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WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ARISING FROM VIOLENT CONFLICT AND RECOVERY

LIFE STORIES FROM FOUR MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Drawing on the World Bank's Moving Out of Poverty dataset, this study explores the life stories of 125 women who have lived through violent political conflict in four middle-income countries.[1] The report attempts to qualitatively assess the factors shaping women's empowerment and community recovery after conflict in order to support broad recommendations for interventions in the post-conflict period.

Two key findings emerged. First, the women living in communities directly affected by violent political conflict rated more highly on empowerment measures than the women living in communities that did not experience conflict. Second, once the violence drew to a close, the set of conflict-affected communities that experienced the most rapid recovery and poverty reduction were also characterized by more empowered women than the set of conflict-affected communities with lower rates of poverty reduction.

The life stories reveal that conflict and recovery, while bringing great suffering, also presented new opportunities for many women as traditional local structures, livelihoods, and gender norms were disrupted. During periods of violence, many women helped their households cope by diversifying and intensifying their economic activities. In the aftermath, they often continued to play more active economic roles as they struggled to recover and rebuild. In some cases, effective post-conflict reconstruction and development interventions created new opportunities for women to improve their livelihoods, access finance, join new groups, and, more rarely, become politically engaged. In these ways, women often gained more independence and contributed actively to the recovery of their families and communities.

A subset of conflict communities experienced especially rapid and widespread poverty reduction and displayed numerous empowered women. North Maluku, Indonesia, was the conflict region with the highest rates of poverty reduction and women's empowerment of any in the sample. In addition, in each of the study countries the analysis highlights one conflict community that stood out for its high ratings of poverty reduction and women's empowerment in the wake of conflict. This subset of communities enjoyed reasonable levels of local security, access to active markets, and local governance that was adequate to attract and make good use of post-conflict aid.

Post-conflict recovery periods offer a rare opportunity to accelerate local development and strengthen women's agency because of the shock to local structures, including gender structures and norms, and because of people's determination to rebuild their lives once peace returns. Similar forces may be in effect for recovery from other covariate shocks. There is therefore **a window for programming interventions that build on these positive but time-limited forces.** Many of the interventions that can help women in post-conflict communities are also good

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[1] Moving Out of Poverty was a World Bank research program published in four volumes. The study explored mobility from the perspectives of people in more than 500 communities in 15 countries. This report builds on the final volume by Deepa Narayan and Patti Petesch, *Moving Out of Poverty: Rising from the Ashes of Conflict*, which examined conflict and recovery processes in seven countries.

practice in other settings, but they may have greater payoff in the more fluid environment of a community emerging from war.

Based on the findings, the report calls for stronger policy attention in five areas:

- Establish and maintain local security
- Support women's accumulation and independent control of major assets
- Build connectivity to active markets and strengthen women's economic participation
- Make women's empowerment and community participation cornerstones of post-conflict reconstruction and development programs
- Strengthen the contribution of long-term social assistance programs to gender equality and post-conflict recovery

Study context

The study period spans approximately 1995 to 2005, and the sample covers 37 communities in four countries that were affected by violent intrastate conflict:

1. **Colombia:** 8 communities across 5 departments of the country
2. **Indonesia:** 10 communities of North Maluku and East Java
3. **Philippines:** 10 communities of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
4. **Sri Lanka:** 9 communities of the Eastern, Northern, and Southern Provinces

The three Asian countries experienced a sharp reduction or complete cessation of violence in the later years of the study period. By contrast, Colombia endured low-intensity conflict and high levels of population displacement throughout the decade as diverse armed groups and government forces battled for control.

Methodology

The research applies a conceptual framework that defines empowerment as the interaction between women's agency and the opportunity structures present in their communities. The life story interview method features a set of open-ended questions in five thematic areas: migration history; occupational history; economic history; social, cultural, and psychological history; and education. Empowerment ratings were assigned to each life story based on the respondent's perception of control in key areas of her life. For a woman to attain a rating of "substantially empowered," she had to indicate that she exercised independent control in at least three of the following areas: (a) education, (b) work, (c) marriage and childbearing, (d) nonfamily friendships, (e) membership in a local group, or (f) political engagement.

The analysis of community mobility (i.e., poverty reduction or lack of it) is based on subjective measures that are derived from a focus group activity entitled Ladder of Life. Mobility is measured by charting the movements of households over the study decade up and down the steps of a figurative ladder, with the steps depicting the different well-being groups in the community and their characteristics.

While the available sample size and data are limited due to the original objectives of the Moving Out of Poverty research program, the large body of life stories and community data is qualitatively rich and detailed. It is hoped that the study findings will inspire additional qualitative and quantitative research on the relationships between women's empowerment and local conflict and recovery processes.

Main findings and recommendations

More women interviewed in the conflict-affected communities (69 percent) received ratings of "substantially empowered" than women interviewed in communities that were not directly affected by conflict (52 percent). Overall, women in the Philippines and Indonesia received the highest empowerment ratings, followed at some distance by those in Colombia and Sri Lanka.

The report identifies commonalities and differences across the four countries in the women's assets and capabilities that underpin the empowerment ratings. Assets and capabilities are the resources that women can potentially mobilize independently, or in collaboration with others, to exercise agency and pursue their interests. These assets and capabilities are examined along five broad dimensions: education, physical assets, livelihoods, psychological well-being and family harmony, and social capital. The dataset is too small to allow strong conclusions on which dimensions of women's agency may be most important for women's empowerment, although differences in the women's physical assets stood out in this sample.

Most women had little education and had worked during childhood. As adults, a large majority were economically active, mainly in agricultural and informal nonfarm work. Generally, they described their family life as harmonious and supportive, and quite a few mentioned participating in at least one community group.

Women from the Philippines were the most educated, controlled the most assets, enjoyed the most respect and support in their families, and displayed the most advantageous social capital. In Indonesia, women's lives often took a turn for the better when they inherited family property. The Colombian women stood out for their civic engagement, but also for their reports of household conflict and reduced economic participation after their forced displacement to insecure and impoverished urban barrios. The Sri Lankan women were the least likely to participate in the formal economy or civic networks, because of gender norms and poor security and economic conditions, but many received family remittances.

Major assets. Women's access to land and houses through dowry practices in the Philippines, and inheritance practices in both the Philippines and Indonesia, distinguished these countries from the other two. Women in both these countries reported that such assets provided them with security, independence, productive capital, and resilience in the face of conflict and other shocks in their lives. Post-conflict housing and resettlement programs provide rare opportunities to reduce the large gender inequalities in ownership of major assets, particularly if they provide women title to land or housing.

Invest in women's accumulation and control of major assets. In the context of post-conflict housing and resettlement programs, support joint titling (or sole titling where women head households). Where women own major assets, enhance their security and productivity by formalizing their titles and providing access to formal financial systems.

Livelihood diversification. Women often intensified or diversified their livelihood activities both during and after periods of conflict. Because tending crops and livestock in open fields was often too dangerous during conflict periods, many households resorted to informal street vending and other nonfarm activities. In some contexts, it was easier for women to work because they were not the primary targets of violence. In addition, women were often more willing than men to engage in low-paying livelihoods in times of stress. Men in rural areas sometimes worked in local construction or taxi jobs, or they migrated away to seek work. For both women and men, these coping strategies during conflict periods brought new skills and experiences, and for some women, more independence.

As conflict eased and recovery began, many women had difficulty resuming their farming and livestock ventures. Often they could not access services and resources to make agriculture more productive. Building on experience gained during the conflict period, many increased their participation in informal sector work. Where available, post-conflict programs in infrastructure development, microcredit, and training also encouraged women to increase their economic initiatives. New electricity, water, and roads eased housework burdens and opened up new livelihoods, such as selling cold drinks and prepared foods. Many households that had relied on agriculture were able to diversify and, in some cases, move out of poverty as a result. At the same time, a range of problems on the ground—continued insecurity, weak post-conflict markets, intense competition among informal workers, and interventions poorly tailored to local conditions—limited the gains.

Support women's access to remunerative income sources. Provide women access to services and resources to make farming and livestock raising, core rural economic activities, more productive. Provide specialized technical and financial support to enable women to develop profitable economic ventures in the nonfarm sector and access active markets.

Social capital. Social networks can provide access to information, ideas, connections, and material or financial resources. In post-conflict environments where formal institutions are weak, social capital can be critical for women's inclusion in social and economic recovery. However, women's networks are typically small, informal, and oriented to daily coping and voluntary community activities. Thus they rarely serve as a springboard for access to new opportunities without interventions to strengthen their capacities and ties to resources outside the community.

The Colombian women were the most likely to belong to a formal group (74 percent). Women in Colombia generally spoke highly of the training, counseling,

and enterprise development services they had received, which built skills and solidarity and provided emotional support. However, they reported limited economic benefits from their participation in the schemes.

In the three Asian countries, women engaged in informal rotating credit groups or religious groups. Some women in the Philippines were active in local politics, and many enjoyed political connections that helped them access jobs, entitlements, and cash to cope with household emergencies.

In all four countries, some women joined new self-help credit groups sponsored by public agencies, NGOs, or international donors. However, numerous women in each country did not belong to any formal group. Rather than emphasizing participation in local groups or politics, women across the countries more often stressed the importance of their friendships and informal community ties.

POST-CONFLICT PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITY

Invest in women's collective action and political engagement. Make sure that training and self-help initiatives are tailored to women's needs, economic opportunities, and constraints, and build the capacities for these local groups to connect with better-resourced networks beyond their communities. Opportunities for women's collective action vary greatly across countries and communities, as well as among different socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and caste groups of women. Also take steps to enhance women's local political inclusion through strategies such as gender quotas and investments in partnerships between grassroots women's groups and women's advocacy and support networks at the national and global levels.

Local community structures. Some communities in the study featured high levels of women's empowerment and surprisingly rapid poverty reduction in the years after conflict, and the report draws lessons from these contexts. For a short while in the aftermath of violence, local politics is shaken up. Leaders look for ways to rebuild their legitimacy, access reconstruction aid from outside agencies, tamp down local violence, and reestablish community cohesion. Given the weakness of the private sector in most conflict contexts, local leaders' capacity to direct post-conflict resources to different groups in the community, including women, was often critical for maintaining local security and catalyzing broad-based, fast recovery.

Overall, the conflict communities that experienced the most rapid poverty reduction were also the communities where women received higher empowerment ratings. In high-mobility conflict communities, 73 percent of women were rated as substantially empowered, compared to 65 percent in low-mobility communities. In the exceptional communities that featured high levels of both poverty reduction and women's empowerment, local contexts shared the following characteristics: (a) enough **security** to contain local lawlessness; (b) access to **active markets**, albeit on unequal terms for women; and (c) **adequate governance** to attract and make good use of post-conflict aid, although some corruption persisted.

Local people in North Maluku reported considerably more poverty reduction than people in the other three conflict regions sampled, and its five conflict communities also registered very high levels of women's empowerment. After a brief period of conflict, the province enjoyed peace, strong economic growth, reasonably capable and responsive local governance, and generous, well-designed, and locally directed aid

programs. Notably, much of the post-conflict aid that poured into North Maluku was programmed by local institutions. Decisions on use of substantial funds were decentralized to community groups, including groups composed solely of women.

In communities with less evidence of poverty reduction and women's empowerment, ongoing violence impeded women's recovery initiatives. Women also frequently reported that local interventions—including some alleged to be participatory and targeted to women—provided few economic benefits. Minority groups and communities also reported less access to post-conflict aid. Poor widows, and especially those with young children, emerged as a particularly vulnerable population group.

POST-CONFLICT PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES

Support rapid and inclusive community recovery by investing in
- local security, with emergency measures to protect women where law and order cannot be established;
- women's access to active markets, including through road and transport projects;
- community-driven reconstruction and development schemes, with measures to ensure women's meaningful participation; and
- comprehensive social assistance, especially for poor widows and minority population groups.

Conclusion

The forces unleashed by conflict and recovery processes may provide moments in history when it is easier for women to forge new pathways for themselves and their families. Shocks to local institutions and structures, including gender norms and roles, may sometimes provide women wider space for action. Women may be exposed to new ideas and skills while displaced and then propelled into new interactions with local public, market, and civic institutions during recovery. New infrastructure built through post-conflict aid may lighten their household burdens and open up opportunities to pursue better livelihoods. Nevertheless, the post-conflict experiences of women and their communities vary widely. Further research is needed on the conditions that may foster women's empowerment and poverty reduction, and on the most promising interventions for building on this momentum.

The report outlines a broad set of entry points for policies and programs that can advance women's empowerment and inclusive recovery processes in communities emerging from violent conflict. Some of these interventions are also needed in nonconflict communities, because many of the barriers to women's economic, social, and political participation are widely present. But the post-conflict period offers a rare window of opportunity that should not be ignored.

This is not only a matter of improving the lives of women. Communities with more empowered women also enjoyed more rapid recovery and poverty reduction in the wake of conflict. For contexts with deeply exclusionary opportunity structures, women require more extensive investments and external partners who will stand by them, because shifting power structures is difficult to do in the best of circumstances. Post-conflict environments, nevertheless, can present promising entry points for undertaking this work.

INTRODUCTION

Violent political conflicts pose severe risks for women. This is especially true of recent conflicts, because they overwhelmingly target civilian populations. However, wars also create opportunities for women to break down gender barriers and assume new roles in their societies. In some cases this is temporary, and there is an eventual return to prewar gender roles, but in other cases the clock is never turned back fully.

This investigation is based on the life stories of 125 women in four conflict-affected countries: Colombia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.[1] All are middle-income economies. Overall, the analysis finds that the women living in communities directly affected by conflict rated more highly on empowerment measures than the women living in peaceful communities.[2] While violence brought great horror and suffering, the conflict and recovery periods also provided new opportunities for many women. To investigate these processes, this research applies a conceptual framework that defines empowerment as the interaction between the women's agency and the opportunity structures present in their communities. The first half of the paper explores dimensions of agency associated with rising women's empowerment, and the second half focuses on the community-level factors behind empowerment processes.

Overall, women in the Philippines and Indonesia received the highest empowerment ratings, followed at some distance by those in Colombia and Sri Lanka. The report identifies many commonalities but also important differences across the four countries in the assets and capabilities that underpin the empowerment ratings. Most women had little education, and significant numbers had worked during childhood. As adults, a large majority were economically active, mainly moving in and out of agricultural and informal nonfarm work, depending on needs and opportunities. Generally, they described their family life as harmonious and supportive, and quite a few mentioned participating in at least one community group.

Women from the Philippines were the most educated, controlled the most assets, enjoyed the most respect and support in their families, and displayed the most advantageous social capital. In Indonesia, women's lives often took a turn for the better when they inherited family property. The Colombian women stood out for their civic engagement, but also for their reports of household conflict and reduced economic participation after their forced displacement to insecure and impoverished urban barrios. The Sri Lankan women were the least likely to participate in the formal economy or civic networks, because of gender norms and poor security and economic conditions, but many received family remittances.

The report's examination of local opportunity structures focuses on four communities, one in each country, that experienced high levels of women's empowerment along with high levels of poverty reduction in the aftermath of conflict. The analysis finds important commonalities across these local contexts. All four communities featured a reasonable level of security where conflicts had wound down (they had not in Colombia), access to active markets, and sufficiently good local governance to support community recovery and attract post-conflict aid. In the region of North Maluku in Indonesia, peace, strong economic growth, and generous, multisectoral, and participatory aid programs played key roles in fueling the highest

overall levels of women's empowerment and poverty reduction found in the four countries.

Overall, the set of communities characterized by more empowered women also experienced more poverty reduction. Where they could access opportunities, women made a difference in their own lives and in the well-being of their families and communities.

Violent conflict should certainly not be seen as a preferred pathway to women's empowerment and poverty reduction. But post-conflict recovery periods can offer a rare opportunity to accelerate local development and strengthen women's agency because of the shock of conflict to local structures, including gender structures and norms, and because of people's determination to rebuild their lives once peace returns. Through a rich dataset of life stories embedded in detailed community-level information, this report examines the individual assets and capabilities as well as the community-level factors associated with women's empowerment in the wake of conflict. The concluding section suggests promising areas for policies to build on this momentum.

PART 1. STUDY TOPIC AND APPROACH

The study seeks seeks to contribute to the limited but growing literature on gender and conflict. It sets out to improve our understanding of two sets of factors: those that shape women's agency in conflict regions, on the one hand, and those that shape the local opportunity structures facing women in these regions, on the other. The analysis draws on a large and rich life story dataset from four conflict-affected countries, part of the World Bank's Moving Out of Poverty dataset covering 15 countries across the developing world. The findings presented are based on systematic exploration and comparison of factors and processes affecting 125 women's lives between 1995 to 2005, a period when a majority of their communities were directly affected by violent conflict.

Part 1 opens with a brief review of the cross-country literature on gender and conflict. It then presents the four-country sample and conflict measures used in the analysis. A final section defines the empowerment and mobility concepts and measures that frame the report's comparative analysis, and describes the life story method and sample.

The comparative literature on gender and conflict

Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's application of economic approaches to the comparative study of conflict triggered a large multidisciplinary debate on the relative importance of economic development and lootable resources to the onset and duration of war, and later to durable peace (Collier and Hoeffler 1998, 2004; Collier 2009). Gender concerns, however, have been absent from this important evolving discourse (see Arnson 2005 for a useful review) and from almost every other conflict analysis as well.[3] An emerging cross-country literature on gender and conflict is making valuable contributions to the understanding of war and its aftermath. Much of this work applies a gender lens to common topics in the conflict literature, such as the causes of war, reasons for variations in violence, and the role of social capital. Women's economic roles during and after war, however, are still understudied.

Mary Caprioli (2003) provides evidence that gender inequality significantly increases the risk of conflict; among other findings, countries with high fertility rates are more than twice as likely as others to experience conflict. Earlier, Caprioli and Boyer (2001) found a strong link between gender inequality and the severity of violence in a crisis. Wood (2006) and Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz (2007) document extensive and varied forms of wartime gender-based violence across countries, and Wood posits a framework to explain the variation that assigns importance to whether an armed group's leadership and hierarchy discourage or encourage violence against women. Moser and McIlwaine (2001) apply social capital concepts in their in-depth study of local-level institutions in 18 poor urban settlements in Colombia and Guatemala. People across the settlements reported low levels of trust and cooperation due to the presence of diverse forms of violence; however, among the membership organizations present, groups dominated by women were the most trusted in Colombia and among the most trusted in Guatemala.

Few cross-country studies have looked systematically at the gender dimensions of the consequences of war, but the available literature finds significant variations and

ambiguities across the different domains of women's lives, across countries, and across urban and rural contexts. El-Bushra and Sahl (2005) provide a rich comparative study of the impact of war on gender relations in five communities, each from a different conflict-affected country in Africa. In all five cases, war reduced men's economic roles while "propelling women into greater economic activity" (87). The authors conclude that this shift often gave women somewhat more authority in their homes, but usually not in the wider community. There was also some variation between the sample communities, with, for example, better-off urban women in Somalia able to make more economic advances than the women studied in Mali.

A six-country study by Krishna Kumar (2001) on the effects of war on women also found higher rates of female economic participation, mainly in agriculture and the informal economy. In many contexts, the lack of men in the labor force created new opportunities for women, for instance in textile factories, construction, and salt and rubber production in Cambodia. However, in the difficult post-conflict period, many female workers lost formal sector jobs as their economies struggled, combatants returned, and, in some case study countries, state-owned enterprises were privatized. Unlike El-Bushra and Sahl, Kumar found significant increases in women's political participation and collective action across the case study countries during the war, followed by a retreat from public life as men reasserted authority and women withdrew from shouldering heavy public burdens due to stress and fatigue. Where women's civic engagement persisted after the war, Kumar traces this to a more supportive political climate, the growth of women's organizations, and increased international assistance from donors and women's networks.

Brück and Vothknecht, in their review of studies assessing women's status in post-conflict settings, conclude that the data are ambiguous on the extent to which greater gender equality can emerge and be sustained in the aftermath of war. They surmise that ongoing insecurity and high levels of domestic violence "seem to be decisive factors in the post-conflict rollback of women's wartime gains and the return to prewar gender roles" (2007, 1).

The war context and community sample

This report assesses the consequences of violent intrastate conflict for women in four countries.[4] The observation period for the data collection roughly spans 1995 to 2005, and the regions covered in all four countries experienced significant periods of violence at different times during this decade. In Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, the conflict-affected areas under study all benefited from a sharp reduction or complete cessation of political violence during the later years of the study period, with North Maluku, Indonesia, enjoying full peace after mid-2000. By contrast, Colombia endured protracted low-intensity conflict, high levels of population displacement, and ongoing insecurity throughout the study decade.

