these issues. Furthermore, I there encountered research and discourse that expanded my understanding of social contexts as a consideration for international practice. This capstone therefore represents a culmination of almost two years of critical examination of- and a lifetime of exposure to- the role of social identity and social justice in the practices of aiming to achieve human security for all.

### **Thesis**

Gender practice, which brings consideration for gender distinctions and vulnerabilities into the fields of conflict transformation and sustainable development, offers useful tools and examples of addressing situations in which human security is affected by one's social identity or intersecting identities within a social context. For one, the "Gender Continuum Tool" offers a conceptual framework that demonstrates the negative and positive incentives for performing gender practice, which, taken together

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<sup>1</sup> I also acknowledge the differences and privileges of my situation, attempting to not project my experience onto contexts of which I had only budding understanding.

signify the goals of gender practice, to integrate consideration of peripheral identity groups whose human security is most threatened within a social context into overall conflict transformation and sustainable development practice. For another, several best practices emerged from my practicum about how one could approach gender practice, which are: to deeply examine social contexts and identify those social identity groups whose human security is most threatened; to target or integrate the most threatened identity groups into our practice in sustainable development and conflict transformation practice; and to emphasize the need for practitioner self-reflexivity in terms of social identity. Making use of these conceptions and best practices can contribute to inclusive and participatory practice in all social contexts where human security is threatened, facilitating individuals to realize freedom and active transcendence from fear and from want, the goals of human security.

### **Methodology**

As a Course-Linked Capstone to the course Theory and Practice of Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, this capstone serves to represent the culmination of my coursework and practicum experience. Therefore, I frame my experience and the knowledge gained in the context of theories and considerations introduced through my coursework, demonstrating the value of both. This Capstone is truly an expansion of my first week in Theory and Practice of Conflict Transformation, when I was exposed to the notions of “structural violence,” which Arai (2013) defines as, “institutionalized denial of access to resources and opportunities” (p. 8), and “cultural violence,” which I would later describe in a Conflict Analysis as “the cultural justification of harm done-- an enactment of conflict on the level of that which groups of people define meaning” (Buck, 2013, p.

3). Gaining those concepts allowed me to understand marginalization, a phenomena I had held a long interest in, through conflict terms, and thus gain access to a wealth of conflict transformation solutions and resources in the fight against oppression. I was thereby empowered to develop a focus in my time at SIT Graduate Institute: to seek to understand the contexts in which certain kinds of people were denied access to resources over other people, particularly in cases where an additional violent conflict and/or absence of basic human needs were at play.

Within the capstone, the definitions of the concepts which provide the structure for my examples, human security and social identity, were drawn from a text-based review of discourses surrounding human security, social identity, oppression, and gender, largely in the fields of peace studies, development studies, and international relations. Gender practice, however, is defined and expanded according to my own exposure and understanding of the field, with the “Gender Continuum Tool” coming as a recommendation from my practicum supervisor, and the best practices coming as a result of personal experiences from my practicum which I will detail. Certain details from my practicum are anonymized for confidentiality.

### **Subjectivity and Assumptions**

I choose to visibilize my own perspective and experience in detailing my learning through this capstone, as my subjective perspective informed my thinking and my relationship to the content of my capstone. As this comes from my individual experience, I use first-person pronouns, have striven to build awareness of and express my own perspective, and frame my thoughts as “working understandings” in conflict and development practices (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, Table 2.1). Towards the usage of this

perspective, I describe the personal context of this capstone in the Background, contextualized my thoughts in terms of fields of practice and discourse, and attempt to here reveal my own biases. I am a European American, cis<sup>2</sup>-female, bisexual Millennial from the U.S. American Midwest. I have been fortunate enough to travel and volunteer extensively, attend prestigious secondary and undergraduate schools, and pursue a graduate degree. I strive to be aware of the privilege many of these identities, statuses, and opportunities give me, particularly in relation to the situations of those most affected by underdevelopment and violent conflict. Thereby I attempt to fulfill my own recommendation of practicing self-reflexivity with regards to social identity.

### **Transferability**

I am able to situate my learning as “working understandings” (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, Table 2.1) within theoretical frameworks utilized throughout multiple fields and practices. My guiding concept of human security holds relevance in the fields of human rights, security sector reform, international relations, and certainly sustainable development and conflict transformation. I join scholars and practitioners around the world in my advocacy for the usage of the concept of human security as a “useful paradigm shift for policy makers and academics” (Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy, 2007, Ch. 1, para. 4). Thus I seek to draw useful and applicable insight for others in this field. Furthermore, my practicum took place in the capital city of one of the most powerful nations of the world. It is here in the center of the center that everyday conversations can influence international politics, and, in many ways, the U.S. Government and agencies that contract with it, many of whom are based here, dictate the fields of sustainable

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<sup>2</sup> “Cis” signifies “not transgender,” or, that my gender aligns with the sex I was assigned at birth.

development and conflict transformation, in their many manifestations. I therefore had a front-row seat to some of the most influential systems in the world. I represent here as well the insight from my many experienced mentors and peers I was fortunate to learn from who work within, for, and in relation to those systems.

### **Exploration of Concepts**

#### **Human Security**

**Definition.** As Tadjbakhsh describes, “there is no single definition of human security” (p. 5, 2005). While there is disagreement within the discourse, most definitions share the commonality that “human security” is a conceptual ideal, wherein “security” signifies the individual’s experiences of it. This is in contrast to “security” being equated with political state stability, a contrast that will be explored more in depth in the section, “History of Human Security.”

