

Research Grant Proposal
Submitted to
Binghamton University Institute for Genocide and Mass Atrocity Prevention (I-GMAP)
December 15, 2017

Research Title: Sustaining and Strengthening Women’s-Based Non-Governmental Organizations as Prevention Tools in Post-Atrocity Societies: A Comparative Study of Colombia, Myanmar, and the Great Lakes Region of Africa

PI:

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Award Requested:

\$10,000

Project Description Linked to Award Criteria:

This proposal is for an extended research project of +/- 18 months, engaging a number of institutional partners in the academic and practitioner communities. The project is an international comparative case study of women-based non-governmental organizations (NGOs), organized in the aftermath of atrocity violence.

The primary questions the study will address are:

First: what role(s) do women’s-based, prevention-focused NGOs have in post-atrocity societies? How successful are they as contributions toward broader “downstream” efforts in post-atrocity societies to reduce the risk of recurrence of atrocity crimes? How visible and influential are they as civil society participants in transitional justice efforts, in programs that seek to hold both state and non-state perpetrators of atrocities accountable, in efforts to provide reparations and other post-violence services to victims and survivors?

Second: can a comparative study of the experiences, successes and challenges of differently situated women’s based NGOs help to identify a set of promising practices that would help to increase the efficiency and prolong the sustainability and lifespan of these organizations, and contribute to their outreach, influence and visibility?

Over the past decade, both atrocity prevention practitioners and governance bodies have come to understand far better the gendered nature of atrocity crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Women are disproportionately victimized in the context of such crimes: they are victims of gender and sex-linked atrocity crimes (rape and sexual assault, kidnapping for sexual slavery and “forced

marriage”). Frequently, legal inequality imposes disproportionate burdens in their efforts both to protect themselves from atrocity violence and to seek medical and psychological care, reparations, and other necessary services in the aftermath of atrocity. Often the precariousness of their economic status also makes them at disproportionate risk of extreme poverty, displacement and homelessness, and social isolation in the wake of atrocity crimes.

At the same time, a growing consensus has emerged that this gender-specific spectrum of disproportionate risks and vulnerabilities has extended to the broad exclusion of women’s voices from efforts to prevent or mitigate the risks of atrocity crimes. Women have been excluded from domestic, regional or international peace negotiations in cases of internal armed conflict, and their voices have been marginalized from the design and implementation of transitional justice or DDR initiatives. Gender-specific experiences of atrocity crimes, generally, have been neglected or underestimated in both government-based and civil society-based dialogues on how societies at risk of a recurrence of political violence can address and mitigate that risk.

Beginning in the new millennium, a series of United Nations resolutions over the past years attempted to articulate and express women’s disproportionate vulnerability to atrocity violence, and the widespread exclusion and marginalization of women’s voices from atrocity prevention and peacemaking. This series of measures, reports, studies and proclamations culminated in UN Resolution 1325 (2000), establishing a new legal and policy framework for Women, Peace and Security that identified specific forms of women’s and girls’ vulnerability to violations of international law, and clarified the shared goal of broader and more effective inclusion of women in peacemaking and “downstream” transitional justice programs.

Initiatives toward the implementation of UN 1325 have had a measurable impact in the international community’s recognition that women and gender-specific experiences must be far better included in national post-atrocity recovery. Even while the Women Peace and Security legal and policy framework has emerged as a consensus among a range of international actors – the United Nations and the larger, Northern based international NGOs – the effect on the ground of these large-scale initiatives remains difficult to assess. Civil society actors – in particular smaller, local or regional NGOs with more specific focus on national or local issues surrounding women’s vulnerability to atrocity violence – must play a principal role in operationalizing the framework, in providing a voice to women in post-atrocity contexts, in accessing contextual knowledge to understand specific needs and capacities, and in advocating for changed policies and practices with their own governments.