Box 1 provides a brief introduction to the conflicts. In Indonesia, the violence was intense but relatively short-lived; in the other three countries, conflict continued for years if not decades, exacting an enormous toll. All of the conflicts except for Colombia's engaged the aspirations of minority ethnic or religious groups.

Box 1. Overview of country conflicts

Colombia

The armed conflict in Colombia dates back to at least 1964, with guerrillas of the FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) and ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional) rising up from the Liberal and Communist parties. Both operated in sparsely settled regions with a weak state presence. Right-wing paramilitary and drug-trafficking organizations also inflict violence on civilians and battle with other armed groups.

Indonesia

In Indonesia, religious and ethnic conflict erupted in North Maluku in August 1999 and lasted until the end of June 2000. The fighting was largely between local groups of Muslims and Christians, although clashes between Muslim groups also occurred.

Philippines

In the south of Mindanao, an island in the Philippines, armed groups including the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), and Abu Sayyaf have waged a battle to create a separate Muslim homeland. The MNLF launched the secessionist conflict in the late 1960s and participated in peace talks that resulted in creation of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) began waging a secessionist struggle in 1983 from bases in the north and east of the country. At the time the study was conducted in late 2005, a cease-fire was quickly breaking down. In 2006 the government launched a major offensive that concluded in victory over the LTTE in 2009, after high civilian casualties and the displacement of thousands to refugee camps. There was also a period of violent conflict between a Marxist revolutionary group and the government in 1989–91.

Source: Adapted from Narayan and Petesch 2010, 9.

Within countries, the sample was selected to include regions and communities with varied levels of conflict and economic growth. The 26 conflict-affected study communities represent the primary units of analysis for the comparative analysis of local opportunity structures in part 4. Since most of the conflicts were waged in remote regions, the sample is heavily rural. The exception is Colombia, where in addition to two villages, the sample covers six barrios (urban neighborhoods) with large populations of internally displaced people who had fled war-torn rural areas. Most of the barrios struggled with diverse forms of political and local violence.

The communities were selected purposively, and thus the sample cannot be considered nationally representative. However, care was taken to select communities that were representative of their region's growth and conflict contexts, using the best information available. To be rated as a "conflict community," the community had to experience violence that was (a) between armed groups fighting for political power, and (b) of sufficient severity to cause mass displacement or deaths and major property destruction. Problems of everyday crime and violence, including organized violence

related to illegal drugs or resource extraction, were widespread in the conflict and nonconflict communities alike; however, the presence of this type of violence alone was not sufficient for a community to receive a conflict rating in this analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1. Community sample, by country and conflict context

COUNTRY	REGIONS	CONFLICT COMMUNITIES	NONCONFLICT COMMUNITIES	TOTAL COMMUNITIES
Colombia	6 barrios,[a] 2 conflict villages	6	2	8
Indonesia	North Maluku and East Java	5	5	10
Philippines	ARMM region of Mindanao	10	0	10
Sri Lanka	Northern, Eastern, and Southern provinces	5	4	9
Total		26	11	37

a. In addition to the war-displaced populations present in all six study barrios in Colombia, deaths, disappearances, and death threats attributed to actors associated with the armed groups were reported in four of the barrios. For further information, see Petesch and Gray (2010).

Measuring empowerment and mobility from below

The analysis gives primacy to the women's own interpretations of the reasons for the ups and downs in their well-being over the course of their lives. Before the findings can be presented, the concepts of empowerment and mobility need to be defined. Both concepts are complex and dynamic, and they intersect in significant ways. (For a more detailed discussion, see the methodology note in the annex.)

The study's analytic approach is informed by concepts of empowerment, agency, and opportunity structure. The framework conceives of empowerment as a product of the interaction between, on the one hand, *agency*, or the capacities of individuals and groups to make purposeful choices, and on the other hand, *opportunity structures*, or the dominant norms and structures that shape social life. Opportunity structures affect the likelihood that agency will be exercised and achieve favorable outcomes. Figure 1 presents a model of the framework that focuses on communities and women's empowerment processes.[5] The figure highlights different dimensions of agency and opportunity structures that affect whether women, and the formal and informal networks to which they belong, are able to influence development processes and outcomes. Although it is challenging to separate the two sides because of the tight interactions between them, part 3 of the report focuses on the right-hand side of the model, and part 4 on the left.

Figure 1. Community-level empowerment processes

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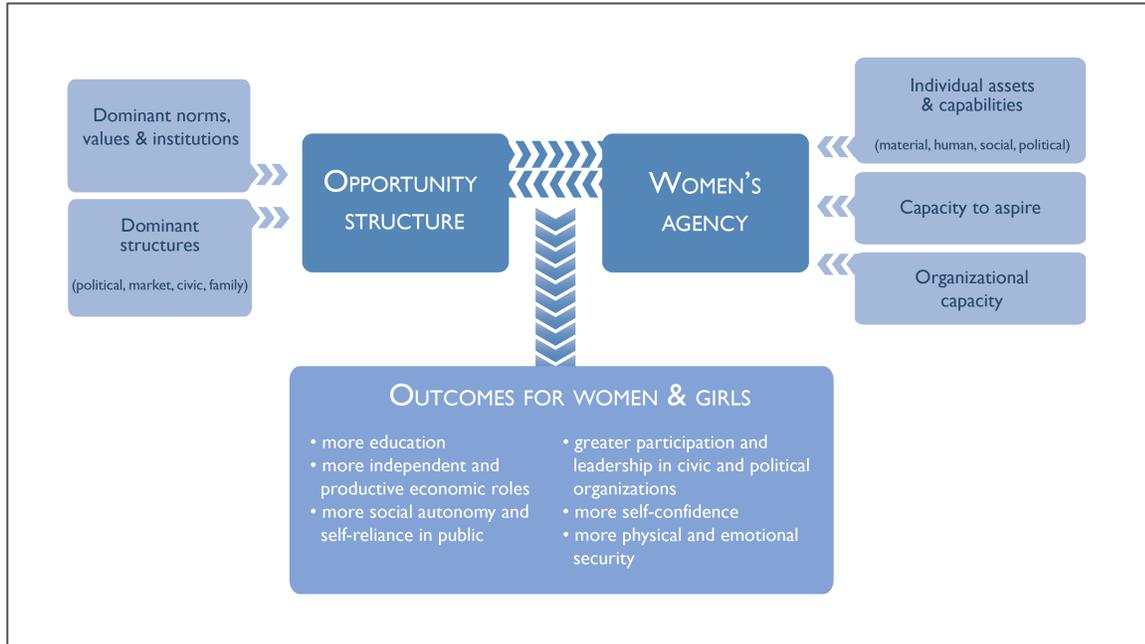
The life story interview is one of the 10 data collection methods in the Moving Out of Poverty study.[6] Table 2 presents the life story sample from both conflict and nonconflict communities used for the agency analysis in part 3. The interview features a set of open-ended questions that progress through five thematic areas: migration history; occupational history; economic history; social, cultural, and psychological history; and education (see Box 5 in the annex). As key events emerge in each of the thematic areas, the respondent is asked to rate each event according to its impact on her individual well-being, using a scale that goes from –5 (representing a large decline in well-being) to +5 (a large increase). With these ratings carefully positioned along the different thematic timelines, a clear picture emerges of the various factors—and their sequencings and interactions—that the respondent considers important to her overall well-being trajectory. The selection from Umi's life story in Box 3 of the next section provides an illustration.[7]

To uncover patterns in the women's descriptions of their key decisions and other important dimensions of their lives, systematic content analysis was conducted with the aid of social science software.[8] For a woman to attain a rating of "substantially empowered," she had to indicate in the course of the interview that she exercised independent control over key areas of her life in a minimum of three of the following areas: (a) education, (b) work, (c) marriage and childbearing, (d) nonfamily friendships, (e) membership in a local group, or (f) political engagement. "Control," in this context, might refer to the respondent's ability to decide on her own marriage in a community where women do not usually have this choice. Or it might mean that she made independent decisions about completing her education, launching a livelihood, or managing a major asset. While the life story tool was not designed to assess empowerment levels, and some of these dimensions were not probed with direct questions (notably decisions about family formation), the information available nevertheless provided a rich resource for the analysis.[9]

The measures of community mobility used in part 4 of the report are generated from a focus group activity known as the Ladder of Life. The activity begins with focus group members describing the characteristics of the different well-being groups in their community, from the best-off and richest households on the top step to the poorest and worst-off households on the bottom step. Table 3 in the annex provides a sample Ladder of Life.

Next, mobility is measured by charting the movements of households up and down the different steps of the ladder. Unlike the better-known standardized scale and poverty line for measuring poverty dynamics, the ladder methodology gives rise to outcome variables based on flexible scales and locally determined poverty measures. Box 2 provides an overview of the subjective mobility measure used in the report.[10]

Table 2. Life story sample, by country

COUNTRY	NUMBER OF WOMEN'S LIFE STORIES
Colombia	38
Indonesia	26
Philippines	40
Sri Lanka	21
Total	125

In focusing on women, it is important to note that this study misses critical issues related to gender differences in agency and access to opportunities, stemming in part from unequal gender relations.[11] Gender power relations are important because they greatly affect women's capacities to exercise agency and to influence the norms and structures that affect their initiatives. It is not clear from the findings presented here whether and how men's agency was affected by conflict—and how this in turn constrained (or possibly strengthened) women's agency and life choices. These relational and comparative issues must be left for another study. There is still plenty to learn from listening just to women from four countries who survived and then struggled to recover from violent intrastate conflict.

Part 2. To Hell and Back

A large majority of women in the sample of 125 life stories were directly affected by violent conflict at least once, and many experienced it multiple times. Figure 2 displays the share of women who were forcibly displaced by conflict or suffered damage to their livelihoods or property. As might be expected, the variation in impacts among the countries broadly parallels the different trajectories of the country conflicts themselves. Colombia's violence has continued for decades; at the other extreme, Indonesia's conflict lasted less than a year.

Figure 2. Share of women reporting adverse impacts due to conflict in their life stories
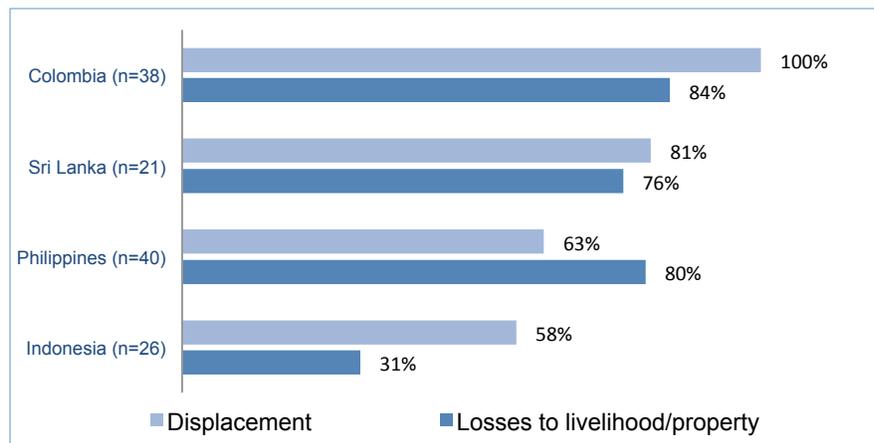
Women from conflict-affected communities told of literally running for their lives. In Sri Lanka, surprise attacks at night sent young and old alike racing into dark forests for cover. In the Philippines, a woman delivered a baby alone in the forest while the rest of her village fled. In Colombia, women who did not flee when armed groups took over their villages were forced to cook and do other tasks for the troops; more than one Colombian woman reported witnessing her husband's assassination or hearing the gunshot to his head just outside the house.

Sometimes women and their families took refuge in evacuation centers in their bare feet. Others had sufficient warning to pack a bag and grab important documents. Still others managed to sell a few cows to have some cash for their needs while displaced. A woman from a village in North Halmahera district of North Maluku, Indonesia, recounts her difficult days in an evacuation center: "Besides us, there were so many people, including children, living in the hut. None of the men had a job because we were afraid to go out. . . . The hut was small, so many people, nobody working, only waiting for aid. So many problems, fighting among families."

Evacuations that stretched over years caused extreme hardship. Mothers spoke of anguish and frustration in caring for young children while confined to evacuation centers. Trapped in crowded spaces without adequate sanitation or relief supplies, the children went hungry and often caught respiratory infections, fevers, diarrhea, and skin rashes. "They would first have a fever, and then there were bumps on their hands that became itchy and watery. Their faces became yellowish and their stomachs swelled. People said it was like meeting ghouls in the forest," recalled a woman from

Our neighbor came and told us that the army was going to attack us, so we ran into the forest. But they surrounded the forest from the coastal side and caught us. There were some children playing, including my sister's sons. The army shot them on the spot and then cut one of the children using a knife. I will never forget it.

—A woman who was displaced to a village in Trincomalee district, Eastern province, Sri Lanka

West Halmahera district in North Maluku, whose husband died during the evacuation. The women could not readily obtain food or medical care for their families. A young woman from a village in the municipality of Kaptagan in Lanao del Sur, Philippines, spoke of losing her five-year-old brother during her evacuation: "He had an asthma attack and he was hospitalized until he died… That was the worst experience of my life."

Added to the trauma of displacement was the shock of returning home to devastation. Houses were looted bare, badly damaged, or burned to ashes. Farm equipment was gone. Livestock and crops had perished or been stolen. Many respondents commented that the rapid mass evacuations provided opportunities for looting by armed groups on all sides of the war. Quite a few attacks took place just prior to harvest time.

For poor women, the theft of cooking utensils, bedding, and other scarce property was a severe blow. Yet better-off families suffered greater monetary losses because they had more to lose. One woman's family fled with only what they could carry in their hands, eventually ending up in a barrio outside Cartagena, Colombia:

> We lost a part of our lives. We lost everything: two houses, a car, two cows, the other animals, chickens, furniture. . . I lost money that was owed to me. . . I was the one who was most affected. But I had to suffer in silence. I was the motor of the house. My husband is very quiet. If my children didn't have food, I cried. If they didn't have clothes, I was the one who suffered.

Most Colombian women interviewed did not dare return to their villages. With nowhere else to go, they made their way to nearby cities. Some paid rent or slept on the floor of a friend's or relative's home until their cash and their welcome ran out. Many ended up in makeshift camps or shacks with other impoverished displaced families, squatting illegally. They crowded under plastic tarps or roofs of metal scrap, exposed to rain, cold, and mud, and pestered by spiders and rodents. They risked another evacuation, this time by armed police, and lived in constant fear of theft and assaults. Their children were hungry and sick. "The displacement marked my life," recounted a woman residing in a poor barrio outside Cartagena. "I was a mother, and my daughter would be asking for food, but I didn't know anyone to borrow from or who could help. December 24th would arrive and I couldn't buy her a doll. This was really hard." For some women interviewed, it took years before they became eligible for housing assistance and could get a solid roof over their heads again.

In each of the four countries, a few women said they were too scarred by their conflict experiences to return to their old lives. "I still haven't got the courage to start a new business as before because I am still traumatized by my experience," commented an impoverished widow from West Halmahera district in North Maluku, Indonesia. Some said their husbands had become withdrawn and could not begin anew either.

But a large majority of the women interviewed did bounce back. They had to; they had no choice. Indeed, a fair number did more than simply recover. Contrary to what one might predict, the women interviewed in the sample communities directly affected by conflict were *more* likely to be rated as substantially empowered than the

> After my husband told me that the house and everything in it had burned down, I was devastated. I threw away the market kiosk key and the house key right there in the harbor, realizing that they served no more purpose. All I could do was cry.
>
> —A woman in a village in West Halmahera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

Figure 3. Share of women rated as empowered in conflict and nonconflict communities

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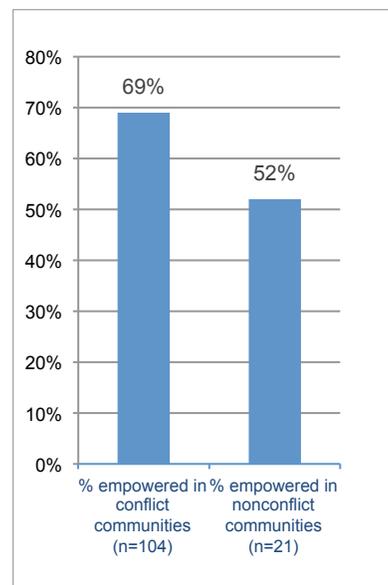
women in the nonconflict communities (see Figure 3). Part 3 probes into what lies behind the empowerment ratings.

PART 3. ASSETS AND CAPABILITIES THAT SUPPORT FREEDOM OF ACTION AND CHOICE

This section presents a comparative analysis across the four countries of the women's assets and capabilities. Again, these are resources that women can potentially mobilize independently, or in collaboration with others, to exercise agency and pursue their interests. The women's agency is compared along the following dimensions: education, physical assets, livelihoods, psychological well-being and family harmony, and social capital.

Although the different assets are examined in turn below, they should not be seen in isolation. What is often most important is not the role of a particular asset but how its accumulation (or depletion) can combine with that of other assets to strengthen (or weaken) women's agency. This quote from a displaced woman in Colombia shows how women in conflict areas often faced intertwined disadvantages that left them with few choices:

> In Cartagena, the cause of my difficulties was that I didn't have work because I had a little girl and no one to care for her, and the insecurity of the neighborhood required me to stay in the house with her. Another thing that has been difficult for me is not having completed my education, because if I had finished high school I'd have a job that would be giving me income.

Such obstacles are not found only in conflict areas. Lack of access to affordable childcare, restricted physical mobility, and low education levels are common hurdles for women trying to enter labor markets in peaceful and conflict environments alike around the world. The women's testimonies make clear that conflict contexts are marked by many traditional gender and development challenges.

The life stories also clearly show that the women considered many events besides conflict as having had significant impacts on their lives. Hence, the analysis below tries to honor the women's accounts by not focusing narrowly on conflict, because the women certainly did not focus only on this when explaining the trajectory of their well-being.[12] Findings from the 21 life stories from peaceful communities are included in the agency analysis so that we can draw insights from these experiences as well, although each section below devotes some attention to specific conflict dimensions. In part 4, we return to a tighter focus on conflict and set aside the data from peaceful communities.

Figure 4 presents overall findings on the share of women who received a rating of "substantially empowered" in both the conflict and peaceful communities in each country. Again, the rating indicates that a woman mentioned during her life story interview that she controlled or participated substantially in decisions affecting at least three of the following areas of her life: (a) education, (b) work, (c) marriage and childbearing, (d) nonfamily friendships, (e) membership in a local group, or (f) political engagement. The analysis reveals that the sample of women from the Philippines, followed by Indonesia, were more likely to be rated as substantially empowered than the samples of women from Colombia and Sri Lanka.

If I had been able to study, I would be a better person. I'd be living in other conditions. Now I don't know how to work on a computer, and because of this I have lost job opportunities.

—A 35-year-old woman in a barrio outside Cartagena, Colombia

Figure 4. Share of women demonstrating substantial empowerment
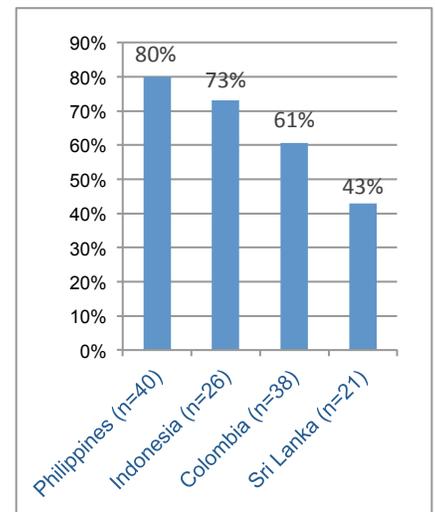
If we assess levels of empowerment in the life stories for just the sample of conflict communities, the only major change in the statistical outcomes is that Indonesia jumps to 81 percent of women empowered, slightly overtaking the Philippines. This result reflects unevenness in the sampling: every community in the Philippines was affected by conflict, while in Colombia and Sri Lanka, the life story datasets from the peaceful communities are small relative to those from the conflict communities.[13] More generally, the samples are much too small to be considered representative of the different sampling regions in each country, and on their own, the statistics need to be interpreted with caution. Numerical findings from the systematic content analysis are presented to serve as rough framing devices for the report's causal arguments and detailed findings from the qualitative accounts.