Some definitions of human security only go so far as to encapsulate the “absence of insecurity and threats,” “to be free from both fear (of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, violence, persecution or death) and from want (of gainful employment, food, and health)” (Tadjbakhsh, 2005, p. 5). Achieving such a result would constitute, in conflict terms, Galtung’s “negative peace,” or the “absence of organized collective violence” (Galtung, 1967, p. 12), violence that could be manifested structurally, culturally and/or directly (Galtung, 1996, p. 12). This capstone brings a broader conceptualization to bear, utilizing Moser’s (2010) definition, which focuses on, in addition to achieving an absence of threats, on the individual’s demonstrated capacity to adapt, and their freedom to act:

“Human Security (is) something that is achieved when and where individuals and communities have the options necessary to end, mitigate, or adapt to threats to

their human, environmental, and social rights; have the capacity and freedom to exercise these options; and actively participate in pursuing these options...Human Security is a variable condition where people and communities have the capacity to manage stresses to their needs, rights, and values” (p. 18).

“Human security” here goes beyond a negative peace, in that human security is not present unless individuals are able to actively engage their own agency to live their lives to involve more than just the successive meeting of their needs, but towards the gainful pursuit of their values and rights. Such a vision better demonstrates a “positive peace,” a concept that, in addition to including the absence of violence (“negative peace,”), involves "cooperation and integration between human groups" (Galtung, 1967, p. 12), with people actively engaging with their environment and their communities in a constructive way. Human security therefore involves, in addition to the absence of fear, the resiliency, adaptation and capacity to meet and exceed one’s basic human needs.

**History of “Human Security.”** The current iteration of the field of human security emerged in U.S. International policy discourse in 1994, post-Cold War, when, “in the academic and policy-making circles, the need to analyze root causes and find solutions to end misery, born of conflict or underdevelopment, prompted focus on the expansion of the idea of security” (Tadjbakhsh, 2005, p. 6). A new conceptual framework was required that did not conflate state security, or the stability of national government control over a state, with an individual’s sense security (p. 4). The reason for this is that having the former, state security, does not guarantee the latter, individual security: indeed, “states themselves (can) become perpetrators of insecurities, not only failing to fulfill their obligations toward their subjects but threatening their very existence” (p. 5).

In the shifting global political landscape of that time, when the violence of intrastate conflict outpaced that of interstate conflict in proportion, the targets of international policy shifted from “enemy” states to the complex, multidimensional threats to individual security.

A key feature of human security is that it links the collective and politically salient notion of security with the subjective needs of the individual: human security makes the political, personal, and the personal, political. Human security functions as a next conceptual step following the concepts of basic human needs and human rights, bringing the strongest aspects of both to the foreground in order to further the missions of peace and justice at the macro level and agency and safety at the individual level. In combining the macro and micro, human security seeks to address the root causes of the threats to individual security. Human security, therefore, brings salient aspects of multiple frameworks into a functioning ideal, which includes the realization of basic human needs and the entitlement of human rights.

As Gasper (2005) defines, “Basic human needs are whatever people require to be able to achieve a level of functioning that satisfies a given ethical conception of the acceptable minimum” (p. 232). The prioritization of needs and their satisfiers are subjectively defined, empowering agents to assign value and process for achieving their needs and living their lives. Human rights, by contrast, create an objective<sup>3</sup>, normative framework within which the subjective concerns of basic human needs comes into play. Human rights, in relation to basic human needs, are “legitimated claims/entitlements ‘grounded in basic needs’” (Gasper, 2005, p. 236). Therefore, wherever basic needs are

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<sup>3</sup> At least, there are agreed-upon sets of universal human rights that act as a standard, although they do not supersede criticism or revision.

not being met, the rights to those needs are being subverted: from the perspective of human rights, unmet basic human needs are an injustice. This calcification of needs as rights boosts the obligations of the “duty-bearers” to fulfill the rights of those in need without sacrifice of one person for another’s rights- all people are equally entitled to their rights. Human security, then, serves to capture both the subjectivity and prioritization required of basic human needs and the objectivity and unwillingness to sacrifice any one person inherent in human rights (Gasper, 2005, p. 236). Human security sets a standard by which theory and practice can set their goals and achievements, in which individuals are entitled to their needs fulfillment for freedom from, and transcendence of, threats to their sense of security.

**Relation to Conflict Transformation and Sustainable Development.** Human security, human rights and basic human needs relate importantly to conflict transformation and sustainable development. In Conflict Transformation, communities have a right to achieve their need for peace (in all of its many definitions, whether the cessation of warfare or fair governance). Within Sustainable Development, communities have a right to achieve their need for development (whether that includes clean drinking water, functioning infrastructure, free education, guaranteed livelihoods, or other). In terms of how to reach human security, within a context, threats to individual security, such as “ethnic confrontations, terrorism, and forced displacement,” could be addressed through the tools of conflict transformation, while “extreme poverty, HIV/AIDS,” environmental degradation and more, could be addressed through methodologies falling under sustainable development (p.6). Human security exemplifies an aspect of the

achievement of the transcendence of such threats, where freedom from fear allows people to freely and positively impact their own lives.