We know that such small, focused NGOs spring up in great number in the wake of large-scale political violence, and that these new civil society actors can have measurable positive effects on the overall outcomes for societies struggling to emerge from such crises. There is also evidence to show that such women’s based NGOs can

have a significant role in transforming the status of women in post-atrocity societies from that of vulnerable victim to that of engaged political agent and stakeholder in efforts to ensure the non-repetition of atrocity crimes. In fact one of the perhaps ironic aspects of the social upheaval and disruption of social experiences of large-scale political violence is that in its aftermath, women can often discover avenues and openings for increased social and political agency that might not have been open to them previously. Whether advocating for various transitional justice measures, for access to medical and psychological aid to victims and survivors, to enhanced social awareness of the prevalence of gender and sex-linked atrocity crimes, to demands for post-atrocity development to reduce the economic vulnerability of women, or lobbying government to demand accountability, this “pivot” from victim to agent is a crucial output of such smaller-scale national and local women’s-based NGOs.

At the same time, we also know that these NGOs often have relatively brief life spans. Their capacity to exert real and positive influence on the status of women in post-atrocity contexts is frequently limited by their relatively short duration. Many possible factors contributing to the lack of sustainability of these NGOs are shared by organizations with comparable mission and scope: founding members generally lack important organizational skills; funding streams cannot be secured; overly narrow mission statements can result in advocacy and lobbying efforts that are difficult to sustain as political and social conditions change; initial enthusiasm is inevitably depleted. But women’s based post-atrocity NGOs also may be limited by more gender-specific factors. Just as the disruption and upheaval of widespread political violence can often leave the civil society stage more open to women in its aftermath, offering increased opportunities for stepping outside of traditional assigned gender roles and into more visible and influential stakeholder roles, so the recovery and normalization of a society with conservative gender norms in the post-atrocity period can frequently constitute a re-imposition of those norms and expectations, with the result that women come under increased pressure to withdraw from their work as civil society actors.

Pressures on women’s-based NGO’s come from multiple sources: family and friends, civil society in general, specific social groups, and state actors. It ranges from subtle pressure to legal maneuvers, public shaming, and finally intimidation and the outright use of physical violence from assault and kidnapping to murder.

How can we best understand the shared experiences of women’s post-atrocity NGOs as they attempt to negotiate not only their common experiences of victimization, but also their shared ambition to pivot from victim to agent status in their national civil societies? How have such organizations contributed to larger non-recurrence efforts? How do they themselves attempt to assess the purpose, effects and influence of the civil society organizations that they create? What factors are most important for them in the design and mission of their organizations? What are their own perceptions of the resources and skills they draw on, or wish they could draw on, in order for these organizations to thrive? What do they see as the main driving factors that limit both the

influence and the sustainability of their organizations? What lessons have they drawn from their successes and failures? In what ways, and with what outcomes, have they explicitly addressed the gender-specific factors, from cultural expectations to lethal violence, limiting the sustainability and influence of their work?

What common themes emerge from such lessons from distinctly different national contexts? And finally, what if anything emerges as a set of most promising steps and practices that might help women in present and future NGO efforts to make their organizations both more sustainable and more influential?

The project will proceed in three stages.

- In the first, “quiet” stage, the PI(s), GA and staff will work to determine a definitive line up of academic and NGO partners. We will then collaborate on identifying and reaching out to smaller, women-based NGOs – or, in the case of no-longer operational NGOs, relevant individuals - in the 3 relevant locations, with a special interest in NGOs that have explicitly expressed non-recurrence of atrocity crimes as part of their mission statements. In collaboration with these NGOs, we will make arrangements for representatives of these NGOs to be interviewed, normally in person, about their stories, their work, their successes and failures, and their ideas for promising practices. Interviews can be conducted either by PI(s) or by doctoral researchers, either from Binghamton University or other research institutions (whether in the U.S. or elsewhere) whose thesis fieldwork would qualify and motivate them to assist us by conducting and recording the interviews and sending recordings, transcripts and their own notes to us. (In a separate budget line, we are requesting funds to pay doctoral researchers for their assistance.) By the end of this first phase, we hope to have both an emergent network of individuals and organizations, a growing body of information on their work and its potential influence, and a record of their experiences as they attempt to sustain the work of their NGOs over time. This phase will conclude with an initial workshop event at Binghamton University, involving our main academic and NGO partners, and including (probably via Skype) as many of our regional women’s-based NGO participants as possible.