Despite issues of unevenness with the available sample, it is possible to compare the general characteristics and experiences of each country sample with that of the others. Among the four countries, the Philippines (at 59) also ranked highest on the 2009 Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), followed by Colombia (80), Indonesia (96), and Sri Lanka (98) (lower numbers indicate more women's empowerment and less gender inequality).[14] Colombia fares much worse in this report's empowerment ratings because, unlike in the other conflict regions sampled, many people faced permanent displacement and their recovery has been extremely difficult.

Childhoods cut short: Education and early work experiences

Educational opportunities for rural children are often slim, and especially so for girls. In conflict settings, girls can be even further disadvantaged with respect to schooling.[15] "It is a bit difficult to educate our children, especially girls, due to this uncertain security situation," declared a woman in a focus group conducted in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. One country stands out in girls' education. More than half the Philippine women who were interviewed had completed high school and a surprising two in five had enjoyed some exposure to college or vocational school afterwards. The education levels in the Philippines are likely to have contributed to the higher empowerment found there. At the other extreme, two in five of the Colombian women interviewed did not complete even a primary education, and few attended high school (11 percent) or college (3 percent).[16] The educational disparity between the two countries seems all the more striking when one considers that gross national income (GNI) per capita in the Philippines (US $2,920 in 2005) is less than half of Colombia's (US $7,030).[17] Unfortunately, the educational profiles of the other two countries sampled are closer to Colombia's than to that of the Philippines.

The women with little education mostly reported that they had dropped out of school because they needed to help support their families, they lacked money to cover school fees, the schools were too distant, or they became pregnant or married. Women in every country often expressed deep disappointment and frustration over having to withdraw from school. "Without an education, you can't do anything. If you have an education, the doors are open. But if you don't, no one will give you a job," related a 26-year-old woman from a poor barrio of Ibagué, Colombia.

Many women said they were doing everything in their power to keep their children in school and provide better opportunities for their sons and daughters than they

I am confident enough–the older, the more experienced, the more confident.
—A woman in a village in Probolinggo district, East Java, Indonesia

My education is the only wealth that was given to me by my parents that could not be taken from me or sold. My life has become better because of the education that I have.
—A woman from Lanao del Sur, Philippines

I felt happy when I graduated because I had freedom and my parents considered me mature enough to face life.
—A woman in a village in West Halmahera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

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themselves had. "There are people who don't even have any land at all, but the mothers always try to give a good education to their children," remarked a woman from Trincomalee district in the east of Sri Lanka. But some mothers simply could not find a way. One related that the school uniform was unaffordable; lacking a uniform, her daughter was sent home by the school and then withdrew permanently in embarrassment. Another mother in Indonesia considered her inability to send a daughter to senior high school after she passed the qualifying exams to be such a painful event in her own life that she marked it with a negative score on the psychological timeline.

Child labor is ever-present in young lives marked by shortened education. Significant shares of women across the countries reported that they had been economically active from very young ages, with by far the highest rates reported in Colombia (Figure 5).[18]

Figure 5. Share of women working for pay or in-kind compensation before age 16
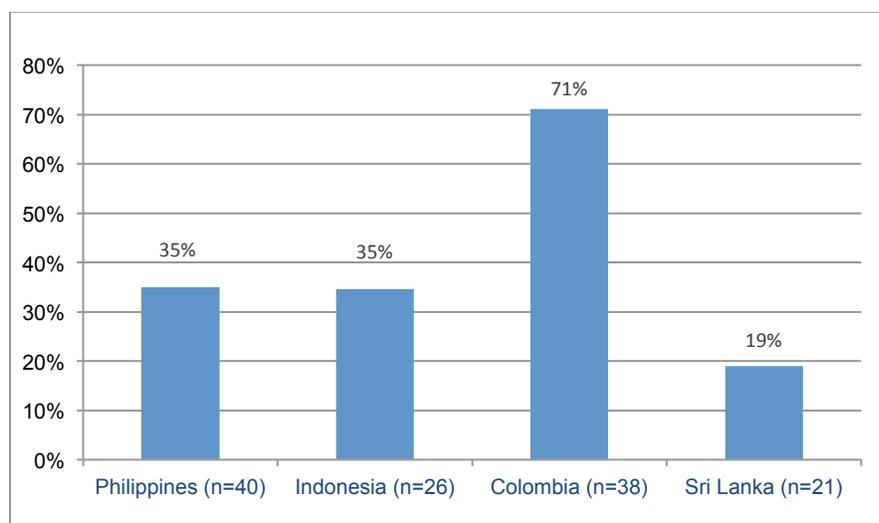
Perceptions about early work experiences varied. Some women enjoyed spending time with their fathers and formed close bonds while helping on the family farm. Others resented being pulled from school to work and spoke pointedly of hard labor and dashed hopes. Women also described leaving home at young ages to work elsewhere for pay or in many cases just for food and lodging. A few women had positive work experiences away from home at young ages, but most did not: "In Zapatoca, I worked in a restaurant [at age 9] and I went to school in the afternoons. I worked for two long years with a woman who was really abusive. She exploited my work. Didn't pay me anything . . . I was there for the food," stated a woman from a barrio of Bucaramanga, Colombia. Another woman from the same barrio described being sexually abused by a cousin in her early teens while cleaning his family's house.

I started working at age 12. I did this when there were potatoes to harvest. I sold them to buy my things . . . My father was not able to provide for me. I also worked on my godfather's farm . . . At that time they only paid 2,000 or 3,000 pesos [about US $0.85 to $1.30 a day]. I worked from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. . . . I worked like this from 12 to 15 years old.

—A woman in a village outside Pasto, Colombia

Women's physical assets: All in the family

Rarely were the women's life stories marked by steady progress in building assets. Notably, the economic trend lines of women from conflict communities dipped sharply during episodes of violence. Figure 6 reveals, however, that except in Colombia, a majority of women reported that their households were mostly able to accumulate assets over the study period despite dips during conflict periods.

Fewer women reported that they were financially prepared to cope with a large emergency that might befall their household. Where women owned some land or other property (the Philippines and Indonesia), or family members were sending remittances (all of the countries), these factors were often important to weathering shocks. The Colombians' complete dispossession and permanent displacement made it difficult for a large majority of these women to begin anew with asset accumulation, much less cope with any emergencies that might befall them.

Figure 6. Share of women reporting mostly upward trends in asset accumulation and ability to weather emergencies
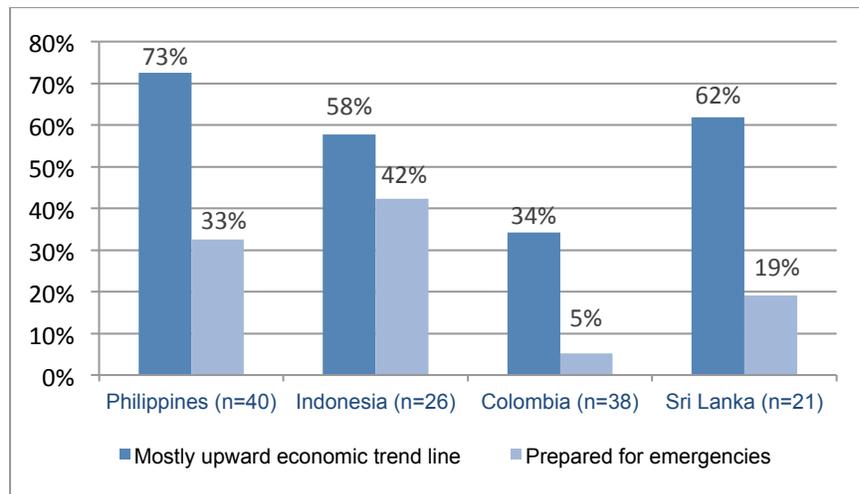
Marriage and inheritance practices

Dowry customs varied strongly across the three Asian countries, with the Philippine women seeming to benefit the most and Sri Lankans the least. Property inheritance emerged frequently in the Philippine and Indonesian life stories, but only rarely in accounts from the other two countries. Understanding these practices is important because marriage and inheritance are often the only way for women around the world to acquire any major assets. The life stories make clear how and why women's control of these assets can fuel both economic independence and post-conflict recovery.[19]

In the largely Muslim area of Mindanao where the Philippines study is set, the groom's family typically makes important asset transfers as dowry to the bride's parents.[20] In these life stories, most of the brides' parents passed a large share of this wealth down to their daughters, and some contributed additional assets. Such large asset transfers to younger women cannot be found in the life stories of the other countries. In some cases, having such wealth at stake may leave women vulnerable to

This land was given to me by my father when I got married in 2002. In the Muslim culture, it is important that the children are given a share of the land that the family owns.

—A woman in a village in Kapatagan municipality, Lanao del Sur, Philippines

abuse. In one case a woman was beaten and forced into marriage at a very young age by her family, who then kept her dowry. In another life story, a woman reported that her estranged husband had kidnapped her daughter, and she feared he would marry the daughter off and keep the dowry before the young teen could finish her education. Most of the Philippine women, however, reported that they appreciated and benefited from their dowry. A typical case comes from a village in Balabagan municipality, Lanao del Sur. A woman received two hectares of farmland as dowry for her wedding in 1997. The land was planted with coconut and coffee. She valued it not only because it was her husband's gift to her, but also because it served as their source of income. "My life seemed to improve because of the land," she noted. Another woman reported, "I was happy when I received the dowry even if I'm not his first wife. I just considered that [dowry] as his souvenir for me if ever we would separate. At least I would have something to leave to our children if that were to happen." In addition to receiving substantial dowry assets, many Philippine women mention inheriting property later in their lives.

The testimonies show that ownership of land and other large assets provided women with security, independence, productive capital, and resilience in the face of conflict. A woman from North Cotabato province in Mindanao, Philippines, had to flee her village in 1999, but she had enough time to sell off the family's cows first. This cash turned out to be critical during the year and a half her family spent in an evacuation center, where the government and private organizations were not providing enough food. And when the family returned, their land ownership was key to their recovery:

> The conflict affected most of our livelihoods, but the land is always our fallback, because after the conflict the land is still there. During the 1999 evacuation, we lost all of our livestock because it was sold to support our evacuation. But when we returned we could still survive because we could go back to the land.

Along with higher levels of education, dowry and inheritance practices seem critical to understanding the higher levels of empowerment found in Mindanao despite the difficult local economy and ongoing insecurity.

Dowry also flows from the groom's family to the bride's in Indonesia, but not a single woman in this sample referred to her dowry when telling her life story. This is likely because dowry obligations are relatively small in the two regions visited in Indonesia.[21] Rather than dowry, many women in this sample reported that they received family property as a gift or inheritance, which they control and plan to pass along to their own sons and daughters. A woman from Probolinggo district in East Java, Indonesia, inherited a market stall from her parents. She explained that what she earned from selling cooked food in the stall "sincerely helped my family's economy because my husband no longer had the chicken business."

In Sri Lanka, dowry transfers are reversed, with resources flowing from the bride's family to the groom's. The women's stories there show that new couples often get their start with dowry cash, lands, and homes, but these assets remain in the husband's control. Not a single woman mentioned receiving an inheritance when asked about her major assets. Taken together, the differing marriage and inheritance customs in the three Asian countries are consistent with the varying levels of

empowerment found, which suggests that they play important roles in enhancing or constraining women's agency.

Remittances

In all of the countries, some women reported that they received remittances from husbands, sons, or daughters working elsewhere. The extent to which these assets supported a household's mobility and women's empowerment seemed to vary widely. A happy case was that of a 58-year-old woman from a poorer village of Tulunan district in North Cotabato, Philippines. She had struggled long and hard to keep all of her children in school with the earnings from the family farm, but she had recently moved out of poverty thanks to a steady stream of remittances from three daughters working in Canada.

Across the rural conflict regions, good jobs were practically nonexistent. What few jobs were available paid little and required hard work and often long hours in the hot sun. In the war-torn villages and towns of Sri Lanka, even daily wage opportunities for women were scarce. If their husbands were working overseas, remittances covered household budgets, and many women expressed gratitude for not needing to work outside the home. One woman from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, explained that her family faced many difficulties after their displacement in 1995. But since her husband found employment in France, she said, "I don't go to work. My husband sends money to meet our needs . . . Since my husband went to France, my confidence has increased greatly."

Such successful migration experiences were by no means common. Migrant workers from poorer families in Sri Lanka could typically only reach developing countries such as Malaysia, where earnings were considerably lower. Unsuccessful migration experiences could cause a family even greater hardship, wiping out their savings and plunging them into debt. Migrants were sometimes robbed and deserted by recruiters who promised them employment, while overseas employers often failed to pay the migrant workers and sometimes abused them. In part because of such problems, some women reported that remittances from kin who had migrated were limited and unreliable.

The struggle for livelihoods

Among the 125 respondents, just three women reported that they had not worked for pay or in-kind compensation at any point in their lives. As a group, these women work. They work hard, they work long days, and they work for very low pay. Several women in their late fifties and sixties were still economically active. Moreover, women often reported intensifying or diversifying their livelihood activities during periods of conflict and post-conflict recovery.

Constant reshuffling

As recalled in their life stories, many women seemed to shift continuously from one livelihood activity to another, often combining and recombining different farm and nonfarm informal activities to make ends meet. Figure 7 displays a broad picture of the relative importance of the different occupational sectors in the lives of the women. The most common economic activities that the women combined were growing some commercial or food crops, tending livestock, and vending informally (from their homes, tiny shops, kiosks or stalls in the market, or in the streets with crates or carts). Many women also had tiny home-based ventures doing piecework, sewing, or handicrafts. "Women have less freedom, because when they are done with cinnamon peeling they have housework to attend to, and then if they are making cigars they do that late into the night," explained a young woman from a village of Hambantota district in the Southern province, Sri Lanka.

Figure 7. Share of women who mentioned each type of livelihood in their life stories
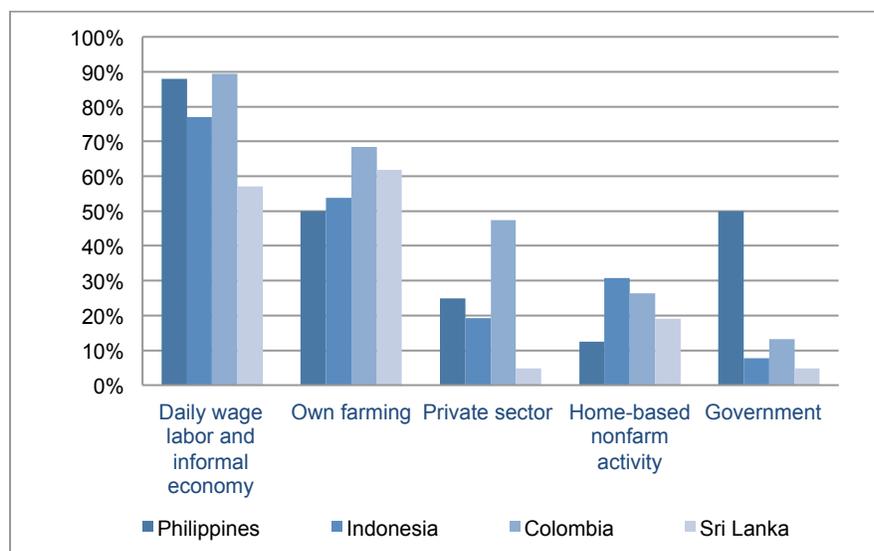
Note: Totals do not add to 100 percent because women often reported participation in more than one sector.

A full quarter of the women interviewed in Colombia, including several who headed households, were not economically active at the time of their interviews, and many others had only occasional work. This contrasted sharply with these women's active work histories in the countryside prior to displacement. With little in the way of education or connections, and displaced to poor urban barrios that were viewed as

It was very hard. I woke up at 4:00 every morning to get things ready. I had to drop off three children at 5:45 in the morning to go to school, and I worked until 11:00 at night. I then had to do the household chores and make the lunches for the next day. They paid me 10,000 pesos a day [about US $4.25 in 2005].

– A 20-year-old woman in a barrio outside Cartagena, Colombia, describing her brief stint as a domestic worker in Bogota

In the past, if a woman had a husband, the family could be prosperous because the husband could support them, but now the wife has to sell cakes.

– Women's focus group, West Halmahera, North Maluku, Indonesia

war zones, the Colombian women faced diverse obstacles to obtaining even poorly paid work. During their interviews, many expressed fears of leaving their children unattended or risking assault when moving about on local streets, especially at night. A woman from Ibagué explained that she obtained a job cleaning in hotels, but a friend had warned her in advance that "they don't hire people from my barrio or the displaced because they were [seen as] thieves, and so I didn't tell them I was displaced or that I lived here." Others voiced great frustration over how little they could earn, especially as they desperately needed cash income to meet the expenses of city life. A woman from a barrio in Bucaramanga said she washes clothes to get some cash, but she does not have customers every day. On the days she works, she can earn about 15,000 pesos (about US $6.50). In addition to irregular domestic work, some women engaged sporadically in *rebusque* (the hustle), hawking goods in the streets with loans taken at exorbitant rates.

Stable work in the government or private sector can be a promising avenue for women, but relatively few in the sample accessed these jobs. An unexpected finding is that if these formal-sector jobs were entry-level or low-end, the women seemed no more likely to remain in them than in their different informal livelihood ventures. Most often the formal jobs they could access involved cooking, cleaning, administrative tasks, or frontline service provision in government-sponsored childcare and health care programs or local government offices. Some had jobs selling in shops or did cooking and cleaning in restaurants and hotels. Women sometimes expressed pride in having landed these seemingly prestigious jobs with regular hours and pay, but their occupational timelines make clear that they left these jobs quickly. Either the work schedule was arduous, or the pay was very low, or quite often both. For instance, displaced women living outside Cartagena, Colombia, sometimes said that they could barely cover their transportation expenses with what they could earn from jobs cleaning in hotels. It might be steady work, but it was evidently not steady work worth having for long.

A small number of the women interviewed ran larger shops or farms or had steady jobs in teaching or health care. Their occupational timelines often displayed fewer job changes. In Ternate district of North Maluku, for example, a 44-year-old widow spoke with pride about the government salary and benefits she earns as a university lecturer; she spoke of no other work experience. Those with government jobs coped a bit better during periods of conflict because most continued to receive a salary even if they could not work. A 60-year-old retired hospital worker in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, who was receiving a pension indicated that she found work at another hospital during the years she was displaced. In the Philippines, some of the public school teachers who were interviewed supplemented their incomes with side businesses selling candy and cookies to schoolchildren or running small shops. A teacher from Kapatagan municipality in Mindanao expressed deep gratitude to her parents for supporting her education: "If I had not been able to finish my studies, I could have been working as a laundry woman or a farm laborer."

Assessing women's satisfaction with and control of their livelihood choices was sometimes challenging because of local cultural and gender norms, struggling economies, and poor security. Were women working because they bore much or all

My mother is a housewife and she is working at a small shop near our home, where she gets a small income.
—Focus group of youth in a village of Trincomalee district, Eastern province, Sri Lanka

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of the responsibility for their household's daily budget? Or were they working because it gave them satisfaction, purpose, and independence, as well as cash? These questions were not asked of the women, but they often gave clues in their testimonies when they spoke about their economic initiatives and about the relationships and economic responsibilities in their households (more on this in the next section). It was not uncommon for women to reserve some of the highest ratings on their timelines for their economic achievements. One woman from West Halmahera in North Maluku, Indonesia, for instance, gave a "+5" rating to the time when she was single and working for a wood processing factory in Ternate, even though she was living in a crowded dorm provided by the factory.

In all four countries, some women reported that their husbands preferred them not to work. "You must dedicate yourself to the children," said a Colombian woman, imitating her husband. In Sri Lanka, women's household roles were deeply valued, and the women routinely introduced themselves as housewives when interviewed— even though they might also work in a hospital, run a shop, or spend long hours sewing garments or making handicrafts at home. One woman from a Muslim community in Trincomalee district of Sri Lanka's Eastern province has remittances from a husband working in Iraq and reported that "I do not work," but later in the interview she spoke of tending small livestock and selling eggs.