The overlapping fields of conflict transformation and sustainable development can seek to address threats to human security that are occurring within the same context using approaches and methodologies that originate from different conceptual backgrounds. According to Arai (2014), adapting Galtung (1996), “*Peace studies* concerns reducing direct, structural, and cultural violence, through needs satisfaction,” whereas, “*Development studies* concerns meeting basic needs as well as developing needs further” (p. 9). They are both based on the currency of needs, their satisfaction and development, but peacebuilding looks at violence, specifically. Within the same context, the cessation and transformation of violence (conflict transformation) facilitates the development of basic needs (sustainable development), both goals which form key components of human security. As Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy break down, “Human security makes the critical acknowledgement that underdevelopment can be dangerous and conflict prone, and that conflict is necessarily dangerous for overall and long-term development” (2007, Ch. 5, para 1). Violent conflict and underdevelopment often go hand in hand, as numerous studies demonstrate a link in both directions between underdevelopment and violent conflict in a context (Goldstone, et al, 2000; Goodhand, 2001; Justino, 2009, among others). Thus, both forms of interventions are necessary towards achieving and enacting human security. Human security offers a useful framework for understanding the goals of conflict transformation and sustainable development, as they become different tool kits working towards the similar goals of transcending the threats to their rights and needs.

### **Social Identity and Human Security**

**Definitions.** In all contexts throughout the world, social identity, that is, the ways “by which we define ourselves in terms and categories that we share,” and do not share, “with other people,” (Deaux, 2001, p. 1) can be linked with achievement of human security. Numerous fields have emerged to examine and understand the phenomenon wherein, in the same context, one group will, according to its identity within the social context, have access to the central resources and capital, and another group will, according to its identity, have diminished, limited, restricted or even forbidden access to the same resources. According to an application of Wallerstein’s (2004) World Systems Theory onto social, rather than economic, contexts, the groups with access to resources, who can be identified as “central,” can, consciously and unconsciously, perform direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung, 1996, p. 12) upon, and, in short, oppress and exploit the more “peripheral” social identity groups. This exact structure of violence can take numerous forms, several of which Moser (2013) helpfully outlines as including:

“...a wide and diverse terrain of forms of oppression, exploitation and disrespect - a well-known list ranging from colonialism to capitalism, globalization, imperialism, clientelism and paternalism, from sexism and patriarchy to racism, class and caste systems, state or interpersonal violence, war and related traumatization, other forms of abuse and victimization, and more subtle, but no less impactful legacies of upbringing and family dynamics” (p. 8).

Participation in any of these systems holds tremendous implications for one's achievement of human security. The more peripheral one's identity groups are, the higher degree of threat they experience: with lesser access to resources, peripheral groups have fewer "options necessary to end, mitigate, or adapt to threats to their human, environmental, and social rights" (Moser, 2013, p. 18). Such threats can take the form of direct violence, such as hate crimes targeted against that identity group, structural violence, such as poorer infrastructure or job opportunities for members of that group, or cultural violence, such as representation in the media of a group as lazy or stupid. As Moser aptly summarizes, "Oppressive, disempowering systems make people less secure" (2013, p. 9).

**Intersectionality.** To complicate the phenomena of center-periphery (non)actualization of human security, systems such as sexism, caste systems and capitalism rarely take form separate from each other. Each person contains different group identities: center-peripheral systems that favor some groups and disfavor others occur in overlapping spheres across a single human context. The overlap of such social contexts is captured in the concept of "intersectionality," which examines the effects of the intersections between different social identity statuses, such as gender, race, class, and also sexuality, religion, ethnicity, country of origin, age and beyond, together (Jones, Misra and McCurley, 2013, p. 1). Intersectional social contexts hold strong implications for one's experience of human security. Any one person could, for instance, feel a threat to their human security in the form of direct violence due to their gender but be perpetuating threats to human security against others due to their ethnicity. Those who face exponential threat, therefore, are those who are peripheral to multiple identity group

contexts. In response, I consider Galtung's needs-based definition of development, "the progressive satisfaction of the needs of human and non-human nature, starting with those most in need" (1996, p. 128). In this, I interpret a mandate for practitioners to first identify those most in need and then start with satisfying that group's needs. Practically, this means that, within social contexts that determine access to resources based on identity group membership, those most peripheral, whose human security is most under threat, should be a key consideration of practitioners seeking to facilitate sustainable development and conflict transformation overall. This should be particularly the case because social contexts and the underdevelopment and violent conflict in which they are enacted can cause increasing and specific threats to those already among peripheral groups. Therefore, the need becomes even clearer that we as practitioners in sustainable development and/or conflict transformation must work to address the needs of those most at risk, the most peripheral groups in a context already experiencing high threats to human security.

**Gender in Social Contexts of Human Security.** I choose gender context-- that is, the context-specific social distinctions between men and women and other genders-- as an example of a social context that influences an individual's feelings of human security. Gender inequality demonstrates around the world the central-peripheral determinations of threats to human security described in "Social Identity and Human Security," above. In terms of threats to their human security specific to their peripheral gender, "Women tend to suffer violence at the hands of their intimate partners more often than men; women's political participation and their representation in decision-making structures lag behind men's... women are over-represented among the poor; and women

and girls make up the majority of people trafficked and involved in the sex trade” (Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, p. 1, 2002). Men, while in most cases the central gender, can also experience threats to their human security specific to their gender, for instance, in the form of cultural violence as to how masculinity should be performed, which can result in, for instance, men being dissuaded from seeking health care. Others most affected by this binary gender system and set of expectations are those who do not conform to either gender role, or who transition from one to the other, or who belong, as in South Asia, to a third gender, hijra. Gender can be a determinant of social status, access to resources, and cultural value, all of which can result in heightened threats to human security to more peripheral genders.

