Women entrepreneurs have the ability to reunite war-torn communities through social and economic growth.

Evidence suggests that including women in peacebuilding improves efforts to reduce conflict and encourage peace. Similarly, evidence shows that supporting women entrepreneurs has a positive effect on economic growth. Recently, new peacebuilding practices involving social entrepreneurship have come to light, but like other methods for peace, they are not yet gender-inclusive.

As of now, few peacebuilding organizations are actively pursuing the social enterprise model as a methodology for creating peace. The goal of this paper is to illuminate existing peace and gender-based social enterprise efforts, advocate for social enterprise as a powerful peacebuilding tool, and elucidate how gender-focused social entrepreneurship can contribute to peace. Additionally, this paper will provide recommendations for including women in social entrepreneurship programs as a tool for peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding & Social Entrepreneurship

A review of the literature finds two primary mechanisms through which social enterprise encourages peace. First, entrepreneurs have a vested interest in maintaining peace as conflict poses a threat to their business operations. Second, entrepreneurship has the potential to foster new connections that can bridge divides created or exacerbated by conflict.

Social enterprise is generally understood to mean business and innovation which aims higher than just profit-creation. Businesses within the social enterprise model aspire to make the world better through their market ventures. This new business model has the potential to foster peace not only through innovative business solutions, but by forging new connections through the market.

Many peacebuilding experts and organizations have discussed the potential of social enterprise to aid peacebuilding processes, highlighting the ability of business to provide people in conflict-prone areas with a common (economic) goal. Promoting social cohesion through business while also improving economic opportunities can go a long way in creating sustainable peace, and the social enterprise model is an auspicious vessel. Unlike other peacebuilding tools which focus on dialogue, social enterprise provides a tangible reward for collaboration: profit.

Women & Economically-driven Peacebuilding

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) ‘...calls for equal participation by women in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and for the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into conflict prevention, peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction’.2

In 2010, the UN Secretary General published a report analyzing women’s participation in peace processes to assess the impact of resolution 1325. This report centered on a 7-Point Action Plan to better involve women in peacebuilding

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activities. The final point of this plan centers on economic recovery and posits that women’s involvement in post-conflict economic development is crucial and as such, women should be a target group for employment in job creation programs. The report cites analyses that indicate women’s economic empowerment is just as efficient as men’s economic empowerment in negating conflict, and therefore efforts should be made to make resource provision more equal and to promote women’s economic involvement.

**Women & Social Entrepreneurship**

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5.5 ‘calls for ensuring women’s full and effective participation in political, economic and public life.’ Too often, women’s economic participation is siloed into microcredit schemes which can fall short when investment opportunities do not exist. Additionally, rather than only reduce poverty, microcredit mostly helps smooth consumption. These models are criticized for their narrow scope and inability to challenge structural exclusion and perpetuation of gender norms which subordinate women.

Social enterprise has the potential to empower women through innovative business models that depart from the accepted norms of microfinance. Social enterprise challenges existing models and structures and aims to change society through innovation. Including women would not only empower women, it would tap into a demographic of entrepreneurs that are often overlooked.

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**Organizations Promoting Women Social Entrepreneurs**

**Aware Girls**

Aware Girls is an organization which works toward empowerment, equality and peace in Pakistan. Their program ‘Economically Empowering Young Women of Slums’ is a micro-entrepreneurship-centered intervention in Peshawar, Pakistan, a conflict-prone region and thus has important implications for peacebuilding efforts.

**Kate Spade & Company and Abahizi Dushyigikirane, Ltd. (ADC)**

After the conflict/genocide in 1994, Rwandan society has been making concerted efforts to both rebuild and reconcile. In 2013, Kate Spade & Company made a social enterprise investment in Masoro which incorporated local women into the company’s supply chain. Kate Spade selected 150 artisans and assisted in the creation of Abahizi Dushyigikirane, Ltd. which acts as an independent supplier to Kate Spade. Many women report economic and social improvements for themselves and their households, aiding Rwanda as it recovers from conflict.

**Two Neighbors**

Founded by Adeem Amro and Segal Kirsch, with support from the Center for Emerging Futures, the Two Neighbors initiative brings women together from both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to both support women and encourage peace in the region. The beautiful garments created are a manifestation of the partnership forged between Israeli seamstresses and Palestinian embroiderers. Though small, this initiative provides hope that these two societies can come together in peace one day.