New economic initiatives during and after conflict

Periods of conflict disrupted rural livelihoods across the study. In general, during episodes of violence, economic activities came to a standstill. If violence or the risk of violence persisted, however, most households had no choice but to find some way to earn income and put food on the table. Because tending crops and livestock in open fields was often too dangerous, many households across the study countries resorted to informal street vending and other nonfarm activities as coping strategies.[22] In addition to selling water or cookies on the streets, sometimes women found jobs doing piecework or washing laundry. In some contexts, but certainly not all, it can be easier for women to work because they are not targets of political or local violence. In addition, women are often more willing than men to engage in low-paying and low-status livelihoods in times of stress. Men in rural areas often sought to earn income by working for hire in local construction and taxi jobs, or they migrated away for better jobs. For both women and men, these coping strategies during conflict periods often brought new skills and experiences, and for some women who had been home-based, more independence.[23]

As conflict periods drew to a close and recovery began, many women further intensified or diversified their economic activities. A woman from Ternate district, North Maluku, Indonesia, stated:

> Since 2002, when the conflict ended, I have run a *sembako* retail shop for extra income to fulfill our family needs . . . I received support money that I used for my business capital from Ternate city government . . . Ten years ago, I was only a housewife because I didn't have the capital to run the business as I do now.

An array of infrastructure development and post-conflict microcredit and training programs encouraged women's livelihood initiatives across the study countries, and many households that previously relied on agriculture were able to move out of

The women are the ones who will look for work when there is *Rido* [violent feuds between clans]. The men are the targets.

– A woman in Lanao del Sur, Philippines

poverty due to this diversification of local livelihoods. By way of illustration, Box 3 presents the occupational portion of a life story from the Philippines. Except for a period as a farm laborer that she rates low, the respondent, Umi, launched ever bigger and more profitable ventures and participated in a cooperative—but only as conflict and recovery periods allowed in her Mindanao village.

Box 3. Building a livelihood amid violent conflict: The experiences of Umi, Tulunan municipality, North Cotabato, Philippines

Umi did not work for a living until she was married. When she was young, she helped her mother with household chores. Her first paid occupation, in 1985, was growing vegetables on her husband's farm and selling them at the weekly market in Poblacion, Tulunan. Umi also started a small business that year, selling fried peanuts at her children's school. "I would buy raw peanuts and fry them, and my children would bring them to their school canteen." Umi learned how to sell from observing her elder sister, who had a mini-grocery store in Davao. These vending activities gave Umi some cash of her own. Her husband, meanwhile, had income from the farm and from working as a member of CAFGU (Civilian Armed Forces Geographic Unit). Umi rated her first occupation as +2 (on a scale of −5 to +5) because it had enabled her to start earning an income.

In 1997 Umi stopped gardening and went to work as a farm laborer. She was paid 70 pesos per day (about US $1.25) for weeding the rice fields of other farmers. However, the job was not regular, because farmers would only hire laborers seasonally. Moreover, Umi could not work full-time in the fields because she also needed to care for her children and do household chores. Another difficulty with this job had to do with the tension between Muslims and Christians in the community. "We were afraid to work on the farms of people suspected of being targeted by Muslims because we might be caught in the middle during fighting." Nonetheless, Umi rated this occupation as +4.

In 2003 Umi started selling cold water and candy during the fiesta celebration in their barangay (village), and she continued after the fiesta ended. She would pack water in cellophane bags, put it in a box, and place ice on top to cool the water. She sold her cold water, along with candy and cigarettes, at the cockpit (cockfighting ring). This earned her around 100 pesos (about US $1.80) net profit per day. Umi gave this year a rating of +5 in her occupational history.

Her business grew in the following years. "I used to get the candies that I sold on consignment with the grocery store in Poblacion. After a few transactions, they allowed me to take other goods to sell on consignment because of my good credit record." In 2004 Umi was able to set up a mini-grocery store at their community market, selling basic household goods. Part of the capital that she used for her store came from the savings she had set aside from previous sales. Umi gave this event a +5 rating in her occupation history.

When asked about her present situation, Umi said that it is much better than before. Her mini-grocery store now sells almost everything that a household in their barangay might need. Her income has increased, although Umi is hesitant to divulge it. "My very small business improved to become what it is now. I tried to find the means to earn even a small amount and save as much profit as I could. My savings enabled me to buy the refrigerator that I now use at my store." Umi rated the current year with a +5 in her occupational history.

Umi used to be a member of a cooperative, but it is no longer functioning. She said that the cooperative helped its members improve their livelihoods, although it existed for only a few years. Umi blamed the conflict for the cooperative's closure: "The cooperative was already growin in assets and profits. The conflict that forced our evacuation affected the cooperative. People did not pay back their oans, members did not meet anymore, and officers stopped performing their functions."

Umi emphasized that conflict could affect all types of livelihood and that economic activities essentially stopped during the conflict. People had to abandon their farms, leaving the land unproductive. "Conflict really affected people's livelihoods, because we were very much afraid. We could not return here [back to their village to work their farms or tend livestock], because we could be shot at any time. During this kind of conflict, people have no means to find alternative livelihoods."

Trend line: Umi's occupational history

1985: Started her garden and sold fried peanuts: +2
1997: Worked as farm laborer: +4
2003: Started selling cold water and candy: +5
2004: Set up her mini-grocery store: +5
2006: Improved her store: +5
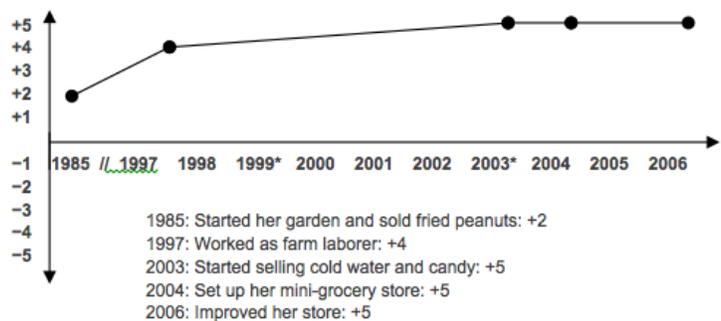
* Periods of intense Muslim-Christian conflict and evacuation from the village

Source: Adapted from field notes of Umi's life story interview.

In all countries, and especially in the urban barrios of Colombia, the sample included women heading their households because husbands were no longer living, had migrated, or had joined armed groups. These circumstances also compelled women to expand their economic roles. This account from a widow in Pasto suggests that conflict and displacement can sometimes be empowering, even for a mother raising a family on her own in a barrio with little security and few economic opportunities:

> I like very much the work [selling milk] that I have now. I earn more and it's not so tiring [compared to work in her village]. If one of my children gets sick, I can take care of it. I'm independent now . . . It's also better because my four children are studying. And here they learn more.

Although the women's earnings were often low, their increased economic agency is a significant part of what the empowerment ratings capture, and part 4 fills out this important story further.

Family bonds, psychological well-being, and aspirations

Believing in yourself and pursuing what you deeply want and value is the heart of agency, and this process cannot be understood as a function of educational and economic factors alone.[24] Self-confidence, aspirations, harmony and cooperation in the household, and relationships outside the household provide other valuable assets that women can mobilize to act in their interests. For many women in this study pursuing their aspirations also required a measure of defiance and courage to resist the submission and isolation that accompany women's roles and gender norms in their societies. "No one helped me get a better life. This is all because of my own will, my own hard work," exclaimed a woman from a village in Probolinggo district of East Java, Indonesia. In this and the next section, we explore some of these psychological and social dimensions of the women's agency processes.

Throughout their life stories, many women spoke of being loved and encouraged by parents and adored and supported by husbands, and taking great pride and joy in children. When asked about the most important relationships in their lives, women mentioned husbands with the highest frequency. The responses of these two women from Lanao del Sur and North Cotabato in the Philippines are representative of many others in the study:

> My husband is the most important person in my life because now I have somebody I can talk to and share my problems with. My life has changed since I got married, unlike when I was still single and dependent on my parents. Now, I have to decide on things that will be good for my family.

> My husband is very important to me because he is my partner in all that I do. We plan everything together and he has been very supportive of everything that I wanted to do.

Women who spoke positively of economic activities or purchasing decisions that they engaged in jointly with their husbands (in the occupational and economic sections of the life stories) were also very likely to speak of harmony and support in their marriages (in the social and psychological portion). By contrast, in some interviews heavy silences followed questions about the most important relationships in their lives. Responses might be marked by frustration, grief, loneliness, self-doubt, or confusion. "My husband made things difficult. He is a drinker," was the simple reply from one woman in Sri Lanka.

> The important thing is to possess determination. Even if a person has capital, they cannot progress without willpower.
>
> —Women's focus group discussion in North Halmahera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

The links between women's agency and family relationships were not always predictable. Women credited helpful and unhelpful husbands alike for their agency (and also for their lack of agency). In cases where husbands were abusive, unfaithful, drinkers, gamblers, or unemployed—or sometimes all of the above—many women had little choice but to challenge male authority and take charge. They did whatever it took to run their households and earn an income—if not for themselves then for their children. A woman from a village in Ternate district of North Maluku, Indonesia, explained how she resisted submission as much as she could:

> I think I am very confident, because if I wasn't, I would not have been able to survive up until now. Just think about it: I had to struggle to send my children to school because my husband didn't agree. Not to mention that when my husband still worked, I was not allowed to sell cookies, although it was for extra income.

As shown in Figure 8, women in the Philippines were the most likely to say that their husbands were supportive and helped them. They were also the most likely to report that they had earned rising respect from their families. On balance, the findings suggest that more empowered women enjoy more rewarding and harmonious marital and family relationships.

Figure 8. Share of women who reported supportive husband and rising respect in family
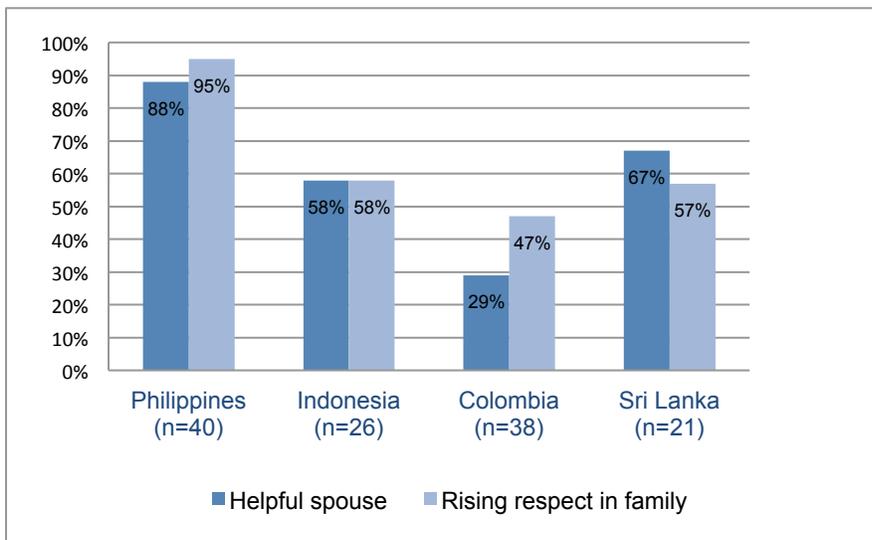
The Philippines dataset, of course, also had women who struggled with their spouses. This woman, from a village in Balabagan municipality in Lanao del Sur, runs a shop with her husband and also sells sweet potatoes, but she has to take charge because she cannot count on him:

> I wish both my husband and I would help each other, that he would not be so pessimistic and would instead support me in my ambitions. Also, when our business improves, I don't want him to hinder my ambition for our family. I want him to stop preventing me from doing what I want to do . . . He is ill-tempered sometimes. We hardly understand each other because I had higher education and he does not. We cannot meet halfway.

The Colombian women were the least likely to speak of their husbands favorably or to perceive rising respect from their families.[25] And although the interviewer did not

It is like the [law of] physics that says, "In every action, there is an equal reaction." That is what happened to me. I took care of [my children] and respected them, so they returned respect to me. I also respected my mother, so that may be the reason that my children respected me also.

–A mother in a village in Tulunan municipality, North Cotabato, Philippines, who has retired from

probe into matters of domestic violence, nearly a quarter of the Colombian women spoke spontaneously about emotional and physical abuse. By comparison, mentions of domestic abuse were practically nonexistent in the other countries.[26] Women in Colombia were also much more likely than women elsewhere to speak about emotional struggles and the trauma they had suffered due to conflict and displacement. "I was the most affected because I had to provide for all of them," said a displaced woman from Pasto, Colombia. "I was taking pills to calm down and I've gone to psychologists. It's that you want to have your own things, and living here like this is the worst."

For some Colombians, the line between violence inside and outside their homes was blurred, leaving them powerless. Their husbands worked in distant farmlands and coca fields under siege. They and their daughters traveled dangerous streets to reach work, shops, or schools. And sons sometimes joined gangs with ties to armed groups and the illegal drug trade: "I have not been very happy. [In the barrio] there are many fights, and I have to keep my mouth shut every time my son is stabbed. There is a lot of stress. You don't live peacefully," confided a 56-year-old woman from a barrio in Bucaramanga. Her first husband abused her and the second one drinks heavily.

The women's stories show how strong family bonds—where they are present—along with emotional resilience and a great hunger to get back their everyday lives can be vital resources that women draw on to endure and recover from conflict. For many women, the experience of conflict itself has strengthened these nontangible assets. For example, a Colombian woman reported that her struggles to recover from displacement have raised her self-confidence:

> Yes, it has grown. I have done things that I had never done before—for example, going to an office and fighting for my rights. Never before would I have imagined this situation, having to explain to someone my rights as a displaced person and to fight for this.

Connections beyond the family

Social capital refers to formal and informal social networks. A large literature has demonstrated the power of these ties to provide (or exclude) access to information, ideas, connections, and aid in crises; foster trust in others; and support collective action and conflict management. In developing country contexts, findings on the association between social capital and political and economic development have been mixed, pushing scholars to examine more carefully the nature and functioning of social capital. Some of this literature distinguishes between networks characterized by *bonding* ties and those that feature *bridging* ties. Bonding ties, which link individuals from the same locality, religion, race, or ethnicity, who often share similar socioeconomic backgrounds, are considered important for enhancing trust, cohesion, identity, and day-to-day coping at the local level. But it is bridging associations, which cross local social and economic divides or entail public, market, or civic partnerships outside the community, that are most often present in communities characterized by more equitable and prosperous development. Especially important are inclusive local groups with ties to responsive government officials.[27]

A gender lens is rarely applied in social capital analyses. Relative to men, women face much greater limitations in physical mobility, resources, and time; hence their

If your friends are the same as you, what can they do to help you?

—A 56-year-old woman in Bucaramanga, Colombia

People want to advance, but there is the problem of capital. Perhaps capital and contacts [are important].

—Two women in a focus group in North Halmaera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

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networks are typically small, informal, characterized by bonding ties, and oriented to daily coping and voluntary community activities. Women are often actively excluded from the more powerful and better resourced associations dominated by men, or from leadership positions within them.[28] As such, women's local organizing is unlikely by itself to serve as a springboard for their access to significant new opportunities.

Perhaps because of limited economic options and the presence of diverse assistance programs that worked with community groups, the Colombian women in the study were the most likely to belong to a group (Figure 9). Many women in Colombia were members of local housing associations that help displaced families access housing and public services. In Asia, the women who were engaged in networks were likely to be members of informal rotating credit groups or religious groups. In all four countries, some women also spoke of joining new self-help credit groups sponsored by governments or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as part of post-conflict assistance programs.

Figure 9. Share of women reporting group membership or a political connection
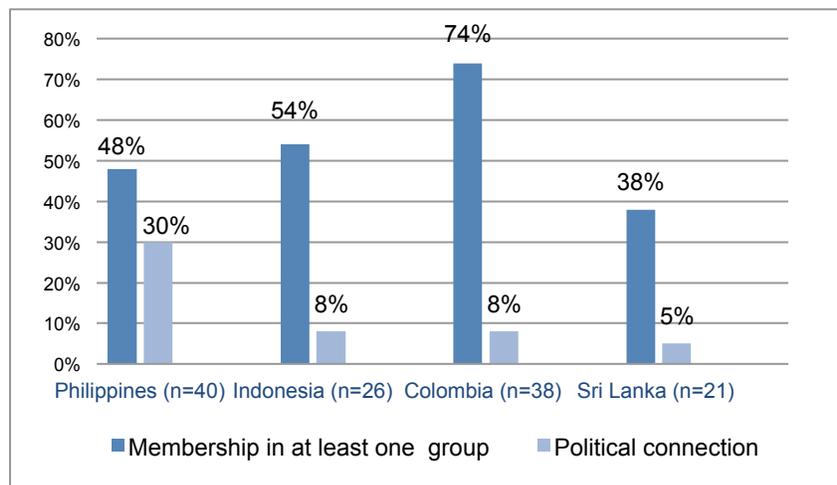
Across the countries women also told of using connections to find work or obtain services. Recommendations or tips about opportunities from family and friends were often sufficient to obtain lower-paying local jobs. Gaining access to good jobs and government entitlements, however, often required connections with influential local leaders or family and friends living in other places. A woman now residing in a village in Lanao del Sur, Philippines, for example, got her first job in a garment factory in Manila when she learned of the vacancy from an aunt living in the capital.

Women in the Philippines sample displayed particularly favorable bridging connections when sharing their life stories. They were the most likely to report having a connection with a politician or bureaucrat, a valuable asset (Figure 9). Nearly a third of the Philippine women had such political connections, and another 19 percent reported that they belonged to a political organization. On political engagement, these women were far more endowed than others in the sample.

I am very thankful to the community for electing me a barangay councilor. Having this office entitled my child to be a scholar in college. I also thank the community for helping me in times when I needed the help most. The community's confidence in me is where I get my determination to improve my life and my service to them.

–A woman in a village of Tulunan municipality, North Cotabato, Philippines

25

Philippine women spoke of landing jobs in distant cities and local offices with the help of community leaders and local politicians. They received help with hospital bills for aging parents and for husbands and sons in vehicle wrecks. The local leaders warned women and their families when attacks were imminent. They sent women to training sessions and other events to represent their villages, and they mentored women in leadership positions. One woman spoke of how the mayor helped her keep up her husband's payments on a motorcycle after it was stolen.[29] Typically, patronage politics works well for those with connections and cash, but it excludes others, thus hindering inclusive development. In conflict contexts, however, governance problems intensify, and special connections, corruption, and bribery become important pathways to mobility.[30] The Philippine life stories indicate that women there were more able to benefit from this weak governance context than women elsewhere.

The Philippine women also exercised more leadership in local politics than women in the other countries. A few women mentioned in their life stories that they had been asked to run for local office and had learned a great deal in representing their community, gaining skills and experience, for example, with conflict resolution. This seems to be a product of informal initiatives by political parties and NGOs to ensure that women are politically engaged and compete for elected office.[31] A female mayor in Kapatagan municipality of Lanao del Sur was beloved for her effectiveness in reducing local conflicts and attracting new infrastructure and NGOs with microcredit programs.

Rather than bridging social capital, however, women in all the countries spoke much more often of their bonding networks, consisting of close friends, neighbors, and members of informal groups. They spoke of friends helping each other in times of need, and of neighbors coming together to celebrate important occasions. Strong friendships and community bonds, where present, brought valuable resources, happiness, a sense of belonging, and meaning to their lives. A 50-year-old female villager from Pamekasan district in East Java, Indonesia, offered these observations on community life:

> I like living here. My neighbors live harmoniously, helping each other. During the tobacco harvest, everyone is busy cutting tobacco all day. They come without asking for payment. The hosts just prepare food. Also, when there is a community event, we poor people also take part. If the program were here, the cost could be 100,000 rupiah [about US $10.35]. I joined before but have now been replaced by my grandchildren. The program is once a week. Every week there is a 2,000 rupiah [about US $0.20] contribution for food and coffee. My family gets a turn twice a year [to receive the cash]. If someone gets married here, neighbors contribute three kilograms of rice.

Help from neighbors is clearly much easier to access than help from formal institutions. When asked about their political connections, poor women from across the countries often insisted that they would never dare seek such help: "I have never asked the government or political parties for help. It's not that I don't want to, but I don't know how. I am stupid. If I knew how then I would ask for help," stated a poor woman from a village in Pamekasan district in East Java, Indonesia. A woman from another village in the same district reported, "I've never joined a specific political party because I'm troubled and poor."

Some of the women interviewed had social circles that were largely confined to their families. They ascribed this to their scarce time, low social standing, discomfort in public, and lack of education, as well as to poor public safety. In some communities norms of seclusion restricted women's freedom to move unaccompanied beyond their homes. When asked about important relationships outside of her family, a woman from a town in Jaffna in the Northern province of Sri Lanka replied, "I do not have such relations with neighbors. I have enough work at home, so I have no free time to chat." Likewise, a displaced woman from a barrio of Bucaramanga, Colombia, said that she has not joined a group: "No, not one. You know, for this you must have a head, know how to talk, be educated." Older women in the village outside Pasto, Colombia, spoke of feeling sad and lonely when their children became adults and left the community for better opportunities. In most communities, women had nonfamily relationships mainly with other women like themselves, if at all.