**Gender Practice.** Sustainable development and conflict transformation have long been aware of gender inequality, particularly as it affects women, and have attempted to address it. Indeed, very soon after the founding of the United Nations, the Commission on the Status of Women, “the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women” (A Brief History of the CSW, n.d.) first convened, and has led prominent causes in women’s rights since (Short History of the Commission on the Status of Women, 2006). Such work done on behalf of gender equality in conflict transformation (such as Inclusive Security, Gender-Sensitive Peacebuilding) and sustainable development (such as Gender Mainstreaming, Women In Development/Gender and Development) is remarkable, and has led, for instance, to landmark policy passages (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979; UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, 2000) (A Short History of the Commission on the Status of

Women, 2006). In terms of how the hard work of gender advocates has affected the culture of sustainable development and conflict transformation, I observed from my practicum a normalization of hiring “Gender Experts” in contracted projects, who ensure sensitivity and inclusion to peripheral genders. Within a project context, such gender experts are those who hold foundational expertise in gender inequality, who first analyze the social context in terms of gender, disaggregating the social roles, resource allocation and threats to human security according to gender, and then provide recommendations to the project to best address the gender discrepancy as it is manifest in the context. Such recommendations can take the form of anything about how, when, and where the project can best be implemented, such as providing certain resources to the implementers or requiring quotas of women and men’s participation in certain activities. Through multiple decades of practice, the fields of sustainable development and conflict transformation have developed multiple conceptual and practical tools and approaches to addressing gender inequality, often in contexts that have parallel situations of violent conflict and/or underdevelopment, with the goal of addressing gender-based discrepancies in the social context.

### **Conceptual Framework and Approaches to Gender Practice**

As an expansion of my exploration of gender practice, I will now delve more deeply into a conceptual framework, the Gender Continuum Tool, as a means of demonstrating the positive and negative incentives for integrating gender practice into conflict transformation and sustainable development. Simply, the positive incentives are that striving towards gender equality creates better overall practice, and the negative incentives are the ignoring the gender context can create increased harm. Then I will

extract the lessons I have learned from my own experience and provide the context in which such insight emerged, as a means of demonstrating my own learning but also reflecting several methodologies for how one could execute a sound gender practice. Altogether, the conceptual and practical approaches outlined below demonstrate why and how conflict transformation and sustainable development practitioners could and should integrate consideration of gender and overall social contexts into their striving towards facilitating the achievement of human security for all in contexts of violent conflict and underdevelopment.

**IGWG’s Gender Continuum Tool**

This capstone employs the Interagency Gender Working Group’s Gender Continuum Tool (see Figure 1), whose purpose is, “To guide various projects on how to integrate gender;” in order to do this, “This framework categorizes approaches by how they treat gender norms and inequities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of program/policy” (IGWG, n.d.). The tool presents a normative value framework by which

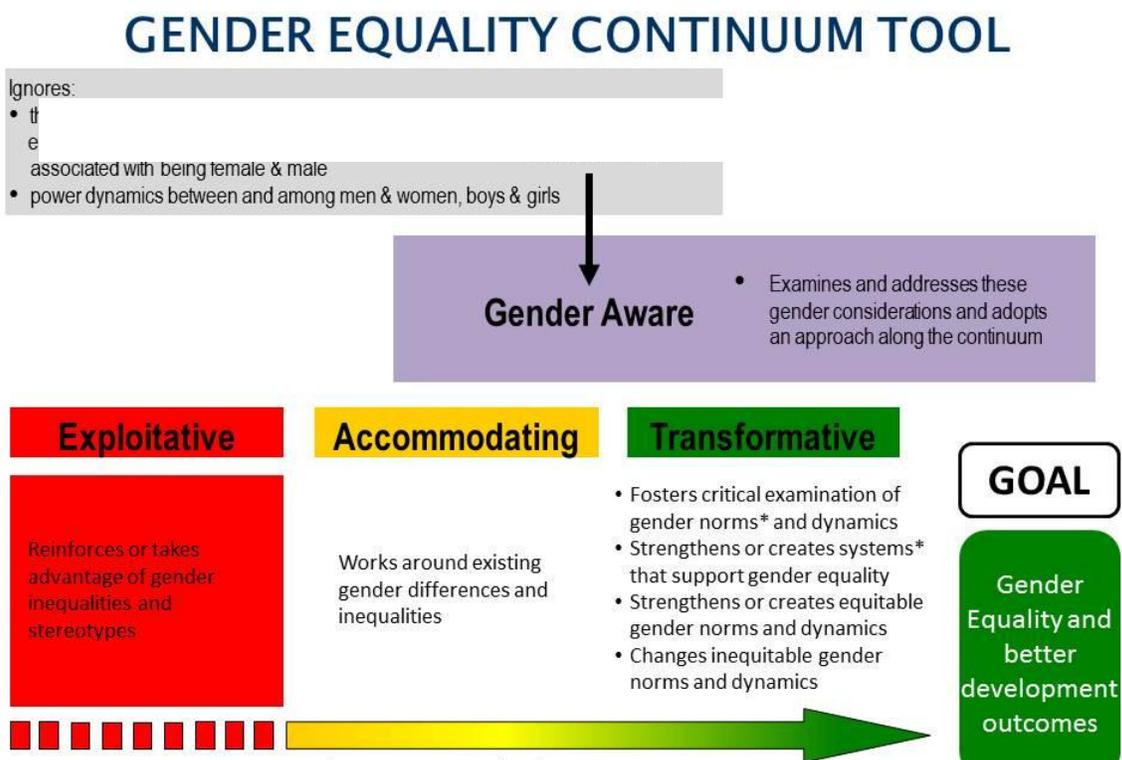


Figure 1: The Gender Equality Continuum Tool (IGWG, n.d.)

practitioners can assess the degree to which and the manner in which a project addresses gender inequality.