- The second phase of the project consists of three workshops – held in Bogota, Kampala, and Bangkok – where the PI(s), Graduate Assistant, invited academic partners and (if available) doctoral researchers spend several days meeting with individuals representing NGOs. These workshops will be a way both to deepen and expand our understanding of their work and its outcomes, and to foster networking and comparing promising practices for the NGO members themselves. These workshop events are not understood as opportunities to offer NGOs and staff instruction or training, but rather to offer them a safe space and hosting for them to collaborate with one another, and for us to be witnesses and recorders of that collaboration. Each workshop will serve as the foundation

for a report that will be distributed to workshop participants, who will be invited Binghamton University, where the outcomes of the workshops can be compared, common themes, opportunities and problems, and promising practices common to them, identified and described. This final event will serve as the basis for both the planned academic output (a series of articles culminating in an academic volume) and policy output (a substantive policy paper). [It's important to note that the second phase of the project – the series of international workshops – represents the bulk of the project's budget. It would certainly be possible to think of an alternative project description in which these three workshops were not present, bringing the overall project budget to a level that could be funded with little or no contributions from foundation grants and other sources. While the proposal envisions an extremely important role for the international workshops – direct access of PI(s) to NGO representatives, opportunities for new and deeper narrative interviews, and networking and planning for the NGO's themselves – it should remain an option to proceed without them if appropriate funding can't be secured.]

- The third and final phase of the project is the production of both the academic and policy outputs, and plans for the publication of the first and the distribution and dissemination of the second. In addition there may be opportunities for follow-up events in order to enhance the visibility and effect of the policy paper.

Methodology

This project's methodological approach is primarily narrative. NGO representatives will be interviewed and will be asked to respond in depth to a series of prepared questions exploring the personal circumstances and experiences that led them to become involved in public advocacy; what relevant training or understanding of the organization, funding, activities, and accountability of NGOs they had or acquired; their narrative reconstruction of the processes in which the NGO was formed and populated, how it defined its mission and objectives, and what steps it took to pursue them; how they assess the overall successes and failures of the NGO's work, and – in cases where the NGO in question has ceased operation – what they see as the most significant factors contributing to the NGO's conclusion. The objective of these extended, in-depth interviews is to generate multiple, rich narrative accounts of differently situated experiences of women as they negotiate the transition from victims of mass atrocity to agents and stakeholders in reducing the risk of recurrence. We will be especially interested in question of how they understood the goal of promoting non-recurrence and what concrete steps their organization took as an actor for atrocity prevention; how the organization understood this goal in relation to the organization's other missions and objectives; how they personally understood their own status in the larger purpose of the NGOs work, its impact and influence; how they responded to organizational, financial, and political challenges; how they understood their role as public advocates and agents to increase the accountability of their governments; how their status as civil

society actors related to their self-understanding as women – as wives, mothers and daughters – and whether they were successful in their own view of negotiating potentially contradictory expectations from family members, friends, and others. In the case of no longer operational NGOs, we are particularly interested in whether individuals can identify what in their view were the chief contributing factors to the NGOs demise – lack of financial support, vagueness or over-narrowness of missions, lack of operational capacity and expertise, staffing issues and burnout, pushback from patriarchal cultural expectations and social norms.

These collected in-depth interviews should generate a body of narratives, as well as provide the basis for identifying common themes. Phase Two of the project – a series of workshops planned to bring NGO participants together to network, share experiences and compare notes, and plan future collaborations – will also be an opportunity to expand and deepen the narratives already collected, and reach out to un-interviewed individuals who attend, in order to add to the number of interviewees.

[In addition to this narrative approach, it may also be useful to contract with an independent operator to distribute, collect and analyze targeted surveys in the three study regions to attempt to assess the visibility and perception of the role and effects of some of these NGOs among a broader representative sample of the population. This component is still only a possibility and for this reason will not (yet) appear as a budget line item.]

Timeline

- Spring-Summer 2018: Quiet pre-launch phase. Focused consultation with academic and non-academic partners to identify and initiate contact with relevant NGOs and individual activists. Begin planning for opportunities for in-depth conversations with representatives of NGOs, both active and inactive. Develop questionnaires for narrative interviews and materials in consultation with academic partners. Begin planning for the 3 regional workshop events including logistics, transport, translation services where necessary, security, etc. Begin outreach to identify doctoral students preparing dissertation fieldwork who would be prepared to assist in identifying, contacting, and interviewing NGO representatives. Hire and provide preliminary training to project GA.
- October 2018: Launch event; inaugural workshop for project at Binghamton University. Hosting for some NGO and academic participants, with many others joining via Skype.
- February 2019: Regional Workshop I: Bogota
- July 2019: Regional Workshop II: Kampala