Cultures of inequality

To summarize, the women in the Philippines rated more highly on empowerment than women in the other three countries; the underlying factors include high levels of education, control of substantial assets, access to formal employment, harmony and respect in family relations, and advantageous social capital. Women in Colombia, by contrast, reported the lowest rates of schooling, asset accumulation, supportive spouses, and family respect.

The dataset is too small and uneven to allow strong conclusions on which dimensions may be most important for women's empowerment, although differences in the women's physical assets seemed to be particularly important in this sample. Access to land and houses due to marriage and inheritance practices clearly distinguished the more empowered Philippine and Indonesian women, giving them valuable resources with which to buttress their economic initiatives and weather diverse shocks in their lives, including conflict. As examined in the next section and in the conclusions, however, current post-conflict programs designed to strengthen women's economic agency are having mixed impacts and receive relatively low priority in the overall allocation of post-conflict assistance.

This section now steps away from examining these factors in isolation in order to demonstrate how they interact to help or hinder women's agency. This requires incorporating two more dimensions into the dynamics of agency: a women's life stage and her socioeconomic status.

Unequal and changing chances for girls and young women

For young women from better-off families, who had the education, connections, and ambition to work outside their homes, the years after completion of schooling and before marriage were often recalled as good times. Still young, the women could move about more freely, have some fun, and spend their earnings as they liked. Looking back on her first full-time job, a woman from Ternate district in North Maluku, Indonesia, recalled, "I worked in the district administration office for about one year. At that time, I felt happy that I could be independent of my parents, because with my salary I could fulfill my needs by myself. I could use all the money

I studied up to grade 9. I thought that was enough, in those days. One of my relatives offered me a job as a matron at the school for the deaf and blind. But my husband did not like it, so I did not work.

– A 61-year-old widow in Ampara district, Eastern province, Sri Lanka; she moved her family out of poverty by running the farm on her own until her boys could take over

for myself alone." Other poorer, less educated, less connected women from her village never got the chance to taste such freedom.

Assessing how life stage and socioeconomic status interact to shape women's choices is complicated by the fact that gender norms and women's roles were in flux in many communities where the study was conducted. In the Philippines, the clash between modern and traditional norms was particularly striking, with stark disparities in education and other opportunities for women. Some wealthier young women were going off to college but returning to their villages for arranged marriages. Poorer girls and young women from those same villages, meanwhile, often left school lacking functional literacy, endured child labor abuses, wed very young, sometimes in polygamous marriages, and had begun raising children.

The contrast is illustrated by two women from the same village in Kapatagan district of Lanao del Sur, Philippines. The first was appointed in 2001 as a barangay secretary in Barangay Bakikis, Kapatagan, where her sister is the barangay chair. She noted, "The income is not that important to me because I'm also working as a clerk. I just want to become civil service–eligible so that I could apply for a permanent job in any public office." She felt that her well-being had increased to +5 with these white-collar jobs: "I was free to roam after leaving the office or rest if I felt very tired." It hardly seems possible that she comes from the same village as a poorer woman who reported:

> I was still very young when I got married, only 13, and I had not graduated from elementary school. My aunt and my sister betrothed me to a man so that they could get the dowry. I cried the whole time and that led my sister to hit me on the head with a bottle so that I would give in to what they wanted. I was not able to do anything but follow them.

After being forced into marriage, this woman went on to have 12 children. Yet, at the time of her interview, two were attending college with grants that she had obtained from her mayor. It is remarkable that a poor woman could have such a connection. It may be that contexts where gender norms are fluid provide more opportunities for poorer girls and women to challenge structures and norms. To the extent that conflict causes displacement, shakes up local institutions, and ushers in new norms and structures, these may also create space for women to negotiate new roles, hence contributing to empowerment.

Women often perceived the period of life when they were young brides and mothers as having been a challenging time. This is when rich and poor young women alike put some dreams on hold to build a family. Several described giving up their first jobs upon marriage with regret. Even if they continued working after marriage, they certainly did not do so during pregnancy. A common refrain across the countries is that they were either fired or felt pressured to leave their jobs. "I was expecting my first child, so I was ashamed to go to work after that [in an urban factory]. So I stopped working. Now I do wage labor [here in town]. I really enjoyed my first job," recalled a 45-year-old chronically poor woman from Hambantota district in the Southern province of Sri Lanka.

Poor women who were young mothers when conflict hit their villages have perhaps the most distressing tales to tell of any women in the sample. With nowhere to go

Maybe our life would be much better if all the children that we are now sending to school would finish their studies. Then there would come a time when they would be the ones to help me.

– A 30-year-old woman in Lanao del Sur, Philippines

and no one to turn to, these women described their lives with small children in cramped and unsanitary evacuation centers as pure hell. It is the impoverished young widows, however, who must be conflict's greatest victims. Widows either care for their small children and starve, or they leave them unattended or in otherwise risky situations to earn pennies from employers who prey on their desperation.

Older mothers and widows, while they struggled as well, usually appeared to cope better. Many had livelihood experiences, skills, and a reservoir of emotional resilience and confidence that younger women had yet to acquire. They could often draw on help from extended family or close friends, whom they might have helped in the past, as well as help from adult children or remittances. In Indonesia and the Philippines, many widows also controlled important assets.

Unequal and changing chances for adult women

A household's mobility status and headship were not reliable predictors of a woman's empowerment across the dataset. Marrying into a better-off family was not always associated with more empowerment. Conversely, widowhood did not necessarily derail a household's long-term mobility path.

The sample sizes when broken down by household mobility status are too small to draw anything but the most tentative conclusions. But it is notable that every life story from a woman classified as living in a "never poor" household in the Philippines and Indonesia received a high empowerment rating. This group of households remained above the community poverty line and maintained their better-off status over the 10-year study period. By contrast, women from "never poor" households in Colombia and Sri Lanka were much less likely to be rated as empowered.

This fits with the overall patterns revealed above with respect to country-level differences in the women's assets and capabilities and the related cultural differences in gender roles and norms.[32] Although there were exceptions, most women in the Sri Lanka dataset did not work outside the home unless economic circumstances required them to. For example, a woman from the district of Mannar took a training course and worked as a tailor for two years because income from her husband's job with the irrigation department had been cut off during one of their displacements. But she sold her sewing machine once his income was restored: "Now my husband is doing his government job and I have to bring up my children." Later in the interview, however, she confided that she regrets not being more educated and working, saying, "It is difficult to pass the time."

The methodology annex provides a Ladder of Life from a women's focus group in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The group located widows on the bottom two steps of the ladder: "They do not have houses, land, or any kind of property; they live in mud huts. They lack any kind of permanent employment and depend almost entirely on food stamps provided by government." Widows, in fact, were often placed on the bottom steps of ladders throughout the conflict countries. In many contexts around the world, widowhood can trigger sudden destitution and social exclusion.[33]

Yet, the life stories reveal that becoming a widow need not necessarily lead to loss of agency and impoverishment. In this dataset, Indonesia contained an unusually large number of widows of all ages, with most losing husbands to illness rather than conflict. Five of the seven Indonesian widows from better-off households continued to do well and even enhanced their empowerment and well-being after their husbands died and they assumed leadership of their households. Also, four widows from Indonesia were among the households that escaped poverty, often due to a combination of their own hard work and help from adult children. A widow who moved out of poverty in East Java, for example, explained that she supported her family by growing and selling vegetables and tobacco on her land. Now 60 years old and raising a granddaughter while her daughter works in Saudi Arabia, she advised, "People can avoid falling into poverty by working hard, never giving up or just doing nothing, and always praying to God." Indonesian women's independent control of major assets, as noted above, seems to be important for such outcomes.

While some older women expressed feelings of loss and disempowerment as they outlived loved ones, lost physical strength, and sometimes endured social isolation, a majority perceived that they had more control than ever. Whether rich or poor, married or widowed, they had learned from the ups and downs of their lives, and they took pride and strength from this. Two women from Mindanao said it best:

> When you get older, you realize that you can overcome any difficulty in life and that makes you even more confident.

> The older I become, the more I trust myself. We can continue to endure the trials of life. I know how to handle problems.

PART 4. OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES THAT SUPPORT INCLUSIVE AND RAPID RECOVERY

Part 4 examines local recovery processes and women's roles in them. While the analysis begins when the worst political violence finally settled down, the term post-conflict must be applied loosely. There were no more reports of intense mayhem after mid-2000 in Indonesia, and after 2002 in the other three countries, but many communities continued to experience sporadic outbreaks of political and local violence. Indonesia was the only country in the sample where security had been fully restored by the time the field research was conducted in 2005.

Figure 10 illustrates that, overall, the set of conflict communities that went on to enjoy the most rapid and inclusive recovery are also the communities where women received higher empowerment ratings. The comparison is sharpened by dividing the communities into terciles based on their poverty reduction outcomes (using their MOP ratings, as detailed in Box 2). Only the outcomes for the top tercile (high mobility) and bottom tercile (low mobility) are presented in the figure. Given that so few households moved out of poverty in the displaced communities sampled in Colombia, the comparative analysis used for that sample is the proportion of poor households that moved up any distance—irrespective of whether they crossed the community poverty line (this rating is called MPI).

To better illustrate the processes behind community mobility and women's empowerment after conflict, this section first examines the rebuilding of North Maluku, Indonesia. This conflict region experienced the highest rates of poverty reduction and women's empowerment of any in the sample. In addition, part 4 highlights one conflict community in each of the study countries. The four localities were selected because they met two conditions: (a) they had high poverty reduction in the wake of conflict, and (b) nearly all of the women interviewed received high empowerment ratings. In order to differentiate these exceptional places from the others, they are referred to as "superstars" throughout the rest of the report.

Together, the superstar region and the four superstar communities provide valuable illustrations of conditions that can sometimes arise in the wake of conflict and fuel rapid community recovery and women's empowerment. While the specific circumstances for these local successes vary, important patterns emerged that cut across these contexts.

> Even if we experienced hardships during evacuation, we also got good things. Now we have a bigger house than before.
>
> —A woman in a village of Lanao del Norte, Philippines

Figure 10. Share of women rated as substantially empowered in low- and high-mobility conflict communities
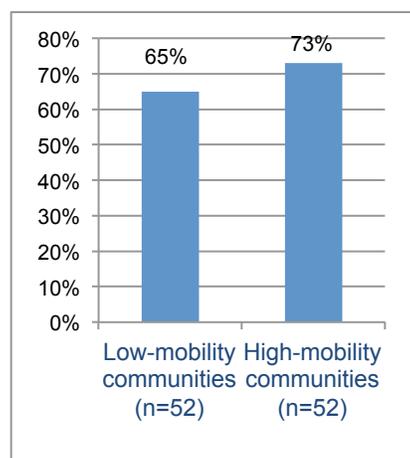
Local recovery from violent conflict

In poor and remote communities hit by conflict, democracy and markets often do not work as they are intended to.[34] Local governments are up for grabs and are captured by those with the most guns or the most money, or both. Markets struggle where they function at all, and are political and unfair. In many villages where the study took place, a small cluster of families—and the men who headed them—owned most of the productive land and also controlled local politics. In the urban barrios visited for the study in Colombia, actors with ties to the armed groups took over, shut down, or stole from local institutions.

In such an unequal and lawless landscape, ordinary citizens have to fend for themselves. People resign themselves to giving bribes to gain access to economic opportunities or public services. For poor people, such a landscape is problematic, as it is difficult for them to amass enough cash to pay the bribes needed to make their way up and out of poverty.[35] For poor women, the obstacles are all the larger. They may find it nearly impossible to accumulate and control sufficient assets to provide a bribe. Moreover, social norms largely proscribe them from making advantageous personal connections; as noted above, many poor women said that they could not conceive of approaching a politician, much less asking a favor. This is not a static state, of course. Notably, the recovery period in the aftermath of conflict does sometimes help open wider pathways for local people, including women, to make better use of their own resources and access new opportunities. It is these conditions that helped fuel the surprisingly rapid and high levels of poverty reduction seen in some communities across the countries.

Post-conflict aid played an important role, although the levels and forms of assistance available to communities varied widely. *Moving Out of Poverty: Rising from the Ashes* (Narayan and Petesch 2010) reviews this uneven landscape for reconstruction and development. Communities that were safer usually received more of these investments. The book draws attention to the pivotal roles that formal and informal community leaders played in attracting urgently needed outside resources and ensuring fair and equitable access to them. The capacity of local-level institutions to channel resources to different groups within the communities was vital for getting housing reconstructed, and markets, schools, health centers, roads, buses, and other services up and running in very short order. Just as important, it was critical for building peace and defusing the anger, frustration, insecurity, and mistrust that people harbored as a result of their exposure to horrific violence. Effective local leadership was also pivotal in containing the lawlessness that often permeates post-conflict contexts.

Post-conflict reconstruction and aid programs brought many women more freedom and choices. Running water, refrigerators, and electric cook stoves eased the burden of household chores, freed up time, and offered new ways to earn income. Several women across the countries said they were now selling profitable cold drinks and prepared foods from their new refrigerators. New or improved roads brought in customers and made it easier for women to access the more active markets outside of their villages. Many women joined new microcredit and training programs and tried

We live in constant fear. Sometimes we question why we came back. Is there a purpose in living like this?

– A woman in a village of Mannar district, Northern province, Sri Lanka

Now I'm better. At least I have my little house, my children are studying . . . I think what has helped me is unity, the association, and joining together with others to obtain things. I could not have gotten this house on my own. It was done working in association with others, and the mayor helped.

– A woman in a barrio of Ibague, Colombia

their luck again, or for the first time, with vending, baking, making handicrafts, sewing garments, raising livestock, growing vegetables, flowers, or spices, and so on. For most of these women, conflict experiences enlarged the presence in their lives of state, market, and nongovernmental institutions, as well as their own grassroots groups. This in turn helped them rebuild.

For a short while in the aftermath of violence, local politics is shaken up. Leaders look for ways to rebuild their legitimacy, access reconstruction grants and other resources from outside agencies, tamp down local crime and violence, and reestablish community cohesion. Given the weakness of the private sector in most conflict contexts, local leaders' capacity to direct post-conflict resources to different groups in the community, including women, was often critical for catalyzing broad-based, fast recovery and local security. In North Maluku, Indonesia, these and other factors came together to fuel the most inclusive and rapid recovery found in the study.

North Maluku: Broad new opportunities for women

North Maluku in Indonesia is the "superstar" conflict region where women across the five conflict communities visited displayed the highest overall levels of empowerment of any conflict communities in the four-country sample. These communities also experienced the highest rates of poverty reduction.

This story has three parts.[36] One, the conflict in North Maluku lasted a brief 11 months, and security was quickly restored in full. Two, post-conflict economic growth was stronger here than in any of the other sampling regions. Three, effective and decentralized aid programs flowed in from a strong and well-resourced state, buttressed by significant support from international donors and NGOs. Hence, peace, economic dynamism, and extensive aid *plus* reasonably good local democracy and governance were all important factors in the extensive poverty reduction and gender inclusion seen in this superstar region. This confluence of favorable circumstances, while obviously beneficial for the people who lived there, greatly complicates the prospects for replicating North Maluku's experience elsewhere. Yet, there is still plenty to be learned from this success story.

In economic terms, North Maluku outperformed the other conflict regions in the study. It also outperformed the peaceful but remote East Java farm communities visited in Indonesia. Prior to the conflict, North Maluku farmers had diversified into spices, vegetables, and other commodities that were being traded in international markets. By contrast, East Java's farmers seemed to be stuck in a rut, growing mainly the country's traditional and now less profitable domestic commodities of rice and tobacco. When the Asian financial crisis unfolded in 1997, North Maluku enjoyed a jump in profits as terms of trade for their export crops turned in their favor (but against East Java's domestic commodities). After the conflict in 2000, another boom followed in North Maluku with the creation of a new district capital and extensive construction surrounding it.

While global economic forces and national redistricting policies played a role, the economic contrast between the two sample regions of Indonesia also reflects the forces unleashed by conflict and local recovery processes. In North Maluku, people

I only graduated from junior high school, but every time a guest came from outside or from a subdistrict, the village head used to ask me to accompany the guest. The opinion of women in the village meeting was really considered, and even in the PKK meeting, I was always asked by the head of the village to represent [the village]. The skill that I could apply was gained through the meetings with other PKK members. So I received a lot of knowledge that I could use in my daily life.

— A woman from West Halmahera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

were unable to farm during periods of intense conflict between 1999 and 2000, so they acquired new skills out of dire necessity. Male farmers took up construction work or taxi jobs, if they could find them. Women hawked goods to help their families cope. When a modicum of safety was restored, men and women returned to their farms, but they also continued with or expanded their new nonfarm economic activities, mainly in the informal sector. Access to new infrastructure and diverse grants and loans supported both agricultural recovery and diversification into new activities.

In addition to a growing economy, responsive post-conflict reconstruction and development programs fueled North Maluku's recovery. An assistance program known as BBR (Bantuan Bangunan Rumah, or Assistance with Housing Materials) supported extensive housing reconstruction across the province, along with rebuilding of other community structures and cash grants for households. One woman from West Halmahera district in North Maluku recalled years later exactly what she received: "50 zinc sheets, 25 sacks of cement, 8 sheets of plywood, nails, and cash in the amount of 2 million rupiah" (about US $207). Indonesia's ambitious housing program stood in sharp contrast to housing programs elsewhere, typically marked by limited reach, poor coordination, and delays.

Putting their houses back together made it possible for the women to recover a normal daily life for their families, bringing peace of mind and a sense of safety and belonging. Many women also spoke of how the new housing helped them restart or improve their home-based livelihoods. One poor woman in West Halmahera said that finally having a house made of permanent materials was the best thing that ever happened to her: "When I got [housing assistance] in 1999, I could build a concrete house." Many women, in fact, marked the occasion of recovering their homes with the highest ratings on their timelines when telling their life stories.

Villagers of North Maluku also received cash grants, subsidized rice, and training in agricultural and nonfarm skills. Programs provided farm equipment, seeds, fertilizer, and technical assistance to improve farm productivity. Much of this assistance came through IDT (Impres Desa Tertinggal, or Presidential Instrument for Neglected Villages) and KDP (Kecamatan Development Program).[37] In addition, women spoke favorably of the community health, education, credit, and capacity-building initiatives provided through PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, or Family Welfare Movement).

What is novel in the North Maluku case is not just the extensive and multisectoral aid that poured into the region, but how much of it was programmed by local institutions. Decisions on use of funds were decentralized to community groups. KDP was just rolling out in the area when conflict struck, but in the aftermath the participatory program was able to bring together warring groups to plan and reach consensus on development projects in the villages (KDP 2002). KDP mandated the inclusion of women and poor community members in local decision making about use of its funds. It also made resources available to local groups composed solely of women, who most often directed the resources to support their economic activities. While women were members of grassroots economic groups in all four countries, in no other conflict region did they exercise authority over resources of this magnitude.

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Next we move from a focus on the superstar region to the individual superstar communities, one in each country. In the case of North Maluku, the spotlight turns to a town where women displayed especially strong empowerment and many households moved out of poverty after peace came in 2002.

Indonesia's superstar town

Superstar 1 (the names of the individual communities are omitted here) is an urban community of office workers in Ternate district of North Maluku, with a population of 2,000. Fighting in 1999 between Muslim factions left 71 houses burned to ashes. This was followed by a second conflict that pitted Muslims against Christians and resulted in a mass evacuation of the Christians and further destruction of housing. Once the violence was quelled in 2000, all of the generous, multisectoral, and responsive aid just described began flooding into Superstar 1. From the life stories it is evident that women benefited, with the active local economy reinforcing their recovery initiatives:

> The government's programs that helped me include the [KDP] loan for business capital and PKK. Through those programs, I was able to borrow 500,000 rupiah (about US $52) to run my cookies business. Right now I can produce and sell cookies in large quantities because I have a large amount of capital.

In addition to strengthening women's economic initiatives, the new participatory programs contributed to shifting women's public roles. KDP mobilized new groups and provided them with training and resources for starting up enterprises. These investments, in turn, raised women's expectations for services and gave them a stronger voice. One focus group reported that the women had met with provincial officials and let them know that "there was something wrong with the handling of the fund. They responded very well and as a result, we have now received the support money, namely the BBR funds."