The Gender Continuum Tool posits that the dual ideal goals of conflict transformation and sustainable development are to both improve whatever the focus of the intervention is, achieving “better development outcomes,” while also transforming the social context, achieving “gender equality”. In order to achieve those goals, the tool presents two ranges in which a project can operate in terms of the gender context of a setting: in terms of awareness of a gender context, a project can range from gender blind to gender aware, whereas in terms of means of addressing the gender context, a project can range from exploitative, accommodating or transformative. According to this tool, in order to achieve the dual ideal goals, practice must be gender aware and transformative.

There are many compelling reasons for building gender practice as a part of our work in conflict transformation and sustainable development. Most of them manifest as positive and negative incentives, that is, for the potential benefits in doing so and the potential harm in not doing so. The Gender Continuum Tool presents the broad categories of these positive and negative incentives: the negatives comprising the threats to human security that can result in projects which are gender blind and exploitative, the positives comprising the contributions to the human security of those within the context, particularly to the most peripheral genders. The result in breaking down the Gender Continuum is a demonstration of the goals of gender practice.

**Neither “Blind” nor “Exploitative.”** Whether we as practitioners in conflict transformation and sustainable development are coming in to a foreign context or acting in our native one, there is the potential that our projects can cause harm to those we seek

to help, often due to ignorance or misappropriation of certain factors within the context. Within a human security approach, the goal is to diminish threats to one's sense of human security, and so, clearly, increasing the structural, cultural and/or direct violence to those within a context achieves the opposite agenda of decreasing human security. Thus, the potential harm of practices that increase violence constitutes the negative incentives for using neither gender blind nor exploitative approaches.

According to the Gender Continuum Tool, one's intervention is "blind"<sup>4</sup> to the gendered social factors that can determine security when the project is ignoring "the set of economic/social/political roles, rights, entitlements, responsibilities, obligations and associated with" one's gender (IGWG, n.d.). By and large, such practice has unfortunately "dominated the development discussion and the development projects" (Välilmaa, p. 20, 2004). What this means, in practice, is that because "biological differences and patriarchal cultures (have) made men the primary actors in development," "often the gender-blind policies are in fact male-based" (Välilmaa, p. 20, 2004). In other words, projects that did not explicitly involve consideration for women and their security, so-called gender neutral approaches, would in fact be gender blind and cause harm. Practice that does not involve awareness of peripheral groups can tend to favor higher status groups, excluding or harming the lower status groups.

If a project is exploitative of the gender context, then it is reinforcing, even expanding, the inequality and the threats to the human security of particularly the most peripheral genders. Exploitative practice bespeaks an awareness of the gender context but not of the harm being perpetuated already by said context, particularly upon most

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<sup>4</sup> I acknowledge the problematics of associating a disability (blindness) with a harmful practice, and ask practitioners in their own practice to consider the use other terms such as "unaware" or "ignorant." It is used here for consistency with use of the Gender Continuum Tool.

peripheral genders. Such practice can be more insidious: exploitative practice is often done in the name of furthering the goals of the project, which ostensibly address other harm being done. An example would be attempting to improve behaviors in a population by encouraging them to fulfill their gender roles, such as, for instance, encouraging women to be peaceful, or men to be strong. Such an example would result in both gender roles being further reified within that context, and those who cleave from their sex or gender, such as transgender<sup>5</sup> individuals, being further ostracized. Such a project increases cultural violence, which can go on to justify future direct and structural violence within that context. Therefore, gender blind and exploitative practices demonstrate the negative incentives for practitioners to pursue un-blind and un-exploitative relations to their projects' gender contexts.

**But “Aware” and “Transformative.”** If one’s practice is gender aware, demonstrated in the Gender Continuum Tool as the opposite of gender blind, the Interagency Gender Working Group states the intervention will be more effective, as it deliberately reaches and involves more of a population in the project, particularly those of peripheral genders. Such a benefit provides a positive incentive for practitioners to perform gender practice within their conflict transformation and sustainable development, and demonstrates the guiding principles of gender practice as a whole.

Being gender aware means operating with an understanding of the social forces and roles at play within a gender context. Within gender awareness are two responses: accommodating and transformative. Accommodating to the gender context means employing practices that “work around existing gender differences and inequalities” (IGWG, n.d.). At my practicum site, it was common practice within evaluations to

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<sup>5</sup> One who is assigned a sex that differs from their gender.

determine at the outset of a project what considerations would need to be set in place in order to have equitable gender participation and representation. Often, this meant understanding work habits and roles and responsibilities of the genders. Such practices were not meant to alter the gender context, necessarily, but rather to work to maximize possibilities within the constraints already set by it. I would typify such an approach as gender accommodating.

In order to move further along the Gender Continuum to achieve practice that is fully transformative, a project would have to facilitate a group's transcendence of those gender-based limitations. Transformative practice "fosters critical examination of gender norms and dynamics, strengthen or create systems that support gender equality, strengthen or create equitable gender norms and dynamics, and change inequitable gender norms and dynamics" (IGWG, n.d.). Interventions that are transformative can maximize project resources so that those who experience or perpetuate gender-specific threats to human security can critically consider their social roles and trouble-shoot transforming them. The goals of gender transformative projects that seek to empower those within a context are both to transform the social context which is threatening the human security of certain genders and also to achieve "better development outcomes," through practice that, through its gender sensitivity, is more grounded, sensitive and targeted towards human security for all, inclusively (IGWG, n.d.).

