

# ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Women and conflict

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## Foreword

Conflict affects women and men differently, and it can alter women's economic and political roles in society. However, changes in women's economic and political status and roles during times of conflict do not necessarily lead to long-lasting shifts.

The significance of the relationship between gender equality and peace and stability is reflected in recent UK policy frameworks, including the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security 2018 – 2022, which sets out how the UK Government will integrate a gender perspective into its work to build security and stability overseas, and DFID's Strategic Vision for Gender Equality, which outlines how the women and girls who face the greatest challenges are those in conflict and crisis situations.

This collection of ESRC-DFID-funded research explores social norms, economic empowerment and women's political participation in fragile and conflict-affected states, including Jordan, Pakistan and Somaliland. In rural Pakistan early marriage has a range of damaging consequences for women and girls, including a risk of domestic violence and the possibility that they will drop out of school. Research has revealed that in virtually all households, fathers had the final say in matters of marriage. However, 'edutainment' interventions targeted at men are showing potential for shifting the social norms which support early marriage.

In Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, attempts by female refugees to achieve economic stability through entrepreneurship are hampered by a lack of support from aid agencies whilst evidence indicates that supporting entrepreneurship efforts helps to alleviate their poverty. In Somaliland, society is changing from pastoralist systems to a more settled, urban way of life, with women prominent among small business owners, but they find it difficult to scale up their enterprises, and they are excluded from leadership roles in both politics and business.

The value of the insights provided by this research is partly rooted in the interdisciplinary partnerships upon which they are based. Academics worked with a range of civil society partners, including Oxfam Novib, Oxfam Pakistan and grassroots NGOs in Pakistan. In the Middle East, researchers are reaching out to policymakers through roundtable stakeholder discussions and via a change



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Making fishing nets as part of a co-operative. Some UK-funded aid programmes are supporting both Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese citizens to help community relations.

campaign run jointly with their partners. It is essential to work with beneficiaries, partners and stakeholders in a collaborative way if we are to understand complexity and create policies that will lead to sustainable futures.

### Dr Becky Faith

Research Fellow, Institute of Development Studies (IDS). Becky's professional experience and research interests encompass gender and technology for social change.

## Key messages

- Micro-entrepreneurship can be a route out of poverty for long-term refugee women but they are held back by a lack of support from aid agencies.
- Interventions to address inequitable gender and social norms may also need to target men and boys.
- Conflict and climate change have accelerated urbanisation, which has deprived pastoralist women of some of the opportunities they had for political participation but has not created any new ones.

# Women's participation in Somaliland society far exceeds their influence

Somali women outnumber men in lots of grassroots political and business activity, yet it is very difficult for them to participate at the highest levels. Conflict and climate change have accelerated urbanisation, depriving pastoralist women of some of the opportunities they had for participation but has not created any new ones. Consequently, women are significantly under-represented in government, parliament and major business, which has weakened the durability of Somaliland's political settlement.

The Development Planning Unit of UCL, in partnership with the international NGO Progressio conducted research between July 2015 and April 2017. The project focused on developing a better understanding of the ways in which women and men see the political settlement in Somaliland, and of the roles played by each gender in constructing and maintaining those arrangements.

The research is critical for three reasons. Firstly, the research partners in Somaliland and throughout the Somali Horn of Africa, were concerned that, while Somali women participate actively in most spheres of life, they tend to be systemically excluded from political decision-making and from leadership roles. Secondly, there is evidence that the more gender-inclusive a society is, the more likely it is to avoid a recurrence of violence or conflict. Somaliland endured a brutal civil conflict in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s, which was finally resolved in 1997; the research aimed to gain understanding of the roles women and men played in maintaining the peace after that, and to find out whether gender roles had been altered by the conflict. Thirdly, gender roles seem to have been affected by climate-change-exacerbated drought, which has accelerated urbanisation in a long-established pastoralist society.