The women mostly spoke highly of the BBR, KDP, and PKK programs in Superstar 1 even while acknowledging problems of corruption and delays. Politics is messy, but these women could show their politicians that they were watching them. When asked whether their local government had become more responsive, the women's focus group of Superstar 1 said it had not, despite all the aid they had received. By way of explanation, one woman remarked, "Because they all consider themselves clever." Another added that "because of the impact of the conflict, people no longer respect each other." Local institutional capacities to be inclusive and accountable take time to build, but the women were confident that their community was headed in the right direction: "The last election was a good lesson in democracy and this will benefit us in the future."

What is most important in the North Maluku success story is not just that there was one superstar community with extensive poverty reduction and women's empowerment. It is that the set of communities visited in this conflict region experienced *very* high levels of poverty reduction (averaging 38 percent poverty escapes overall), and 81 percent of women in the region received high empowerment ratings. Many villages were enjoying peace, a strong economy, and extensive post-conflict aid, and many women were contributing to and benefiting from the

The things that helped me in improving my well-being and moving out of poverty are as follows: one, BBR aid after the White-Yellow [factional] conflict; two, loans from the cooperative; and three, better security.

—A widow from Superstar 1 town

opportunities in their communities. Women in a village of West Halmahera district in the superstar region recalled:

> We protested to the head of the village because we did not receive BBR [housing assistance] and Raskin [rice for poor people] for 2004 even though we had had an interview. After we came back from the evacuation, we had the courage to organize a demonstration. Before, we were afraid to speak and to make a mistake. We were afraid of everything.

The Philippines' superstar village

Superstar 2 in the Philippines, with both extensive poverty reduction and women's empowerment, is located in Picong district of Lanao del Sur province in Mindanao. Like Indonesia's Superstar 1, this community enjoyed security, access to active markets, and significant post-conflict aid.

In addition to the political conflict, many Mindanao villages struggle with *rido*, or violent family feuds over land and local politics that often have decades-old antecedents. A beloved leader from this village mediated construction of the area's first "peace zone" after resolving a vicious and protracted blood feud among families in the 1970s, a feud that had killed his father. The peace zone is invaluable to community life because it delimits a substantial area of the village where armed fighting is not permitted.[38] While 12 villagers lost their lives during the "all-out war" in 2002, and other deaths followed in 2003 and 2006 due to *rido*, the peace zone protected the villagers from the surrounding violence and the hardships of displacement.

When a different political party came to power and took over the local government in 2003, the village's barangay status (stripped by the previous administration) was restored, and public services and investments took a sharp turn for the better. The village received electricity in 2003 and the main road was paved in 2004, both of which bolstered the area economy. Village farm produce and fish catches could now more quickly reach distant markets, where they could command better prices. Interclan fights declined because these improvements meant that people had more to lose if the fighting disrupted travel or services. There is little doubt that the community's successful conflict mediation made it attractive for public investment and fostered more rapid recovery of agricultural livelihoods relative to communities that were unable to provide safety from recurrent outbreaks of clan violence. But the well-timed post-conflict change in partisan fortunes must also be understood as contributing to the village's prosperity when the all-out war ended.

Some of the women who provided life stories in Superstar 2 had become successful moneylenders, while women in other communities who tried this risky business often went bankrupt because of defaults. In addition, the women remarked that they could add rooms to their houses with their earnings as cooks and bakers and owners of small shops, while women elsewhere seemed barely able to tread water with these types of jobs. One woman, whose husband was not a particularly good breadwinner, said that their household moved out of poverty because "I myself have a job. I work as a cook." The road building and construction boom had brought jobs and customers. The life stories also contain accounts of women being sent by the local government to peace seminars.

Here in [the village], as long as you work hard, something will really happen to your life.

—A 49-year-old woman from Superstar 2 village

Maria Elena, a 39-year-old college graduate also moved her household out of poverty almost single-handedly. She teaches at the village school as her main job, and in addition she runs a variety store and sells cookies to the children. She needs the extra income because her husband struggles with gambling and alcohol, and sometimes is not around at all. She explained how she copes:

> The reason why we did not fall back into poverty is that I receive a salary every month. I sell food at school. I believe this alternative way of earning a living has helped me a lot too. I earn from this every day . . . If I had to sum up, I would say that I have a big income, but all of it goes to the school expenses of my children. If I did not have all these expenses, I would have a lot of money.

Notwithstanding the new initiatives of many women, the village's prosperity and security were not enjoyed equally by all. A women's focus group made up of Christians, who were 10 percent of the village population, expressed frustration with the continued economic and political exclusion of this group. Many poor Christians had moved into the village seeking to get ahead, but they had encountered few opportunities. The women described poorly paid wage labor jobs, little access to capital or land, risky hunting and farming jobs in the nearby mountains, and rising costs for basic goods. They also expressed frustration with voter fraud and lack of voice for Christians in the community: "If any of the Christian residents here were to run for office, they [Maranaos] would make sure that the Christians would never win.", The women did acknowledge benefits from the new road and electricity.

As in the North Maluku superstar, governance problems persisted in Superstar 2, but the village provided a measure of security and had managed to attract significant post-conflict aid. Many if not all of the community's women were able to take advantage of new opportunities in the local economy.

Sri Lanka's superstar village

On a scorecard of human development, Sri Lanka ranks high. The country is renowned for showing the world that good health and education outcomes can be attained without reaching advanced levels of development. In fact, it ranks higher on the Human Development Index than the Philippines and many other countries with higher incomes per capita, mainly due to important progress on life expectancy and literacy (UNDP 2010). For all of its laudable efforts to foster social equality, however, sharp inequalities are present in large portions of the nation's territory. It is not heartening that Superstar 3, with extensive poverty reduction and empowerment, is a village that, while located in the country's ethnic minority region, is populated by the country's ethnic majority group. Yet the reasons for success there—better local security, market access, and public investments than elsewhere—reinforce the findings from the first two superstars.

Sri Lanka's exceptional community is a Sinhalese village of 300 families in the Ampara district of Eastern province. Superstar 3 arose from a governmental resettlement and irrigation program in the 1970s that was designed to bolster Sinhalese presence in the region. Unlike the more populous Muslim and Tamil villages of the conflict region, Superstar 3 has benefited from decades of public investment in irrigation and other agricultural infrastructure, as well as technical

We are thinking of moving because of the LTTE problem. We live in fear at night. We would leave if we could, but there's nowhere for us to go. Except for this problem, this is a good village. The 1999 attack is unforgettable for us.

—A woman from Superstar 3 village

support. Yet, the favored status could not protect villagers from the ethnic violence that afflicts the province, and an LTTE raid in 1999 left 44 community members dead. The government responded by expanding the army post next to the village.

While relatively limited aid is available to victims of war in Sri Lanka, the community had a reasonably strong and diversified economy for a rural area of the country. With the army presence nearby, Superstar 3's economy slowly came back to life in the years that followed the massacre. Women do most of the village's paddy cultivation. Profits from farming have decreased, but the women's focus groups indicated that their lives are better on balance because children now enjoy more educational opportunities and villagers are finding other livelihoods. "Most of the young girls, about 25 of them, go to the garment factory for work . . . They come and collect the girls in the morning and drop them home also," explained one woman. The women also benefited from agricultural extension services that helped them increase production, and from diverse sources of credit for their farming and other economic activities. In fact, the women identified six different credit sources available to them, but they remarked that default rates were high because credit was now so easy to obtain.

None of the women in the Tamil or Muslim communities visited for the study mentioned having factory work, extension programs, or more than one or two sources of credit. "We need jobs. It would be better if some organisation would come and start a factory or company in this village. Women are at home with nothing to do, but they can do things like making gunnysacks, weaving, mat making, and so forth," said a focus group of women in a Tamil community of Mannar district in the Northern province. In addition, gender inequalities seemed to interact with ethnic inequalities more strongly in Sri Lanka than in the two other Asian countries visited. Lack of security made it difficult for women to move around, and young Muslim women expressed frustration with norms of seclusion that further restricted their mobility.

Samurdhi was the principal form of assistance reported by the women of Superstar 3. The country's largest antipoverty program, Samurdhi began in 1995 and became fully operational in the Northern and Eastern provinces after the 2002 ceasefire. The program covers very poor families, providing small grants of up to 1,000 rupees a month (about US $10), microloans on a rotating basis to groups of five, and sometimes additional benefits to help families with births and funerals. Samurdhi also requires beneficiaries to provide voluntary labor in local public works. However, just three women in this village—two poor and one not—mentioned receiving Samurdhi in their life stories. The program's cash grants and loans, although valued, were seen as too tiny to provide meaningful support. Evaluations of Samurdhi point to problems with its poverty targeting and coverage in minority ethnic areas (Glinskaya 2000).

Women of Superstar 3 expressed disillusionment with their government and local democracy. The army presence was being reduced and they felt vulnerable to being attacked again.[39] They spoke harshly of politicians and their empty campaign promises, expectations of bribes, and abuses of public funds meant for community development: "Some years back there was a lot of enthusiasm [for democracy] but now people have lost interest. This time we have told the politicians that they should

not come to the village unless they fulfill the promises they have already made." One woman who had worked on the election for the party in power explained that she has protested to a politician about a promised road improvement. "But we can't be sure about [the road] until it happens," she advised. While elected officials may be more accessible than they used to be, the women said this has little effect: "They are all just sitting there. They don't pay attention to the development of the village."

Outside of the superstar village, the more common factors explaining household mobility seemed to be the husband's economic initiatives, overseas remittances, and more rarely, women's own resources (when they had good jobs or their own successful enterprises). In a town in Jaffna district where there was little poverty reduction and none of the five women interviewed was employed, one woman explained that her husband had migrated to France and found work: "Only my husband's effort helped us to arrive at this position." In Superstar 3, by contrast, both women and men were economically active, and there was greater security and government support for local development.

Colombia's superstar barrio

Superstar 4 lies 15 kilometers from the heart of Cartagena, a port city that attracts business and tourism from around the world. In this barrio, where there were many empowered women and many households moved up, the women coped a bit better than in the other Colombian barrios sampled. A few had city jobs, and bustling markets were not too far away. Also, numerous assistance programs operated in the barrio. These programs helped women put a roof overhead, build solidarity, and recover emotionally from the trauma of displacement. Yet, few women interviewed have been able to move their households out of poverty.[40]

Superstar 4 was constructed by families chosen in a lottery administered by the municipal government of Cartagena in concert with a Swiss foundation and a local nonprofit. A women's focus group in the barrio identified projects and programs associated with 19 external partners, including government agencies, international donors, and NGOs. However, few of the women reported success in using these opportunities as launching pads to develop stable livelihoods. Unlike the other three superstars, which managed to establish a modicum of security, the barrio suffered diverse forms of violence, and this seems to be a key factor explaining the limited impact of the assistance programs. The women's great difficulties with recovery after moving to Superstar 4 are well documented in larger studies of Colombia's 3 million displaced people (Ibáñez and Moya 2007).

As discussed in part 3, the Colombian occupational timelines are filled with diverse livelihoods in formal and informal nonfarm work as well as in agricultural activities. Once displaced, however, most women found themselves excluded from good economic opportunities because of poor education, scarce connections, and stigma associated with living in a barrio that is considered to be a war zone. To overcome these barriers, most of the women interviewed had participated in governmental or NGO training courses and enterprise initiatives. The enterprise schemes often required them to attend training sessions and then form a local association to launch

I've improved myself here. I know more people, I have a little house, and I can study. I earned my high school diploma.

—A 42-year-old displaced woman who said her life finally turned around when she was selected in 2003 to receive a housing lot in Superstar 4

an enterprise such as a shop, bakery, soup kitchen, or daycare. With small loans and sometimes grants, many women then became workers and leaders in their enterprises.

As detailed in Box 4, the best of the enterprise development programs in Superstar 4 provided a few women with marketable skills and modest income. Too often, however, the projects provided meager returns yet required extended work schedules, which posed difficulties for women because of their heavy household burdens.[41] One of the larger schemes required so much time and provided so little remuneration that it seemed to leave the women worse off for their participation. The women of Superstar 4 also said they got the runaround with documentation and organizational requirements for participation in the schemes, and loans or grants that were promised sometimes failed to materialize. In addition, different programs competed against one another. The most difficult situation was when external partners pitted different groups in the community against one another. Many women spoke of significant and lasting community conflict over the collapse of a housing assistance program that was supposed to help 100 households but reached only three.

To make matters worse, the barrio became increasingly insecure over the study period. In focus group discussions, residents reported crime and violence involving guerrillas, paramilitaries, youth gangs, and unnamed armed actors. One woman from Superstar 4 reported that she withdrew from running the barrio's housing association because of death threats. Also, a rift in the neighborhood association forced local activists from their posts, and some who had been labeled as sympathetic to the guerrillas fled the barrio altogether. Perhaps most disturbing was the assassination of the community leader who had led the collective action to take over the land and establish the barrio. The women reported that their local leaders no longer represented them. Eventually, due to the strife, the World Food Program and other programs ceased operating in the superstar barrio. Similar forms of violence wracked the other displaced barrios in the sample (Petesch and Gray 2010).

These unfortunate events illustrate the dynamic nature of local security conditions in conflict countries and make clear why security is imperative if women are to benefit from market opportunities and post-conflict programs. In addition to problems of weak security, enterprise development and other local assistance programs that are ineffective and unaccountable can be harmful for women and weaken the cohesion of their communities. Although the Colombian women had track records of being economically active in the countryside and badly needed cash income to get by in their new barrios, a quarter of them were not working when interviewed. The prospects were just too discouraging.

Box 4. Training and enterprise development schemes: Plentiful and appreciated, but limited economic impact

Displaced women from across the Colombia sample mostly spoke highly of training, counseling, and enterprise development services from federal and municipal agencies, international donors, and NGOs. The programs built skills and solidarity and provided emotional support to a badly battered population. Nevertheless, the women widely reported limited economic benefits from their participation in the schemes.

The enterprise initiative spoken of most highly in Superstar 4's life stories and focus groups was an association with five members entitled Mis Esfuerzos (My Efforts). The women completed various training courses and now run a cooperative variety store. They hope the business will grow. Presently, however, it brings in little income, although the women put in long and sometimes risky hours. They are frightened by youth gangs and armed robbers who steal from them, particularly at night. Local women are sometimes afraid to come to their shop.

The enterprise initiative spoken of least favorably was an association of 20 women from Superstar 4 who received training in baking, business management, marketing, and customer relations. Together they launched a bakery offering sweet rolls, cookies, and empanadas. While the sales seemed to go fine, the women struggled. After dividing up the earnings, they barely had enough to cover bus fare to the bakery. "My life improved because of my training, but it got worse because I earned almost nothing," reported one woman in her life story. She felt exploited working from 5:00 in the morning until 11:00 at night, and she quit. She rated this experience as −4 (on a scale of −5 to +5) on her occupational timeline. And for the time being at least, she indicated that her husband is bringing in all of the income and she will not join any other economic groups.

The Colombian life stories beyond the superstar community also overflow with accounts of training and counseling programs. The educational timelines contain six, eight, ten, and sometimes a dozen different training courses in skills such as sewing, baking, industrial cooking, peacemaking, human rights, psychological counseling, community leadership, financial management, and marketing. The record holder, with 28 training certificates, is Julieta. Age 50 at the time of the interview, Julieta began her training courses when she was 25 years old and still living in the countryside. Sometimes taking two courses at once, she trained to become a pastry assistant, nursing assistant, cook, seamstress, embroiderer, fabric painter, glass maker, and dressmaker, among other skills. Julieta said the training helped her obtain her current post as a cooking assistant, but she makes very little in the job.

In addition to developing their skills, the training courses offered women opportunities to network and build solidarity with other women who had also endured displacement. Many described the programs as helpful, saying they had learned how to speak in public and had gained practical knowledge for coping with abusive husbands and harsh city life. One woman reported that she no longer puts up with mistreatment in the home because she now knows her rights and how to get help. A poor older woman in great need of making money said the training helped her run a small food stand from her home in Pasto:

> These trainings have helped me live better. They have taught me how to conduct myself with people. I have a little store and I learned to treat people well. They taught us that you don't have to be boring. Brave I am not, but one can say good morning and make jokes with the customers.

The same woman noted that the training included a component of emotional support:

> Sometimes they make you cry. They explain to us different things that have happened and we remember what we've been though. Sometimes they make us laugh, play. Sometimes you forget the problems you have in your house.

In general, the women in Colombia reported that these programs are helping them and the quality is good, but the economic returns are modest at best. "We don't prosper. I have something like 10 certificates but I am fighting tooth and nail. Here what we lack is work," remarked a woman from a barrio outside Ibagué.

Life outside the superstar communities

Most communities in this study did not have community-driven development programs that supported local recovery initiatives chosen and managed by grassroots groups that included women (as in Indonesia's Superstar 1). Most were not villages with a peace zone, extensive new infrastructure, and diverse economic opportunities, including for many women (the Philippines' Superstar 2). Most farming villages did not have factory jobs for women, nor the army stationed nearby for their protection (Sri Lanka's Superstar 3). And most localities did not have city jobs within reach and numerous assistance programs that targeted women (Colombia's Superstar 4). In short, the superstar communities enjoyed special circumstances: access to active markets; reasonable security (except in Colombia, where conflict continued); and

> The majority of politicians are corrupt. Assistance for the displaced has arrived in the municipality, but they don't give it to us.
>
> —A 17-year-old displaced youth from Ibagué, Colombia

local governance that was adequate for jumpstarting community recovery and making good use of post-conflict support. As a result, many women in these four communities demonstrated empowerment, and many households escaped poverty.

In the other conflict communities in the sample, fewer women were empowered and fewer households found the means to escape poverty. To varying degrees, these communities suffered from weak security, crippled markets, and dysfunctional governance in conflict's wake. These are villages where farmers dared not invest in modern farm equipment because it could be stolen or destroyed in renewed fighting; where only relatives of the mayor received relief and housing supplies; where employers fled for safety, leaving workers jobless; and where vendors languished in weak local markets because it was too dangerous, costly, or time-consuming to travel to more active markets outside the village. In some of these localities, crime and violence could only be curbed with vigilante justice, because there is no formal law enforcement.

Finally, there are 21 localities in the sample that were fortunate enough to miss out entirely on violent conflict during the study decade. The irony is that many of these peaceful places had the lowest empowerment ratings and lowest poverty reduction of all. Without a need to silence the guns and rebuild shattered infrastructure, government agencies and donors evidently saw no need to bring in water pipes, electric lines, roads, or initiatives to strengthen women's economic activities. These places just got the same old neglect.

The oldest woman interviewed, a nearly 70-year-old widow from peaceful East Java in Indonesia, was asked whether she had ever received government aid. She was an impoverished tobacco grower and farm laborer who spoke in detail of how her farm debt had doubled every year. Her son-in-law had just died, leaving her saddled with impossible debt on her half hectare of land. "Ever?" she replied, "We got one cow but it was small, then it got sick and died. We had it for just five months. We were also asked to buy rice for 4,000 rupiah."

The situation is not peaceful now, and we live in fear. Even though we have a big market near our village, there isn't enough demand for the products to bring us a profit. Earlier we had a good income, especially from tobacco, onions, and palmyrah palm products. Now we can't sell our products. Living costs are increasing rapidly and we face great difficulties trying to survive on our low incomes. Education costs are also high, and some of our children couldn't continue their studies.

—Women's focus group in a town in Jaffna, Sri Lanka

PART 5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY REFLECTIONS

The report reveals that forces unleashed by conflict and recovery processes can lead to moments when pathways for women's empowerment and poverty reduction seem to enlarge. For a short while, norms and structures that generally exclude and subordinate women are shaken up and become less confining. Women are exposed to new ideas and new skills while displaced, and they are propelled into new interactions with local public, market, and civic institutions when they return. New infrastructure lightens their household burdens and opens up time and opportunities to pursue better livelihood options. Yet, the report finds that the benefits of these forces for women and for conflict communities varied widely on the ground. Further research is needed to understand better the conditions under which shocks may fuel shifts in gender roles and norms, and the most promising interventions for advancing inclusive recovery.

The variation in empowerment is a product both of women's own agency and of the opportunity structures that surround them. Although the Philippine women displayed the most assets and capabilities, their agency was greatly constrained by poor security, governance, and economic conditions in the Mindanao communities. In comparison, the women of North Maluku, Indonesia, were endowed with lower levels of education and bridging social capital and had less access to formal sector jobs. Yet they received empowerment ratings that were comparable to those of the Philippine women largely because they could count on local opportunity structures that were supportive of their initiatives in the wake of conflict. They enjoyed peace, a strong economy, and effective assistance programs that gave them the voice and resources they needed to participate in and benefit from local opportunities.