This transformation represents the ultimate goal of gender practice, of, in seeking to accomplish the goals of a project, also seeking to identify and transcend the root causes of gender-based threats to human security. Within a project's context, particularly when a population's human security is at high risk, the practitioner's perception of urgency of

need, or really any number of stakeholder priorities, including funding schedules and resources available, may force a de-prioritization of considerations such as gender within a project. When facing such constraints, practitioners can refer back to the ideal of human security as one of their guiding goals, and, in order to help those most vulnerable achieve human security, the practice must be gender aware and gender transformative.

### **Implications for Gender Practice**

Given the stated need for gender practice, one may next ask, how could a practitioner appropriately perform it? Provided the first step has already been achieved, that practitioners are gender aware, acknowledging that there exists a gender context in which certain genders have more and different threats to their human security, then it follows suit that the next step would be to identify which gender populations are those under the most threat, and then, to ensure that the programming continues to consider those genders who are most at risk throughout the program cycle. What follows are the lessons I have drawn from my practicum experience for how to enact gender practice, summarized thusly:

- 1) Build awareness of the gender context
- 2) Prioritize the human security of the most peripheral genders
- 3) Build self-reflexivity with regard to gender

I here will describe these lessons, and, for each, the context in which it arose and the need that I identified that using the lesson in the future will address. Each of these lessons promotes gender awareness and constitutes different necessities in gender transformative practice.

#### **1) Build Awareness of the Gender Context**

Practitioners begin their gender practice by performing gender analysis of a given context in order to gain awareness of the gender context in which we are working.

Gender analysis is a specific form of directed, preliminary research that exposes the gender context, particularly around the issues that the project may be targeting, which particularly highlights those facing the most threats to their human security. The product of the gender analysis can then inform future planning and interventions. Gender analysis can be performed in many different ways, whether through interviews and case studies, desk reviews of other assessments and focus groups with gender experts. Ultimately, however, in order to function as a gender analysis, it must seek to answer the following questions within the context of an intended intervention:

- “How will the different roles and status of women and men within the community, political sphere, workplace, and household (for example, roles in decision making and different access to and control over resources and services) affect the work to be undertaken?”
- “How will the anticipated results of the work affect women and men differently?” (Cozzarelli, p. 3, 2010).

In answering these questions, the gender analysis should present the differences in which men and women operate and interact. Ideally, the analysis should acknowledge other genders as well, such as the Hijra in South Asia, or transgender identities, so as to be inclusive of all genders. According to USAID policy, “the gender analysis should also identify potential adverse impacts and/or risks of gender-based exclusion that could result from planned activities,” thus attempting to diminish negative impacts of a project

(USAID, p. 12, 2012). Gender analysis thus seeks to identify potential possibilities for the project and the gender context to intersect in the most mutually beneficial means.

Performing gender analysis creates a product for the use of not only the team involved in the project, but for other practitioners, those in the field at large, and, contributing to the chance for transformative gender practice, for the stakeholders within a context who are experiencing the gender context explored. What should emerge following gender analyses, as the treatment emerges from the diagnosis, is a plan of action that can both address gender discrepancies and maximize the effects of the possible intervention. Thus gender analysis informs the next steps in programming.

I learned the lesson that gender analysis is a necessary first step from the messaging from USAID itself, which to a large extent sets the trends that the field of international development follows. To perform gender analysis before projects begin is one of the most popular advocacy points in the field of gender practice- likely because it is one that in the past has been most often skipped. Gender analysis, its advocates believe, is a necessary step for considering gender within conflict transformation and sustainable development. And, considering gender is necessary to revealing new approaches to challenges such as underdevelopment. For instance, towards the development goal of decreasing infant mortality, a gender-sensitive intervention recognizes the potential in targeting mother's education, as, when mothers have at least five years of primary education, their children are 40% more likely to live past five years old (OECD, 2008, p. 3). In order to achieve a goal in sustainable development or conflict transformation, practitioners must begin with gender analysis to identify in what way such an opportunity may exist.

USAID has made many recent steps to strengthen their, and their implementing partners', gender practice. It recently (in 2012) adopted new gender equality policies and strategies, which include requiring project budgets and reporting to include gender considerations and creating "incentive funds to promote women's leadership, reduce gender-based violence, and accelerate investments in women peacebuilders, parliamentarians, agricultural producers, and owners of small and medium enterprises" (Office of Gender Equality & Women's Empowerment, 2014). Such steps present an actionable commitment to gender integration: requiring certain actions rather than suggesting them ensures they will actually be taken in this time- and resource-crunched field. As a part of this new policy, gender analysis has become the required first step in USAID interventions, along with a required recurring step in programming cycles. Now, "Gender analysis is one of only two mandatory analysis requirements that are to be integrated in strategic planning, project design and approval, procurement processes, and measurement and evaluation" (USAID, p. 4, 2012). Making gender analysis a requirement rather than a suggestion speaks to the gravity of considering gender in our own practice. Performing gender analysis is an essential component of performing transformative gender practice.

## **2) Prioritize the Human Security of the Most Peripheral Genders**

Revisiting Galtung's needs-based definition of development, "the progressive satisfaction of the needs...starting with those most in need" (1996, p. 128), I found that what practitioners can do with the gender analysis, then, is to identify those genders facing the steepest risks to their human security and make strides to address the root causes of that structural, cultural and direct violence. In order to do so, the practitioner

can either target that peripheral gender with specific programming, or they can be actively included and sensitively engaged within a project with other genders. There are risks and benefits to each approach, but both can comprise successful gender practice.

