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Question 1:

How have women in conflict zones, such as Gaza, demonstrated resilience and leadership in the face of adversity, and what unique challenges do they face in such environments?

War affects men and women differently. While men often take on combat roles and experience the direct effects of war, women usually bear the responsibility of keeping their children and families safe in the midst of armed conflict and displacement. This suffering is compounded by the exacerbation of violence, poverty, exploitation and inequality. Women and girls are also more vulnerable to food insecurity, sexual violence, rape, trafficking, and forced pregnancy and marriage. In 2020, the [United Nations](#) (UN) verified some 2,500 cases of conflict-related sexual violence in 18 countries. However, 70% of the perpetrators named by the UN have not been brought to justice. More recently, the world body reported that over 600 million women and girls continue to live in conflict-affected countries.

It should also be noted that the cessation of armed conflict through ceasefire agreements or political settlements does not necessarily mean the beginning of peace and security for women. A 2011 [World Bank Development report](#) shows that women and children make up 80% of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). [International aid agencies](#) have documented how the vulnerability of women refugees and IDPs to sexual abuse and rape is heightened by the loss of their husbands, fathers, assets and jobs, and increased caretaking responsibilities such as finding food, water, firewood and other necessities for their families’ survival. Those who may take advantage of women’s increased vulnerability range from members of armed groups and gangs to family members, international peacekeepers, aid workers and other strangers. Women and girls who are subjected to sexual violence during and after war can suffer long-term physical, reproductive and psychological damage.

However, it is wrong to think of women only as victims of armed conflict. They fulfil multiple roles and responsibilities during wartime, serving as mothers, caregivers, leaders, human rights activists, negotiators, and sometimes combatants. These multiple roles are essential and highlight the multifaceted contributions women make in difficult times. They create [support and solidarity systems](#) among themselves while forming cross-community solidarity initiatives, such as the organisation of joint peace-building events by members of [Palestine-based Women of the Sun, and Israeli-based Women Wage Peace](#). Women are also often the first to identify and experience potential security risks in their communities (such as the recruitment of unemployed youth by extremist groups) through their everyday social networks, relationships and experiences. Women have the skills, information, experience and capacity to build and maintain peace in their communities, as recognised by [UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#). This landmark resolution is the foundation of the UN’s [Women, Peace and Security](#) (WPS) agenda. Resolution 1325 recognises women’s contributions to conflict prevention, peace negotiation and peace-building, and promotes the active participation of women at all levels of decision-making, whether in security forces, government, the judiciary or civil society. It defines women’s active participation in these processes as key to effectively addressing the disproportionate impact of violent conflict on the well-being of women and girls, and to creating new opportunities for building the foundations of an equitable post-war society.

Question 2:

In what ways do the experiences of women from marginalised communities differ from those of women from more privileged backgrounds during times of war, and how can these differences inform our understanding of conflict dynamics?

Women are not a monolith. They have diverse needs, interests, views and identities that are shaped by socio-economic status, ethnicity, race, religion, age, geographic location, education and disability, among other social structures or categories of power. War exacerbates these pre-existing, intersecting inequalities and leads to different experiences during war. Women from higher class backgrounds or with relatives and networks in other countries are more likely to receive protection and diplomatic assistance to escape conflict zones. However, older widows, girls from minority ethnic or religious communities or women with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination and challenges, particularly in accessing food, shelter, fuel, health facilities, employment, education and other forms of humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation.

For example, Roma women and girls, already constrained by unemployment, poverty and lack of education, were the most vulnerable group in Ukraine following the eruption of the military conflict in the eastern part of the country in 2014 and the outbreak of full-scale war in February 2022. [Approximately 10% to 20% of Ukrainian Roma](#) do not have the personal documentation to confirm their citizenship and therefore face [segregation](#) and [denial of access](#) to neighbouring countries if they cannot prove their residency status.

Therefore, the planning and implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes must take into account pre-existing, overlapping dynamics of inequality and vulnerability. The international humanitarian response to conflict should be based on an integrated, inclusive approach that helps build the resilience and capacity of women and girls to cope with disruptions and emergencies during and after war. This integrated approach also includes addressing and creating opportunities for marginalised women to participate in conflict resolution, peace negotiations and peace-building processes. They should not only be given a seat at the peace negotiating table, but also a voice and influence during the negotiation and signing of a peace agreement and beyond.

Question 3:

What role do women play in peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts, and how can their participation be enhanced and supported at local, national, and international levels?

Sustainable peace can be promoted by building the relevant social, economic and political institutions that are capable of responding to the diverse security and development needs of society. As institutions are formed and function within a specific social context, their ability to respond to the diverse human security and development needs of citizens in post-conflict situations depends on the extent to which underlying unequal structures and power relations are transformed. In this regard, peacebuilding processes create windows of opportunity to transform pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities faced by women and girls by facilitating the representation of their perspectives, needs, interests and capacities in national and international policy-making spaces. When women are fully involved in decision-making, we see better outcomes for society, including economic growth and development, and longer-lasting peace and stability.

Research shows that when women are involved in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements, they have a much greater chance of success. [A study of 182 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011](#) found that there is a 20% increase in the probability of lasting at least 2 years and a 35% increase in the probability of lasting at least 15 years. [Peace agreements are 64% less likely to fail](#) when civil society organisations, including women’s organisations, are involved in the process.

However, progress towards participatory and inclusive peace processes has been slow. [Only 20% of the peace agreements](#) signed between 1990 and 2019 include references to the experiences of women and girls during conflict and their contributions during the post-war era. [Of 31 major peace processes and dialogues held between 1992 and 2011](#), only 4% of signatories, 2% chief mediators, 4% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators were women. [Of 18 peace agreements reached in 2022](#), only one was signed or witnessed by a representative of a women’s group or organisation. Colombia, where women reached near parity in the peace dialogue in 2022, remains the only positive exception. Among 5 UN-sponsored or co-sponsored peace processes in 2022, women’s representation stood at 16%, which was 19% in 2021 and 23% in 2020. Only 23% of parliamentarians and 20% of ministers are women in conflict-affected countries, both are below the global average.

The meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding is essentially a political process. It requires genuine political commitment at all levels of government to support women in peace and security and to take action to change discriminatory attitudes, power relations and structures. After all, national and international security can only be promoted through equal relations between men and women in society.