The Colombians were the least likely to have completed primary school, the least likely to have resumed accumulating physical assets after conflict, and the least likely to report supportive husbands or respect in their families. They did join the most groups, although it is not clear how much good this did them. In Sri Lanka, cultural and gender norms interacted with ethnic inequalities and ongoing insecurity to give rise to the lowest levels of empowerment in the study.

The assessment of local opportunity structures in part 4 focused on the success stories, revealing a virtuous circle between security, market, and governance conditions that were good enough to get inclusive recovery processes going. While problems with local democracy and governance were pervasive, the superstars featured local institutional capacities that could contain lawlessness (except in Colombia) and put external resources to good use. It is also important to note that in all four superstar communities, women could access competitive markets and the formal economy, albeit with often limited returns.

The presence in many communities of new self-help, microcredit, and training opportunities to support women's economic roles provides evidence of rising attention to gender concerns in post-conflict programs. Yet it was not clear from this study that many of these interventions were adequate or effective in post-conflict contexts.[42] Assessments of efforts to mainstream gender concerns into development

> During the time I was displaced, I earned some money from teaching sewing, but that was only for three years. Now that we are back, I would like to improve my small chili business. But it would require peace.
>
> —A woman in a village in Mannar district, Northern province, Sri Lanka

> Given all of the obstacles to escaping from a situation of poverty, not being able to count on economic resources is the most important one. Resources—not having resources. If you have them, you can get ahead. If I had them, I would struggle as much as I could to get ahead.
>
> —A woman in a barrio in Bucaramanga, Colombia

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programs repeatedly conclude that governments and donor agencies have had great difficulties making the leap from strong gender policies to results on the ground (see Greenberg and Zuckerman 2009; Molyneux and Razavi 2006; Moser and Moser 2005; Rehn and Johnson Sirleaf 2002). In the policy arena, Caroline Moser's assessments of gender and conflict programs make a compelling case for interventions that can be more responsive to diverse conflict experiences; among other factors, she stresses the importance of gender, geography, and a community's stage in the transition from war to peace (Moser and Moser 2005; Moser and Clark 2001). In their examination of post-conflict activities since the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Molyneux and Razavi (2006, 19) conclude that "there is still a large gap between the growing recognition of the gender dimensions of war and conflict and the practice of humanitarian aid, as well as in the design, implementation and funding of programs to address the needs of women and girls."

In addition to problems of development effectiveness, the life stories reveal a world that is complacent about the plight of women and girls who are forced by poverty and gender inequalities, and by their weak local governments and economies, to endure humiliation and abuses both in their homes and in the wider community. While abuse by intimate partners may be the most prevalent, the women in this sample also faced diverse risks outside their homes. Some women and girls worked just for food. Many reported working extremely long hours for low pay and sometimes not being paid the wages owed. A few fought off sexual advances by employers. Conflict and recovery periods intensify these problems greatly.[43]

In some cases, post-conflict programs that were ineffective and unaccountable added to rather than eased the women's insecurity and powerlessness. In Colombia, women reported working 18-hour days for little pay in donor-sponsored enterprises. And when corruption and lawlessness undermined local development schemes, the women's external partners shut down their programs and moved on, rather than use their clout and resources to address urgent problems of weak local security and governance.

Together the findings on factors that shape women's agency and opportunity structures have important implications for post-conflict strategies. Against a backdrop of severe gender inequalities and problems of violence against women that can characterize conflict contexts, the shock of conflict to local structures and norms seems to provide opportunities for women to exercise greater agency. There is therefore **a window for programming interventions that build on these positive but time-limited forces**. Many of the interventions that can help women in post-conflict communities are also good practice in other settings, but they may have greater payoff in the more fluid setting of a community emerging from war. These findings point to the need for stronger policy attention in five areas.

1. Establish and maintain local security.

The evidence suggests that there would have been more extensive women's empowerment and poverty reduction across all of the conflict regions, and not just peaceful North Maluku's, if there had been greater investments in local law and order. Markets, local governance, and aid schemes were all undermined by

I have more confidence now, and each year my confidence grows. It's because security is becoming better and better and our kiosk is running well.

—A woman of West Halmahera district, North Maluku, Indonesia

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continuing political and local violence. A growing literature suggests that policies that blindly decentralize resources down to these fragile contexts have the potential to increase local crime and violence.[44] Innovation is needed to create more effective local law enforcement measures in remote areas and poor urban neighborhoods in order to contain lawlessness and the inevitable backlashes against peace and security so common in post-conflict contexts.

Under conditions where human rights violations are persistent, communities need emergency assistance until law and order can be established. In particular, young mothers who are poor, and especially those who are widowed, need well-targeted programs of assistance. Women also require access to formal or informal mechanisms of justice and conflict mediation that will protect them from diverse forms of violence and also protect their economic assets and initiatives in these difficult environments.

2. Support women's accumulation and independent control of major assets.

Many women in the Philippines and Indonesia acquired land and houses through marriage or inheritance, an advantage that distinguished them from the women in Sri Lanka and Colombia. Their control of major property aided their status in the household, enhanced their livelihoods, and provided a foundation for recovery in the wake of conflict. In Colombia and elsewhere, post-conflict housing aid brought women material security and restored peace of mind; for some it was a key productive asset as well, enabling them to run home-based businesses or engage in rental markets. Housing reconstruction and resettlement programs that support joint titling (or sole titling if a woman heads the household) may present an opportunity to foster more gender-equitable ownership of major assets in post-conflict contexts. Weak local institutions and norms that hinder women from acquiring assets and controlling the assets they own present important barriers.[45] Recommendation 4 below attempts to address some of these local challenges.

Few women reported using formal financial institutions, although they often mentioned that they were the main savers and managers of remittance flows to their households. In Indonesia and the Philippines, many women owned homes and farmland, but they did not seem to be able to leverage these assets to access formal financial institutions. Financial services, including for insurance and retirement, are needed to effectively reach women and help them accumulate significant savings, access finance independently, and reduce their exposure to risk.

In the wake of conflict, some women across the four countries enjoyed use of new small loan funds that offered better terms than local moneylenders. However, the usefulness of this credit was constrained by the tiny loans available and by weak local security and economies.[46] Women also expressed frustration with the programs' requirements for participation, documentation, and collateral, and with high default rates. It may be that generous grants, and larger individual or collective loans for women who can absorb them, make more sense in conflict contexts than group-based micro-loans. This may provide space for women to focus scarce time and collective action on more productive ventures.

3. Build connectivity to active markets.

Many conflict-affected women in this sample lived in remote villages that required costly commutes to reach economic opportunities. In a few villages like Superstar 2 in the Philippines, once roads were improved, their economies quickly diversified and became more inclusive for both women and poor workers. Infrastructure investments need to be strategic and effectively link localities to active markets. Other communities with road improvement projects remained isolated. In addition, gender norms and roles that assign much heavier household care burdens to women constrain their time and freedom of mobility, meaning they will have more difficulty than men in accessing distant economic opportunities even with road and transport improvements. Women's mobility is also greatly affected by local security conditions.

In some contexts, modest additional investments in gender-sensitive infrastructure and safety components can help reduce barriers to women's physical mobility (examples include street lighting, women-only waiting rooms for trains and buses, and restrooms in markets). In conservative cultures, separate transport and facilities for women are a basic requirement. There is also a growing literature on how access to information technologies can transform women's economic activities and gender norms,[47] although evidence of this was scarce in this dataset. This suggests that communities in conflict regions may benefit from gender-targeted investments in communication services as well.

A number of other opportunities for strengthening women's economic participation in post-conflict environments emerged from the findings:

- *Women farmers*. Women across the sample grew food or staple crops and tended livestock, but they rarely mentioned access to services or resources that might make these core economic activities more productive. The existence of a gap in providing services to women farmers (as compared to male farmers) has been apparent for decades and needs urgent attention, given recurrent global food crises. A report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization finds that women make up 43 percent of the agricultural labor force in the developing world (FAO 2011). However, the share is likely to be higher in conflict contexts due to the larger number of female-headed households and the scarcity of other economic opportunities.
- *Women entrepreneurs*. In areas with peace and vibrant economies such as North Maluku, informal work can be a springboard, or even a woman's preferred sector, given the flexibility. Yet in the weak economies of most post-conflict contexts, many women and their tiny businesses struggled, remaining isolated and in competition with one another. Strategies that help women cooperate in their economic activities and reach more active markets outside of their localities offer promise. For these linkages to lead to sustained gains, however, women need generous, specialized, and long-term support.
- *Women's* entry-*level opportunities in the formal sector*. The study reveals that women in this sample did not hang on to their formal sector jobs for long. Greater innovation is needed to make entry-level jobs in government, factories, hotels, restaurants, and offices provide stepping stones to better work and pay so that women can remain in these scarce jobs and move up.

- *High-quality daycare and daycare workers.* Entering the labor force and starting a family often coincide in women's life cycles, yet they have few resources to help them navigate this difficult transition. Colombia and the Philippines have national daycare programs that provide subsidized services to enable mothers with young children to remain economically active. Daycare centers also provided poor women in the sample with salaried employment and training; yet women often left these jobs, too, because of poor remuneration and opportunities for advancement.

- *Public works.* Public stimulus packages in response to conflicts and economic crises often involve public works projects that provide jobs in construction, principally for men. Targeted programs should also open opportunities for women, perhaps in areas such as health, education, and agricultural extension services. These are important investments in future growth, but they can also benefit women immediately because they create jobs in sectors where women tend to have skills and experience.[48]

- *Capacity building for profitable livelihoods.* The low levels of education among rural women in middle-income Indonesia, Colombia, and Sri Lanka were surprising, and suggest a need for strategies that are sensitive to these constraints. Some locations had capacity-building programs in basic literacy and numeracy, vocational education, enterprise development, organizing, and psychological support. Where these programs were present, women valued them. They often mentioned that these programs gave them self-confidence and solidarity, and that these were just as valuable as the technical skills and exposure to new ideas that they gained. Yet these supply-driven programs seem to direct women repeatedly into low-paying livelihoods where competition is intense. Women can get these jobs on their own. They need encouragement and support to branch out into more promising economic opportunities.

- *Psychosocial counseling services.* The psychological dimensions of conflict and development are often neglected. Yet the periods immediately before, during, and after conflict are deeply traumatic times, and several women described vividly how they almost single-handedly had to pull their families through—emotionally as well as economically. Colombia, however, is the only country where women mentioned benefiting from counseling services. The Colombian women also valued the resources directed to the problem of domestic violence. In addition to helping women heal, individual and group counseling, like other capacity-building initiatives to support women's collective action, also helps them look forward, aspire, and act effectively on their own behalf. These are key elements of agency processes, as discussed in the assets and capability section.[49]

4. Make women's empowerment and community participation cornerstones of reconstruction and development programs.

In the aftermath of conflict, communities are anxious to rebuild and recover normalcy, and community leaders want to be seen making this happen. This determination can catalyze rapid rebuilding, especially when it is tapped and supported effectively with community-driven development programs, as in North Maluku. Yet, the literature indicates that even well-designed participatory projects will exclude women, or disregard gender targets if they exist, unless specific measures are in place to ensure that women are well represented throughout planning and

implementation. A number of measures can enhance women's inclusion in and benefits from community-driven schemes, thus improving the schemes' overall development effectiveness:

- *Establish clear gender objectives.* For decentralized programs to work for women, upfront investments are needed to support women's meaningful inclusion in the process of setting clear gender objectives. Where local women's organizational capacities to participate are weak, resources can be applied to help their grassroots organizations connect with effective national and international women's support and advocacy organizations. This can strengthen local women's participation and influence at the critical design stage of these programs.

- *Apply measures to support transparency, inclusion, and accountability*, and monitor performance on these objectives closely to allow for needed adjustments. Gender-inclusive measures in community-driven projects include rules requiring gender quotas for planning, decision-making, and oversight bodies, and in hiring for construction. They also often include targets for building women's capacities to organize and make their voices heard, and to strengthen their economic activities. Design features that foster transparency and accountability include measures to build awareness of project rules and requirements, public lists of approved projects and contractors, and public budgets, audits, and hearings. To work as intended, however, these measures need to be tailored to local contexts and monitored closely. Within this kind of framework, women in North Maluku were more able to hold their officials to account for their housing and other entitlements.

- *Invest in local women's political and civic participation.* From the Mindanao communities emerges the promise of women's political inclusion. Two tools can jump-start such processes: informal or formal gender quotas for local elected offices and public sector agencies, and complementary investments in grassroots women's organizing. Quota positions may not give women meaningful roles immediately, but they crack the door open for women to see how men mediate conflicts, engage in politics, and run public agencies. Over time, and with practice, female elected officials and bureaucrats can learn how to represent their constituencies, including women and their networks, and they may then become more effective forces for more gender equality and women's empowerment. Just as necessary are influential women's civic advocates pressing for change from outside government and in partnership with public officials. Innovative and one-off participatory programs and projects can help launch a process of change after conflict ends. But long-term investments are also needed to build and strengthen state-society synergies for gender equality and women's empowerment, because these institutions and linkages are more likely to be sustained and transform gender inequalities on a wide scale.[50]

5. Strengthen the contribution of long-term social assistance programs to gender equality and post-conflict recovery.

Although the four conflict countries were all middle-income, few poor women in this study reported meaningful benefits from their country's established programs of social assistance. Where present, cash transfer and self-help schemes, such as Samurdhi in Sri Lanka, typically provided scant resources. Nonetheless, women valued them, as these interventions tap into women's strong desire to educate their children and their responsibilities for managing scarce household budgets. At the same time, while there is evidence that cash transfer programs improve children's health and education outcomes, critics contend that their design reinforces gender-inequitable household roles by disregarding fathers' responsibilities (Molyneux 2006). More comprehensive and effective programs are needed for conflict contexts, especially interventions that connect women to real economic opportunities. In addition, women reported that they highly valued harmony in their households where this was present (ranging from 88 percent in the Philippines to 29 percent in Colombia), and social assistance programs might experiment with approaches that recognize the value of and enhance household cooperation by working to strengthen opportunities for *all* household members.

An ambitious and promising social assistance initiative, entitled Juntos (Together), is taking off in Colombia. Juntos is an interagency program that mobilizes another kind of army, an army of social workers. Over the past few years, they have gone go door-to-door to the poorest 1.2 million households across large parts of the country. They are gathering information from and developing action plans with all members of these very poor households, then linking the households with services in their communities to support the action plans. Perhaps most important, the social workers and the different agencies providing the services are following up to see what is working and what is not.

Where there is family conflict and women are isolated—as was the case for many women in this study—traditional female-targeted social assistance programs should continue to play a role. But they require a wider variety of interventions, such as those discussed in the recommendations above. Social assistance limited to small cash transfers and self-help cannot serve as an effective bridge to a better life for these women and their households, which are under stress from within and without.

● ●

Implementing these five policy recommendations will be challenging. They require a strong understanding of women's assets and capabilities and their local opportunity structures, and of how and why these can vary greatly and change over time. The findings from this report suggest that given the norms of subordination and exclusion that many women must overcome in order to exercise agency, policies and programs need to work on both sides of the empowerment framework in complementary fashion—investing coherently to strengthen women's agency *and* to remove barriers that disadvantage them in their opportunity structures.

It is not only a matter of enhancing the lives of women. The data show that communities with more empowered women also enjoyed more rapid recovery and poverty reduction in the wake of conflict. Where women were more able to take initiative, they made a difference to their households and communities. For contexts with deeply exclusionary opportunity structures, women will require more investments and external partners who will stand by them for the long haul, because shifting power structures is difficult to do in the best of circumstances. Post-conflict contexts, nevertheless, can present promising entry points for undertaking this work.

ANNEX: METHODOLOGY NOTE

The theories and tools that we can use to examine empowerment and mobility remain inadequate.[51] Fundamentally, the analytic framework applied is inspired by sociological concepts that view social mobility "not as individual movement up and down an abstract hierarchy" but as "concrete flows of persons among clusters, especially clusters that differ significantly in dominance" (Tilly 2007b, 55; 2008). The particular focus here is on gender hierarchies (or clusters) and on how conflict may sometimes shift these in ways that provide more freedom and choices for women.

A comparative case study approach is used to examine the complex dynamics of women's empowerment and its linkages with community mobility. Case studies are the preferred approach for researching questions of "how" and "why" because they "allow investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin 2003, 3). They are helpful for examining change processes such as empowerment and mobility because they allow analysis of factors and processes that need to be traced over time as well as contextually grounded for sound interpretation of their significance in the lives of women and communities. The approach also enables exploration of commonalities or combinations of causes across sets of cases (Ragin 2008).

The empowerment measures used in the analysis build in large part on Naila Kabeer's (1999) seminal conceptual work in this area. To assess empowerment, she advises focusing on decisions surrounding women's strategic life choices in the spheres of education, livelihood, marriage, and childbearing (also see Molyneux 1985, 230–31). Kabeer contrasts these infrequent but pivotal expressions of agency with more frequent but less important decisions about such everyday matters as domestic chores or purchases. She reinterprets selected empirical studies to demonstrate that shifts in the strategic areas predict future empowerment more reliably than do measures of women's control over other spheres of their lives. When women choose, for instance, when and whom to marry, or where to work, these actions tend to alter gender roles and associated family hierarchies in many societies. This rebalancing spills over and transforms other spheres of a woman's life in ways that everyday manifestations of agency do not.

Box 5 provides some of the guidance given to the study teams for conducting the life story interview. Unlike most data collection methods, the open-ended interview and focus group tools allow respondents to share their experiences and perceptions in their own ways and in their own words. Yet, without prompting, many factors seemingly key to mobility—such as conflict, a large inheritance, or the arrival of electricity in the community for the first time—will not be mentioned. It seems to be human nature to recall best what we can and cannot make happen ourselves, while many other events (that happen regardless of our own initiative) get pushed to the background when we make sense of the whys and hows of our lives. As a woman from Lanao del Sur in the Philippines explained, "I learned that it's more rewarding when you really earn out of your own effort." What we do with our "own effort" is more memorable, and perhaps more meaningful, than circumstances over which we have no control.

Almost every type of data collection that involves asking respondents to tap their memories struggles with problems of gaps and recall error. The methodology contains a few design elements to address these weaknesses. Most questions in the life story instrument focus on the past 10 years, rather than on a lifetime, and the starting year is anchored by a major event in each country to help the women remember. The women were also asked about the impacts of the conflict on different dimensions of their lives. The dataset contains extensive community-level information from a community questionnaire and eight or nine focus groups in each community (three and sometimes four of which were conducted exclusively with women), and this information proved especially valuable. The richness of the dataset combined with the large sample size of life stories allowed extensive triangulation of findings for the analysis and conclusions.

To interpret women's control over the different strategic life choices, Kabeer (1999) stresses the importance of assessing contextual factors. A woman who limits her fertility in a community where having many children is still the norm demonstrates a different level of empowerment from a woman who limits her fertility in a society

where fertility control and small families are the norm. The women's accounts also shed light on norms and practices surrounding women's economic roles and how they are affected by conflict. The extensive focus group data with women on the conditions for and trends in their livelihoods and their other roles in their communities provide an important complement to the women's life stories.

Table 3 illustrates a Ladder of Life prepared by a women's focus group in a town in Jaffna district in the Northern province of Sri Lanka. The focus group began with a discussion about local livelihoods and moved into building the figurative ladder, on which household mobility was then mapped. The activity was designed to capture the different socioeconomic groups in a community and the reasons why households in the different groups move up and down the ladder. Step 1 in the table describes the characteristics of the poorest and worst-off households, and step 6 the richest and best-off households.