In terms of the context for this lesson, during my practicum, I took part in an extensive program evaluation of U.S. Government livelihoods projects in refugee contexts in Africa. Livelihoods activities, particularly in refugee settings, include the encouraging of any practices that allow participants to “earn a living,” usually financially, but also in terms of self-reliance in food and daily domestic work. Social Impact had been contracted to perform a one-year performance evaluation of refugee livelihood programs implemented in 2 countries over the past 5 fiscal years. As a part of the project, I helped perform a desk review of white and grey literature surveying best practices in livelihoods programming in refugee settings.

Both refugee settings and livelihoods contexts can be highly gendered, for instance, in contexts of war, women make up most civilians, sexual violence victims and refugees/Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in violent conflict, yet men tend to make up the majority of a wage-earning population (O’Neill and Vary, 2011, p. 84). Furthermore, the situations that lead people to refugee camps- violent conflict- create situations wherein “refugees’ lives, community, and social structure, including the value and practice of traditional gender roles” are disrupted (Social Impact, 2014, p. 20). Gender, therefore, is certainly a factor affecting the lives of these refugees.

The threats to human security in such a situation can be typified as gender-differentiated vulnerabilities (Carr and Thompson, p. 30, 2014)- that is, threats that exist for all but take form differently for different genders, and gender-distinct vulnerabilities,

that is, certain genders only experience those particular threats. For instance, in the contexts we were examining, gender-based violence is, to a large extent, a gender-distinct threat, as it primarily detracts from the human security of women. However, lack of livelihoods is a gender-differentiated threat, wherein different genders experience the threat differently. In the case of this project, most of the livelihoods activities included vocational training, allocation of goats and chickens (for eating and sale), and in one case even sports coach training. These projects, therefore, needed to take into consideration how education is perceived and prioritized according to gender. In our evaluation, we suggested looking at which gender typically performs agriculture work, and who plays what sports, and acting accordingly.

The desk review revealed considerations for programs in determining how to address gender-differentiated and gender-distinct threats to human security among refugees. One project targeted women in its attempt to improve their livelihoods, creating women-only livelihood opportunities; however, this imbalance created resentment among the men who were not included in the program and who were also suffering from poor livelihoods. Thus, a parallel yet differentiated approach could have been used, also providing opportunities for men, to make such a project more accommodating to the gender context. Likewise, another project's objective was to mobilize men and boys, along with women and girls, to improve the status of women and girls, yet noted in a needs assessment a "lack of women- and girl-focused services" (Social Impact, 2014, p. 23). Although they sought to alleviate a gender-distinct threat to human security through inclusion, they missed an opportunity to focus on the population experiencing the higher threat.

Therefore, prioritizing the human security of those most at risk does not necessarily mean specifically targeting them in projects, as that can put them even more at risk, but it also does not have to mean only including them in a broader project. There are strengths in both approaches: to target provides threatened populations with direct resources and the chance for transformation through solidarity, and to include threatened populations holds the possibility of transforming the overall social context in favor of the threatened group. A fine and sensitive balance must be struck, with the hope of maximizing transformation and minimizing harm done to those whose human security is already threatened.

### **3) Build Self-reflexivity With Regards To Gender**

Ultimately, a key issue about gender inequality is that gender, as a social context, does not only affect the contexts in which practitioners work. Rather, we carry with us our own gender identities, which, intersecting with our other identities, likely include both privileges in terms of achieving and not achieving human security. As gender inequality is a critical issue all over the world, our own contexts are not exempt. All practitioners have a gender and a level of gender conscientiousness, which will hold unique implications for one's practice: the more one has developed an understanding of gender as a concept and gender transformation as a goal, the better one will be able to assist others in doing so.

Contracting agencies with US Agency of International Development (USAID), like my practicum site, Social Impact, are currently, largely as a response to USAID's increased emphasis on gender practice, adopting their own gender policies in order to remain competitive in winning USAID contracts. I entered Social Impact just as its CEO

prioritized the formulation of a “Gender Action Plan” by the “Gender Action Committee” to achieve numerous goals related to staff capacity in gender practice. It was as an organizing member of this committee that I felt some of the gaps in reflexivity that I have come to believe are necessary as a part of building an external gender practice.

The Gender Action Plan was the next step following my predecessor’s yearlong project, the “SI Gender Audit Staff Survey, which identified gaps in technical knowledge and organizational culture between Social Impact’s gender awareness practices and its potential to demonstrate gender leadership internally and to our clients and stakeholders” (Buck, p.1, 2014). The Gender Action Committee, consisting of staff members across SI’s practices, and of all (but one) women, consolidated the conclusions from the Gender Audit into 4 goals and 7 objectives to present as a strategy to the entire firm. The goals of the Gender Action Plan strategy were:

Goal 1: Increase Staff Gender Capabilities

Goal 2: Develop Internal Gender Resources

Goal 3: Improve Gender Utilization and Practices

Goal 4: Communicate Gender Branding

At the organizational level, these goals demonstrate building capacity inside-out, progressing from internally increasing staff gender capabilities and resources at staff disposal in order to allow for external actions such as improving gender practice and the branding of these activities. However, the Gender Action Plan encouraged neither critical discourse on self-identification nor expansion of staff understanding of gender as a concept that directly affects us- it was all externalized to be about the gender contexts in which we work. This gap became noticeable as we began to implement the Gender

Action Plan, when, for instance, in trainings, employees would demonstrate resistance to the need for gender practice or be confused about basic elements of threats to human security related to gender within contexts.

What could have accompanied the implementation of the Gender Action Plan was an honest discourse about the gender dynamics within SI and even within the group, alongside informative and practical facilitation on vulnerability and privilege. SI has a majority-female population of assistants and managers, but mostly male executives, a point which was often informally discussed, particularly among the women, but not formally in the organization. Such conversations could have held great potential for increasing employee understanding of vulnerability and to better inform better practice.