The research found that views on gender roles were becoming polarised. Somaliland's peace has been underpinned by clan and custom, yet that system is strongly patriarchal. In addition, in a context where clan has replaced the state in many respects, the patriarchy of the clan system is, arguably, stronger now than it has historically been. Whereas many women had a high degree of autonomy under customary pastoralist systems, running households as full-scale businesses with men absent for long periods, today men are more present and have become vigorously defensive of their right to retain control of the political realm.

A better understanding of these arrangements is critical in order to comprehend the mix of cultural and other institutions that determine which groups are most able to assert their rights and who will tend to be marginalised. Activists throughout the Somali Horn, including in Somaliland, have long fought for policy initiatives such as a quota for



Berbera, Somaliland. Ruun Ali prepares food in her teashop.

women in parliament and local government, but progress has been slow. There remains only a single woman in Somaliland's lower house of parliament, with none in the upper house. A record number of women stood for office in the 2012 local council elections – 140 candidates in a field of 2,368, or almost 6 per cent – but only ten of those were successful, amounting to 2.6 per cent of the 379 positions contested, underlining again the difficulty in translating engagement into decision-making influence.

Social change is heavily reflected in the shifting expectations of women and men's ideal roles in Somali society, with economic realities also playing a major part. With male unemployment extremely high and many men reluctant to assume traditionally socially menial occupations, it is frequently left to women to generate income. Women are therefore much in evidence running small businesses across Somaliland. However, it is very difficult for them to transition from sole trader or micro-enterprise owner to owning and running a medium-sized or large business. They are heavily engaged in most sectors but are significantly under-represented at the highest levels.



Project title: *Political settlement in Somaliland: a gendered perspective.*

**Principal Investigator: Dr Michael Walls**

Development Planning Unit, University College London (UCL)

## SEE ALSO:

Kibble, S. and Walls, M. (2013) *Swerves on the Road: Report by International Election Observers on the 2012 Local Elections in Somaliland*, London: Progressio

Parke, A., Stevens, S., Walls, M., Gaid, S., Ali, S., Butterfield, S., Elder, C. and Le Déaut, D. (2017) 'Somali Women's Political Participation and Leadership: Evidence and Opportunities', Report for UK Department for International Development (DFID), London: Social Development Direct and Forcier Consulting

Walls, M. (2013) 'Women's Political Participation in Somaliland', in International IDEA (ed.) *Journeys from Exclusion to Inclusion: Marginalized Women's Successes in Overcoming Political Exclusion*, Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance:164-97

Walls, M., Schueller, M.-L., Ekman, A.-B. (2017) 'Political Settlement in Somaliland: A Gendered Perspective', Research report, London: UCL/Progressio.

# Female Arab refugee entrepreneurs in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

Political volatility in the Middle East has generated mass displacement of Iraqi, Palestinian and Syrian citizens to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Through their resourceful entrepreneurial behaviour, these refugees have been able to bring about change for their families and themselves. However, their enduring, debilitating political marginalisation presents them with persistent challenges.

A study conducted by the Universities of Plymouth and Nottingham (UK), the Information and Research Centre at the King Hussein Foundation (Jordan), the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut (Lebanon) and UDA Consulting (Turkey), engaged with 150 female Iraqi, Palestinian and Syrian refugee entrepreneurs between 2016 and 2019. The project aimed to:

- critically analyse the extent to which micro-entrepreneurship is a sustainable conduit for poverty alleviation in socio-politically volatile circumstances;
- explore the effectiveness and impact of the sources of support and advice available to the women concerned;
- inform policy and practice regarding the poverty alleviation of Arab refugee women in the above countries, with a view to enhancing the support mechanisms that enable such women to create sustainable micro-enterprises.

The research found evidence to support the notion that entrepreneurship helps to alleviate poverty in poor refugee communities to a certain extent. Moreover, its role in improving the wellbeing of refugee women and their communities makes a welcome contribution to the broader fields of development. However, further thought is needed to how refugee entrepreneurship can enhance resilience during long-term displacement and political marginalisation, rather than viewing it solely as a means for poverty alleviation.