Table 3. Ladder of Life created by women's focus group, town in Jaffna district, Northern province, Sri Lanka

Characteristics	Reasons for movement
Step 6. People who own big shops in the village or outside; people with high positions in government departments; people who receive remittances from kin in developed countries such as Canada and the UK. Their education level is very advanced and they have bank savings. They own land, houses, and vehicles, such as motorbikes.	
Step 5. Government workers such as clerks and teachers; people who have their own businesses, such as vegetable shops in the markets. Their education is at least to the advanced level, and some of their children are at university. They have savings, and some receive remittances from smaller countries, such as those in the Middle East.	Educating children up to a high level, such as university level, and saving money allow people to move up the ladder.
Community poverty line	
Step 4. Skilled laborers in masonry and carpentry; people who have small shops; the self-employed. They have their own land, around 10 perches [a fraction of an acre]. They have fewer children, around 3 or 4. Their wives are also employed. They may also be getting remittances from the Middle East.	When their relations or friends providing financial support move to larger countries like Canada and the UK, these people can move up.
Step 3. Male-headed households of daily wage laborers, government servants who have many children, or minor employees in government offices. They own a certain amount of land. They value education and most of them have studied up to secondary level.	People move upward as well as fall back. People who save more can move up and those who do not increase their savings will stay at the same level. People who do not save money and spend without making plans will fall.
Step 2. Self-employed widows and families with adult children. They receive food stamps. They make greater effort to gain education than the people at step 1, but their houses are not much different. They have dowry lands. In some of these families, the husbands may suffer from illness.	People can move up, from step 2 to 3, or down, from 2 to 1. Training programs can help them improve their income and move up. Housing schemes also help people move up the ladder. Some households fall back due to the sudden death of the breadwinner; normally these deaths are caused by the army. Some women have lost their husbands due to war. They are either killed or kidnapped by the army.
Step 1. Female-headed households, headed by young widows who lost their husbands to the conflict and who do not have a regular source of income. Their husbands were killed by the army, or arrested, or have disappeared. They do not have proper houses, land, or any kind of property; they live in mud huts. They lack any kind of permanent employment and depend almost entirely on food stamps provided by government. Their education level is very low and their children are not in school; children sometimes work and are undernourished. These households were directly affected by the war; they lost their jobs to the war and struggle to survive in the face of both economic and social challenges.	People can move from step 1 up to 2 because of rehabilitation aid, employment prospects, increased income, or earnings from employed children. People can also fall back from step 2 to 1 due to alcohol abuse, disease, and war.

The community-level analysis of local opportunity structures that was applied in part 4 was informed by a growing empirical literature in the gender and development field. In their review of studies that measure women's empowerment, Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002, 18) find that community-level "contextual factors are often more important in determining women's empowerment and its outcomes than individual-level factors." Mason and Smith (2003) similarly conclude in their five-country study that a woman's domestic empowerment can be predicted more reliably by her country and community than by her personal characteristics.

The agency–opportunity structure framework, and the overall approach to the life story analysis and superstar community typology, build on work for the World Bank's empowerment, Voices of the Poor, and Moving Out of Poverty research programs. There is still much to learn from women, men, and communities that find a way to leave poverty behind. The approach to zeroing in on the reasons for the successes was also inspired by Charles Tilly's comparative works on collective violence (2003) and democracy (2007a), as well as his great volume *Why?*

> Stories add up to a great human invention, comparable in their own zone—the organization of social relations—to the plow in agriculture. Like the plow, they use a simple application of force to dig deep. By their very nature, they frustrate purists: they condense complex life into simple plots with absurdly stripped-down causes and effects. They highlight the comedies, tragedies, moralities, immoralities, victories, and defeats of ordinary lives . . . they thumb their noses at codes and technical accounts, so much so that professional wielders of codes and technical accounts often find they must translate their messages into stories. When most people take reasons seriously, those reasons arrive in the form of stories. (Tilly 2006, 95)

Notes

1 This study draws on the World Bank's Moving Out of Poverty dataset. That research program, directed by Deepa Narayan, was a follow-up to the earlier Voices of the Poor study, which explored the experience of poverty from the perspectives of 60,000 poor men and women. Like Voices of the Poor, the Moving Out of Poverty study sought to learn directly from people in local communities, but it focused more specifically on how and why people moved out of poverty, remained trapped in poverty, or fell back into poverty. Volume 1 of the series provides a multidisciplinary examination of current theories and empirical works about poor people's mobility (Narayan and Petesch 2007b). Volume 2 presents a global synthesis of findings from new data collection across 15 countries (Narayan, Pritchett, and Kapoor 2009). Volume 3 examines poverty dynamics in 300 communities in four states of India (Narayan 2009). Volume 4, on which the present report builds directly, examines communities in seven countries as they experienced and recovered from violent conflict (Narayan and Petesch 2010).

2 The empowerment findings are generally consistent with, but perhaps more favorable than, the findings of other studies on the effects of war on gender norms and women's roles in the developing world. See, for example, Bouta, Frerks, and Bannon (2005), Bop (2001), Meintjes (2001), El-Bushra (2000), and Sørensen (1998).

3 Much of the empirical work on conflict has focused on the macro level. This is increasingly complemented by valuable micro examinations of individuals and households (see, for example, Deininger 2003, and for gender analysis, Justino and Verwimp 2006).

4 For a more extensive discussion of the war context and factors contributing to community mobility, please see the first seven comparative chapters and six country case studies in *Moving Out of Poverty: Rising from the Ashes of Conflict* (Narayan and Petesch 2010). The case studies for the four countries included in this report can be found in chapter 8 on Colombia (Petesch and Gray 2010), chapter 9 on the Philippines (Hull and Echavez 2010), chapter 10 on Indonesia (Barron et al. 2010), and chapter 12 on Sri Lanka (Petesch and Thalayasingam 2010).

5 See Petesch, Smulovitz, and Walton (2005) for the original framework, and Narayan and Petesch (2007a) for its application to mobility processes.

6 For the full methodology, see Narayan and Petesch (2005).

7 Pseudonyms for individual respondents are used throughout this report.

8 A coding tree of nearly 150 codes was developed inductively based on analysis of 15 life stories from across the four countries. Ethnograph software was used to code the life stories and facilitate some of the comparative analysis. After completion of the work with each life story, empowerment ratings on levels and trends were assigned and a note was drafted to explain the ratings. Laura Kaufer provided research assistance with the coding.

[9] In addition to family formation decisions, the life story interviews do not probe two other areas that may be quite important to women's agency in conflict contexts: sexual violence and illegal underground economies. The methodology for the global 15-country Moving Out of Poverty study is multidimensional and challenging to program in the field, and many additional topics and questions were added to tailor the 10 data collection tools to the conflict countries (these were piloted in Indonesia). Yet, because sexual violence and underground economies are highly sensitive topics, requiring specialized preparation, training of field teams, data collection techniques, and follow-up, we concluded that it would not be appropriate to add these complex issues. The existing tools already called for substantial knowledge, skills, and training in order to be able to conduct the study on the ground. Due to the humiliation and stigma associated with sexual violence against women, there was near silence on these issues among the global Moving Out of Poverty participants—except in the Colombia life stories, as discussed in this report. Some focus groups chose to speak about illegal economic activities, sometimes in detail, without being asked (see chapter 5 of Narayan and Petesch 2010). However, women rarely mentioned these activities in their life stories—again, except in Colombia—and thus little time is spent on these issues in this report. Colombian women provide accounts of the illegal drug and gun trade, youth gangs and organized actors associated with them, and husbands working on coca fields, and the fear and violence surrounding all of these activities. One Colombian woman described how she served as a drug runner in her youth and enjoyed the ready cash this provided. Another exception was a Philippine woman who mentioned prostitution in her local mosque related to the presence of armed troops.

[10] A household's mobility status was not a reliable measure of a woman's empowerment, and content analysis of each life story had to be conducted to assign empowerment ratings for use in the comparative analysis.

[11] The Moving Out of Poverty dataset contains more testimonies from men than from women. A proposal to undertake a full comparative analysis of the relational aspects of gender and conflict is under consideration. Even the women's dataset, however, is enormous and challenging to analyze. The life story interviews sometimes took more than three hours to complete and are extremely detailed; in addition, there were three and sometimes four focus group discussions with women in every sample community.

[12] In fact, many women likely would have not spoken at all of these painful experiences had they not been prompted by an interviewer asking specific questions about the effects of conflict.

[13] The sex-disaggregated Moving Out of Poverty dataset is an exceptionally rich resource for exploring gender and conflict issues. However, two features of the global study's purposive sampling need to be flagged to explain the unevenness in the life story dataset and thus the limitations on the numerical analysis presented. First, the sampling framework at the household level was designed to ensure representation of the different mobility groups, and gender was not a factor in the

selection of life story samples. This resulted in variation in the number of life stories with women per community and per country. The life story datasets from the Philippines and Colombia are larger than those from Indonesia and Sri Lanka, although the numbers of communities are roughly comparable. Second, movers were the mobility group of greatest interest to the Moving Out of Poverty study, and therefore this group was oversampled. The life stories with women from households classified as movers amount to 36 percent of the sample overall, with some country-level variation. Whether household mobility is associated with women's empowerment is a theme that this paper takes up in the final section of part 3. Overall, the oversampling of movers probably biases findings in favor of more rather than less empowered women; this should be a fairly consistent bias across countries except in Colombia, where three communities had no movers at all and others had almost none. The comparative analysis in part 4 thus uses a less sensitive measure of household mobility for the Colombia sample in order to draw out sharper patterns. More generally, it is hoped that the analysis presented in this paper may persuade policy makers and researchers to support larger and more representative studies on conflict and empowerment links.

14 The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is a measure of inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in a country. It combines inequalities in three areas: political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. It is one of the five indicators used by the United Nations Development Programme in its annual Human Development Report. See rankings at:

http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/125.html.

[15] Empirical evidence on the effects of conflict on children's schooling is limited, but two studies indicate that girls may be greatly affected, more so than boys. Econometric work on the educational impacts of conflict in Tajikistan found that girls ages 7 to 15 in regions directly affected by conflict were 12.3 percent less likely to complete the required schooling than girls who completed their schooling prior to the onset of conflict, and 7 percent less likely to complete school than girls who lived in less conflict-affected regions during the war. The analysis reports little or no impact on boys' education (Shemyakina 2006). Another study, set in Guatemala, also found significant effects on girls' education in areas of more intense conflict. The largest impact was seen among girls in areas of high conflict who were older when the war broke out; they were 17 percent less likely to complete school than girls in the same age group with less exposure to war. Boys were also affected, but to a lesser extent (Chamarbagwala and Morán 2008).

[16] National-level data for Colombia indicate very high rates of primary and secondary school completion, and national female literacy rates are high for all of the study countries. Yet urban and rural educational disparities can be severe. In Colombia, the average level of school attainment in rural areas was 4.6 years in 1999, while urban rates were nearly double that (World Bank 2002).

[17] The 2005 GNI per capita for Indonesia is US $2,840, and for Sri Lanka, US $3,500. World Bank data, GNI per capita, purchasing power parity, current

international dollars. http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?page=1 (accessed April 17, 2011).

[18] The findings likely understate the extent to which girls had to work. The line between domestic chores and livelihood activities is often a blurry one when girls and women engage in extensive unpaid work in family farms and family businesses. However, these issues were not fully examined when women were detailing their occupational histories.

[19] For a useful overview of the limited economic literature on women's control of assets, see Morrison, Raju, and Sinha (2007). The review finds that women rarely inherit land, and when they do, they usually receive much less than male heirs. Also, a husband may effectively control the land although it is in the woman's name. Nevertheless, inheritance is the primary means by which women gain access to any major property. There is also evidence from peaceful developing countries that women's control of major assets protects them from domestic violence (Panda et al. 2006; Panda and Agarwal 2005).

[20] These customs are widely referred to as "bride price" in the gender and development literature; however, the women themselves labeled the practice as "dowry," so that term will be used here.

[21] Dowry practices vary widely across the Philippines and Indonesia. In some Muslim communities of Java, for instance, dowry usually consists of money, jewelry, the Qur'an, and prayer scarves. Women usually have full control over this kind of dowry, but they would rarely sell these assets, unless in an emergency, due to norms that prohibit women from using or selling dowry goods for any purpose. In cases where large amounts of cash or property are transferred, women usually do not exercise full control over them. In East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, where extensive assets are given to the bride's side, the assets will belong to and be managed by the bride's immediate or extended family, often leaving the bride herself with almost nothing. This has left women vulnerable to domestic violence, as husbands often feel that they have "paid" for their wives and thus have the right to mistreat them. Rizki Fillaili, personal communication, December 2010.

[22] The empirical literature on household economic coping strategies in response to conflict is still limited. See chapter 5 of Narayan and Petesch (2010) for discussion of how poor economic conditions in conflict regions can encourage or compel rural households to diversify away from agriculture or combine nonfarm work with agriculture. Over time, as security improved, this diversification helped many households to move up and out of poverty. Brück and Schindler (2009) review some of the literature on household coping strategies; they stress that these are likely to be highly contextual on account of factors such as the dynamic nature of conflict, diverse local farming and market conditions, and variations in household structures and gender norms. Their article contains a case study from Rwanda on the plight of poor widows, an important and highly vulnerable social group in conflict contexts.

[23] Many studies document increases in women's economic participation due to crises. See, for example, Fernandez, Ibáñez, and Peña (2010) for recent research in Colombia. However, our sample provided less evidence of this because so many women were already economically active prior to the conflict period under study. And while many intensified their livelihood activities in response to conflict (in some cases with support from post-conflict schemes), there were also women, particularly in Colombia, but also in the Philippines and Sri Lanka, who withdrew from working outside the home due to poor security and lack of economic opportunities. Many of them, but not all, were getting by on remittances.

[24] For a discussion of psychological factors in empowerment processes, see chapter 1 (especially pages 20 to 22) and chapters 6 and 7 of Narayan (2005). Diener and Biswas-Diener in chapter 6 (pages 125–26) argue that "psychological feelings of competence, energy, and the desire to act" are critical internal components of empowerment processes that interact with external components related to being able to shape one's environment.

[25] They did, however, frequently mention parents and siblings who had been helpful in their lives.

[26] This may be because of the acute humiliation and stigma attached to this violence. It is unlikely that violence was absent from these settings. Please see note 9 for discussion of why these issues were not probed explicitly in this research.

[27] For a useful review of key social capital concepts and findings discussed here, see Woolcock and Narayan (2000).

[28] See, for example, works by Bina Agarwal (2000, 2001) on how these and other factors have fueled women's exclusion from community forestry and resource management initiatives that were designed to be participatory in countries of Asia. Molyneux (2002) also discusses how disregard for the gender dimensions of social capital has led to local organizing interventions that repeatedly failed to help women in Latin America. For useful general discussion of the gender and social capital literature, also see Westermann, Ashby, and Pretty (2005).

[29] This region is also characterized by its strong clans, with communities often perceived to be "one big family—even if they are not related by blood. They take care of one another, in times of trouble, sickness or need of money—including for weddings and other celebrations." Chona Echavez, personal communication, February 4, 2011.

[30] The global Moving Out of Poverty study found corruption levels to be consistently among the highest in the conflict set of countries, ranging from 55 percent (in Colombia) to 62 percent (in Indonesia) of households responding that most or almost all government officials in the country are engaged in corruption (Narayan, Pritchett, and Kapoor 2009, 242–49). This follows patterns found in larger conflict studies (Collier 2009). The links to mobility chances, however, were not straightforward. Higher levels of corruption mostly had a negative association with poor people's mobility in the context of the global 15-country dataset. In the conflict-affected communities of the conflict countries, however, the presence of

high levels of corruption and bribery had very strong associations with higher movements out of poverty. In the middle-income conflict countries featured in this report, moreover, there were strong differences between levels of corruption reported in the conflict and peaceful communities, with levels much higher in the conflict set (Narayan and Petesch 2010, 70–81).

[31] There are no formal gender quotas in the Philippines, although progressive parties strive to allocate a third of the candidacies to women. It is also important to note that NGOs have a long history of community organizing and development in the Philippines and were actively mobilizing and building capacities for civic engagement and conflict mediation in the ARMM region during the study period. Chona Echavez, personal communication, February 4, 2011.

[32] For a useful discussion of the effects of life stage and the influence of ethnic and class norms on women's roles and autonomy, see Malhotra and Mather (1997). Drawing from empirical work with different ethnic and class groups in Sri Lanka, they conclude that education and livelihood status are insufficient determinants of women's agency in key domains of their lives, while motherhood is a substantial source of power and status for many women.

[33] See, for example, United Nations (2001) and Brück and Schindler (2009) for discussion of the overrepresentation of widows in war contexts and the diverse and severe disadvantages they often face.

[34] See, among many others, Narayan and Petesch (2010), Collier (2009), and Horowitz (2000).

[35] See note 30 on the poor governance patterns that characterize conflict-affected states.

[36] This account draws heavily on Barron et al. (2010).

[37] IDT provided grants of 20 million rupiah (about US $2,100) in cash to poor villages. Decisions on use of the funds were left to community groups, and the funds could be used for development of productive infrastructure or for group economic activities. KDP also targeted poor communities and used participatory mechanisms. Among other components, it provided funds to women's productive groups to make credit available for small enterprises. In one village that experienced particularly high levels of poverty reduction, 60 percent of households surveyed cited KDP as a main factor in their increased prosperity. See Barron et al. (2010) for further discussion of post-conflict aid mechanisms in North Maluku.

[38] For a fuller discussion of how peace zones are building a culture of peace in the region, see chapters 2 and 9 of Petesch and Narayan (2010).

[39] The fieldwork for the study concluded in early 2006, just as the government was launching a major offensive that took over territory held by the LTTE. Study participants across the conflict region were voicing great concern about safety.

[40] This barrio thus presents a somewhat different picture than the other superstar communities. While the focus group identified 22 local households that crossed their community poverty line, and many women did report increased agency

following their displacement to the barrio, only two of the women interviewed there resided in households that were not poor at the time of their interviews. In this case, the high levels of poverty reduction documented by the focus group sorting activity must have occurred in other households from the barrio that did not provide a life story interview. As discussed in the report, these women's difficult experiences are consistent with wider studies of displaced populations in Colombia.

[41] Among others, Molyneux (2002) flags these problems as recurrent weaknesses of projects designed to strengthen women's social capital and economic opportunities.

[42] A review of bilateral aid excluding the United States found that just 9 percent of all "gender equality–focused aid" to fragile and conflict-affected states was invested in economic and productive sectors, and another 5 percent in agriculture. By far the largest share of such gender-targeted aid is allocated for education, health, and strengthening governance and civil society (OECD 2010). And gender-focused aid of all types, under a generous definition, constitutes less than a third of total bilateral aid flows.

[43] Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz (2007) document sexual and physical violence during and after wartime in 51 countries between 1987 and 2007. Brück and Vothknecht (2007) cite further country studies showing rising problems of domestic violence in the wake of conflict. Women and girls are the primary victims, although men and boys may also be affected in some contexts. There is a growing literature about the causes of wartime sexual violence, including especially useful works by Wood (2006) and Cohen (2010).

[44] Siegle and O'Mahoney (2006) find that rural violence and instability intensified in Colombia with decentralization as armed groups muscled their way into public office or local procurements. Nordholt and van Klinken (2007) conclude that decentralization led to increased resource capture by elites in post-Soeharto Indonesia, sometimes resulting in violent conflict (as in the case of North Maluku) between elites and the different ethnoreligious groups they represent.

[45] For a useful discussion of the opportunities and challenges in supporting more gender-equitable land rights in conflict contexts, see Lastarria-Cornhiel (2005). A participatory post-tsunami land administration project in conflict-affected Aceh, Indonesia, made it possible for the survivors to reclaim land ownership rapidly, and approximately a quarter of the more than 200,000 titles distributed went to women as joint or sole proprietors. This was a victory, as there was an urgent need to help survivors establish property claims and rebuild with some confidence that they would not be evicted. Also, few women had formal claims to any land at all before the community mapping project. Yet a survey conducted prior to the tsunami found that nearly half the women in Aceh claimed to own some land (World Bank seminar on Gender Impacts of Land Titling in Post-Disaster and Post-Conflict Environment: Lessons Learned from Aceh and Policy Implications, December 14, 2010).

[46] Wider evaluations of microcredit programs in peaceful contexts have also found mixed results. See, for example, Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002) and Kabeer

(2005). Kabeer's review provides a more encouraging picture of the contribution of microfinance to poor women's economic, social, and political gains, but it also stresses that local contexts and program designs can greatly shape the impacts of these programs.

[47] For a particularly promising case, see Bayes, von Braun, and Akhter (1999). They found significant changes in women's economic roles and in the economies of Bangladeshi villages associated with introduction of the Grameen village cell phone program.

[48] These and additional recommendations on addressing gender dimensions of the global economic crisis can be found in Stephanie Seguino's 2009 statement to the U.N. Expert Panel on the Gender Perspectives of the Financial Crisis.

[49] In his work on women's slumdweller networks in Mumbai, India, Arjun Appadurai (2004) draws attention to the importance of the capacity to aspire, a concept that he defines as an individual's internal forward-looking navigational capacity to conceive of and chart a different and better life.

[50] See Evans (1997). Strategies and programs like KDP are not new, but using them to advance gender objectives seems to be particularly challenging—hence the emphasis here on the importance of having a clear vision and goals that reflect what local women value and want. Real resources, of course, matter too!

[51] See Narayan and Petesch (2007a) for a discussion of disciplinary approaches to the measurement of poverty transitions and the application of the empowerment framework to the understanding of mobility factors and processes.

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