Ultimately, the Gender Action Plan already demonstrated a commitment to reflexivity, but it did not expand into a critical conversation about gender and identity. If we as practitioners are to seek to transform gender contexts, we must first consider how such vulnerabilities affect our own lives and the dynamics within the team and our own contexts as a part of the pre-intervention analysis and in ongoing dialogue.

### **Expansion to Broader Social Contexts**

My focus on gender as a form of social identity which can determine human security within a context of underdevelopment and/or violent conflict is not an anomaly in these fields: when I entered my practicum, Social Impact problematically used the term “gender analysis” interchangeably with “social analysis,” signifying implicitly that gender was the most important, or the only, form of social analysis. However, as I recognized at the outset of this capstone, social identities intersect, and practice within social contexts that forward human security must not stop at only transforming

threatening gender contexts. Researcher Ed Carr strongly encourages practitioners to move “from the narrow duality of man versus women to a consideration of the ways in which “man” and “woman” contain a large number of distinct identities that might not always be best grouped by gender if we seek to understand the range of vulnerabilities” to different threats to human security (Carr and Thompson, p. 2, 2014). The goals and lessons of gender practice, however, can prove helpful in addressing intersecting social identities beyond gender.

Carr demonstrated the value of preliminary social context analysis, like gender analysis, in a project that assessed the livelihoods and respective vulnerabilities to climate change in 3 Malian villages (Batimakana, Diondougou and Ngarado). Within the data in that social context analysis, he increased the scope of social identities beyond gender, which broadened the practitioner understanding of the context. The assessment first describes which crops men and women in these villages farmed and how they tended to use them: for example, they found that men produced all of the cotton and women focused on garden produce (Carr and Thompson, p. 31, 2014). Carr further disaggregates the data according to other identities present within their focus groups, uncovering that these decisions for what to grow were also differentiated along age. Senior women and junior men were more likely to target growing marketable crops, leaving them more vulnerable to anticipated reduced rainfall (Carr and Thompson, p. 30, 2014). Thereby, Carr was able to express a more nuanced and intersectional understanding of the context in terms of several social identities at play, which thus informs how to proceed in addressing the specific needs of those most threatened.

Bringing age categories into consideration allowed Carr and Thompson's analysis to better identify potential threats to human security within a community, in this case in the realm of both food and livelihoods. Furthermore, such analysis could go on to better inform a potential intervention and even to transform the disaggregated behaviors towards some that are more sustainable. Carr and Thompson summarize, "Limiting gender analysis to simple comparisons of the situations of men and women... overlooks significant differential and distinct vulnerabilities to climate variability and change that emerge at the intersection of seniority and gender" (p. 35, 2014). As practitioners, we can put the tools already developed in gender practice to their best use in the contexts in which we work, which could involve taking into account any and all salient intersecting identities in our self-reflexive practice, in our analysis of the context, and in our prioritizing those most in need, towards the ultimate goal of transformation of the root causes of the threats to human security in situations of underdevelopment and violent conflict.

### **Conclusions**

Once more, human security makes the political, personal, and vice versa: the focus is upon the human. Gender practice, and other practices that can draw from human security, humanizes identity politics within conflict transformation and sustainable development, so that we as practitioners cannot forget amidst dealing with intractable conflict and mortal underdevelopment that those within those contexts are feeling, fallible, resilient humans. Conflict transformation and sustainable development broadly contribute to work that seeks to, according to Friedman (1992), insist "on the rights of the excluded population(s) as human beings, as citizens, and as persons intent on realizing

their loving and creative powers within” thus “humaniz(ing) a system that has shut them out,” by (p.13). In humanizing these systems, practitioners enhance the empowered subjectivity of those within the context as a part of the goal of transformation. Indeed, doing so fulfills a critical part of the key goals of conflict transformation and sustainable development, that is, development is not sustainable unless everyone can experience its benefits, and neither is conflict truly transformed unless all no longer experience or perpetuate violence.

To further this goal of transformation through humanizing our practice, in order to put the focus on the individual, we must recognize that “people are agents of change rather than beneficiaries” (Foresti and Ludi, p. 5, 2007). Although human security involves an ideal of being free from fear, the practice of human security largely focuses on the threats and on addressing the deficiencies that are preventing the realization of human security in all people. Yet, each person within their context, each community, each nation, has the capacity to change themselves, their culture, and their environment: they are agents as well as in need. This understanding must be a fundamental recognition within our practice, so that our interventions acknowledge the positions, dignity, and complexities of those within each context. This is how we may humanize our systems, visibilizing those under threat through our own practice, identifying the myriad ways in which individuals may feel threatened and may not be reaching their full potential, and to build a shared vision, not only for the realization of that potential, but for a participatory and sensitive method for achieving it.

There is an exciting quality to the newness of gender practice as a field- even the most experienced practitioners are still essaying what are and are not best practices.

There is currently room for creativity in determining how to truly transform a context where social identity influences one's sense of human security. The possibilities in the combinations of the practices of conflict transformation and sustainable development lend hope; transformation of harmful and dehumanizing systems will come from collaboration as much as from ingenuity. Collaboration can bring us ever closer to a shared vision of a world in which people, regardless of their identities, locations, nationalities, or any other designator, have the "capacity and freedom" (Moser, 2010, p. 18) to actualize all of their options towards fulfilling, developing, and exceeding their basic human needs to their fullest potential.

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