To solicit support for emerging policy recommendations, the research team held stakeholder discussions in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey in April 2019 with approximately 100 representatives from micro-finance organisations, humanitarian organisations, civil society organisations, and national and international aid agencies, and published a policy brief for each country. The policy brief will guide a 'change campaign' championed by the project partners in their respective countries.

As policy and aid practitioners operating in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey continue to focus upon Syrian refugees, this study has raised awareness about the Iraqi and Palestinian refugees and their dire living conditions. To enhance awareness amongst international scholars about refugee entrepreneurship, the project delivered capacity building workshops, and presented the study's methodology, findings and recommendations in the UK and internationally at ten world-class events targeting the general public as well as

## SEE ALSO:

Al-Dajani, H., Carter, S., Shaw, E. and Marlow, S. (2015) 'Entrepreneurship Among the Displaced and Dispossessed: Exploring the Limits of Emancipatory Entrepreneurship', *British Journal of Management* 26(4): 713–30.

Al-Dajani, H. and Marlow, S. (2019) *Project Report: Poverty Alleviation and Women Refugees*, Amman: Information and Research Center – King Hussein Foundation, <http://haqqi.info/en/haqqi/research/poverty-alleviation-and-women-refugees-middle-east>



Refugee hairdressing business in Turkey.

policymakers, researchers and practitioners.

Despite the initiatives taken by aid agencies in the three countries to support the refugee communities, the majority of the 150 participants in the research received little support. Aid agencies concentrate upon acute support and the refugee camps. Yet, as the cohort of women in the study are based in urban areas, running enterprises that are at least three years old, and have lived in the host countries as refugees for at least five years, they tend to be overlooked. In turn, the women then perceive the agencies as largely irrelevant to

their needs. In view of this, it is imperative that aid agencies engage with these refugees, who remain invisible in the policy development landscape. They can inform research, policy and practice relating to their present and future livelihoods as they understand their needs and circumstances best. Indeed, the majority of the research participants operate sustainable micro-enterprises, capitalising on their feminised skills, and offer everyday products and services to their refugee communities that soften their marginalisation and make their displacement more tolerable.

The research shows that these women would benefit greatly from subsidised childcare services. Furthermore, if the business registration process were simplified, they could grow their enterprises and reap greater social and economic benefits for themselves and their communities. The researchers also urge policymakers to consider realistic solutions to the uncertain status of long-term refugees, to help them overcome the political marginalisation that their entrepreneurship cannot resolve



Project title: *Poverty alleviation and women refugees in the Middle East: empowerment through grassroots micro-entrepreneurship?*

## Principal Investigator: Dr Haya Al-Dajani

Lead Organisation: University of Plymouth

Project Contributors:

**Professor Susan Marlow**, Co-Investigator, University of Nottingham; **Dr Aida Essaid**, Jordan Project Partner, Information and Research Centre at the King Hussein Foundation; **Dr Nasser Yassin**, Lebanon Project Partner, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut; and **Hakan Demirbuken** Turkey Project Partner, UDA Consulting.

Barbelet, V. and Wake, C. (2017) *Livelihoods in Displacement: From Refugee Perspectives to Aid Agency Responses*, Humanitarian Policy Group Report, London: Overseas Development Institute.

Bastian, B.L., Sidani, Y.M. and El Amine, Y. (2018) 'Women entrepreneurship in the Middle East and North Africa: A Review of Knowledge Areas and Research Gaps', *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 33(1): 14–29.



# Gender, social norms and child marriage in Pakistan

A fifth of girls in Pakistan are married before the age of 18, and half of girls do not complete lower secondary education. Research carried out by the University of Oxford uses a randomised controlled trial to investigate whether these issues are most effectively addressed by targeting 'edutainment' interventions at men, women, or both partners in the household.