- November 2019: Regional Workshop III: Bangkok
- April 2020: Concluding Conference, Binghamton University.. Begin preparation of manuscript and sample chapter(s) for submission to academic presses. [Note: this 2020 concluding conference would also serve as I-GMAP’s annual conference. Depending on factors such as logistics, funding and availability of project partners and participants, it could either constitute the whole of the 2020 GMAP conference or as one special session of a larger meeting. In either case, some funding from GMAP would be available to assist with this concluding event.]
- April – October 2020: Production and dissemination of substantive policy paper; preparation and submission of academic outputs – edited volume, single-authored articles and book chapters; potential single-authored academic monograph; special edited section of academic journal.

Project Outputs

- Academic Output: The potential academic output for the project will be a series of scholarly articles and/or book chapters and either a single or jointly authored monograph. Another possibility would be a special edited section in an academic journal.
- Public Policy Output: A policy paper for wide distribution throughout GMAP’s network of NGO partners and other bodies including the UN, the USIP, USAID, and governmental agencies and offices both of the countries and regions concerned and elsewhere. The policy paper would be released publicly following the final Binghamton workshop.

Tentative Budget

Graduate Research Assistant	One-year position to assist with all aspects of project but especially with collecting qualitative data (assisting with survey, setting up and assisting with interviews, all aspects workshop coordination, etc	\$17,500
Doctoral Fieldwork	Outreach and recruit 2 or 3 doctoral students to assist	\$5,000 x 2 or 3 = \$10,000 - \$15,000

	with interviews and questionnaires, possibly participate in regional workshops	
Workshops	Travel for PI(s), travel support for NGO participants, local hosting, logistics, etc.	\$10,000 - \$15,000 x 3 = \$30,000 - \$45,000
Miscellaneous Expenses	Miscellaneous research overhead, translation services, logistics, hosting, incidental	\$5,000
TOTAL		\$62,500 - \$82,500

Additional Resources

- \$25,000 in hand from Ellyn Kaschak
- Planning stage for identifying an appropriate list of foundation grants to apply for. We envision submitting at least 6 applications for funding and possibly more depending on the outcome of this planning stage.
- Possibility that some departments and/or units on campus (Political Science, Sociology, Anthropology, TAEs, Harpur or CCPA Dean's or Provost's Office, Graduate School) might be willing to contribute in kind; for example, with partial support for the additional GA line; clerical or other service support, etc.
- It is also possible that the various academic and institutional partners that we may attract will be able to provide some additional support in the form of faculty hours, graduate research assistance, clerical and logistical support, etc. This should not be seen as a necessary source of funding but it will be important going forward to work with potential partners in a way that they are open to contributing with some in-kind resources.

The in-hand funding of \$25,000 could be used to cover the costs of a dedicated GA if no in-kind funding from University sources is available, with funds left over to cover some travel and incidentals. In the event that funding for the GA position can be secured internally, this funding would be applied to the costs of the regional workshops. A grant of \$10,000 from I-GMAP could be used to cover most or all of the costs of employing 2-3 Binghamton or external doctoral students to assist in the fieldwork preparatory to the 3 planned regional workshops. The bulk of the tentative budget, for the remaining costs of the regional workshops, would need to be raised from foundation grants.

Existing Literature

The question of assessing the prospects and impact of women's-based NGOs in post-atrocity contexts has been previously explored, though not extensively and not very recently. A series of studies directed by Krishna Kumar (2000, 2001), overseen by USAID, studied the role of such organizations in post-atrocity Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Cambodia, with the specific goal of identifying where US aid either in funds or training and other services would be most effective in enhancing sustainability of these organizations. The project will draw on this earlier work and will reach out to USAID for possible collaboration. At the same time, this existing literature is now nearly 20 years old, and has a very different methodology.

Statement of Agreement with Terms of Award

Understood and accepted. At each stage of the project the PI(s) will update and inform GMAP and provide appropriate public materials as available. The project will be reflected in the Institute's publicity materials including any op-ed pieces under the Institute's signature. All citations will reference the Institute as the primary institutional site and host for the project.

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