**Women’s Peace Collection**

The Women’s Peace Collection invests in women as a means of supporting peace. The organization partners with artisans around the world and provides a unified platform for them to sell their handcrafted products (jewelry, accessories, home décor, etc.).

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6 Kelli Rogers, Devex, “What it will take to enter a new era of women’s economic empowerment”, March 2018.
Case Studies: Social Enterprise by Women and Social Enterprise for Women

Specialty Coffee in Rwanda

The Rwandan genocide pitted neighbor against neighbor in a harrowing conflict between the Hutus and Tutsis. At the close of the conflict, Rwandans had to come to terms with their experiences of violence and repair a country left devastated by war. To aid recovery, the Rwandan government embraced neoliberal trade policies and actively invested in sectors deemed most promising for income-generation. Specialty coffee rose from the ashes as the key to Rwanda’s post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction efforts.

Historically, most coffee farmers in Rwanda were smallholders, and to be successful in the global markets, many joined cooperatives to benefit from ‘economies of scale’ whereby as a sector grows its costs diminish. Cooperatives brought together both Hutu and Tutsi coffee growers, and encouraged them to work cooperatively to make a profit.

Coffee cooperatives in Rwanda were huge post-conflict successes both economically and socially. By investing in better quality coffee and banding together in cooperatives, farmers became more competitive in the global market, and Rwandan coffee rose to the top. On the other hand, through cooperation, coffee growers were emboldened to reconcile with those they had once fought and feared.

A revolutionary aspect of Rwanda’s coffee success is the fact that a large portion of these new coffee farmers are ‘genocide widows and orphans’. In fact, many cooperatives and businesses are run by women, for women. For example, Hingakawa Women’s Coffee is part of the Abakundakawa Coffee Cooperative and brings together Hutu and Tutsi women to fight against their common enemy: poverty. Though the coffee cooperatives were extremely successful on their own, the gender-dimension empowered women by allowing them to interact with other women who were similarly affected by the conflict. Reconciliation would not have been feasible without women’s participation, as they were often the ones left to deal with the fallout of the war without their husbands, fathers, and sons.

Business Council for Peace Fast Runners

The Business Council for Peace (Bpeace) currently has projects in Afghanistan, El Salvador and Guatemala and is launching a project in Lebanon in 2018 targeting Syrian refugees. Bpeace’s business model recognizes certain shortcomings on the part of most capital investors: women are powerful, and so are small- and medium-enterprises (SMEs). This association of skilled businesspeople assist women in conflict-affected areas by providing the knowledge and tools necessary for creating and growing their businesses. Bpeace’s model centers on what they term ‘Fast Runners’. These Fast Runners are women who have been selected based on their potential to grow quickly.

One Fast Runner in Afghanistan, Latifa, dreamt of rebuilding her war-torn community by creating jobs for widows through a kitchen accessory company (Kitchen Kween). Latifa recognized that many people in her community needed new kitchen accessories, but also that many women needed jobs. Her innovative enterprise addressed both needs simultaneously and helped a broken community put itself back together. By investing in Latifa, Bpeace invested in the women she hired, their children, and the small community Latifa was helping to rebuild. Investing in women entrepreneurs has the potential to create and sustain peace, and as such should not be overlooked as a powerful tool for peacebuilding organizations.

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8 Ibid, page 11.
Recommendations

The use of the social enterprise model is becoming more widespread in the international development community. However, it should also be considered as a tool for peace more often within the peacebuilding community. This model has the potential to bring people together and provide tangible rewards for cooperation while also addressing important conditions which make countries more vulnerable to and exacerbate conflict, namely, feelings of relative deprivation informed by economic- and gender-related horizontal inequalities.¹²

Though social enterprise for peacebuilding is a relatively new phenomenon, evidence on the importance of women’s involvement in both peacebuilding and social entrepreneurship is not. Women must not be forgotten. These cases provide examples of the potential for this sort of programming that is not only inclusive of, but built upon women and their abilities. Peace practitioners must build upon these successes and:

- Increase research efforts on the potential benefits of a social enterprise model for peacebuilding, and ensure such research includes a gender analysis component.
- Implement M&E plans for existing social enterprise efforts to advance peace. More effort needs to be made to monitor and evaluate these small-scale and local-level initiatives to determine the scale-up potential.
- Expand women’s participation in social enterprise beyond micro-finance. Micro-finance, though based on group lending, does not necessarily encourage cooperation.
- Support existing social entrepreneurs.