The possible harmful consequences of early marriage are well documented and include premature school dropout, early childbearing, poor health in the longer term for young brides and their children, and a greater risk of domestic violence. These outcomes in turn perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

In many societies, the preferred age at marriage is culturally determined and strongly related to prevailing attitudes and social norms. Interventions that seek to tackle social norms may therefore be an effective strategy for reducing child marriage. Educational entertainment ('edutainment') has been shown to be a promising type of such intervention. Using entertainment media, it combines the delivery of information with entertaining stories and characters that individuals can identify with.

An important unanswered question is whom within the household these interventions should target? In contexts such as rural Pakistan, many women have low bargaining power, and household decisions may predominantly reflect the attitudes of men. Thus, efforts to target men, while potentially costlier, may have a bigger impact and eventually be more cost-effective.

To test 'what works' in reducing child marriage, and whom belief and norm interventions should target, a research team from Oxford is working in collaboration with Oxfam Novib, Oxfam Pakistan and grassroots NGOs in rural Pakistan. The 'edutainment' intervention they are evaluating consists of film screenings and gender workshops and is conducted across almost 200 villages. The study is designed as a randomised controlled trial. In some villages only men and boys are targeted, in other villages only women and girls, and in others both genders; with some villages held as control for comparison.

Prior to the intervention, researchers conducted an extensive survey across almost 800 households with unmarried adolescent children. Evidence shows that there are important differences between the attitudes of men and women, and thus that interventions with men and women may have substantially different effects. If anything, mothers seemed to be more traditional than fathers, with more than one-third reporting a best age of marriage below 18 versus approximately one-quarter of the fathers. On the other hand, men cared substantially more about social pressure: about half of them agreed that a girl should be married straight away if there was gossip about her behaviour. Importantly, in virtually all households, fathers had the final say in matters of marriage. Therefore, changing



Photo: © Azeem Nadeem

Male gender workshop after the mobile cinema screening.

the attitudes of mothers and daughters may not be sufficient to improve girls' chances.

Crucially, respondents' personal attitudes did not appear to coincide with their assumptions about what others in their community thought – the majority of the population privately preferred later marriage. Such misconceptions may play an important role in the persistence of early marriage.

This ongoing research directly contributes to a deeper understanding of how best to target interventions to address social norms around child marriage. It also strengthens the capacity of local organisations to design and implement their interventions. Ultimately, the impact findings aim to enable policymakers and practitioners to focus resources on the most promising and effective components of edutainment programmes addressing child marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls.



Project title: *Women's Empowerment, Social Norms and Violence Against Women and Girls (also known as 'Women empowerment, social norms and domestic violence')*

## Principal Investigator: Sir Paul Collier

Professor of Economics and Public Policy  
Blavatnik School of Government  
University of Oxford

The study took place in collaboration with the Amsterdam Institute for Global Health and Development (AIGHD) and Oxfam Novib in the Netherlands, and the Centre for Economic Research in Pakistan (CERP). Local implementing partners are IRC and Bedari. **Dr Rachel Cassidy** (IFS/University of Oxford), **Dr Wendy Janssens** (AIGHD/Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and **Dr Karlijn Morsink** (University Utrecht/University of Oxford) are Co-Investigators.

### SEE ALSO:

La Ferrara, E., Chong, A. and Duryea, S. (2012) 'Soap Operas and Fertility: Evidence from Brazil', *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 4(4): 1–31

Mackie, G. (1996) 'Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account', *American Sociological Review*: 999–1017.

Miller, D.T. and Prentice, D.A. (2016) 'Changing Norms to Change Behavior', *Annual Review of Psychology* 67: 339–61.

# Series of Research for Policy and Practice papers

Impact Initiative Research for Policy and Practice papers provide key messages and research evidence for policymakers, practitioners, NGOs, and others engaged in development policy and practice. These collections of research provide direct insights into how projects enabled by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership demonstrate the depth and breadth of research impact in key areas including: disability, gender, education, social protection, teaching, and urban resilience.

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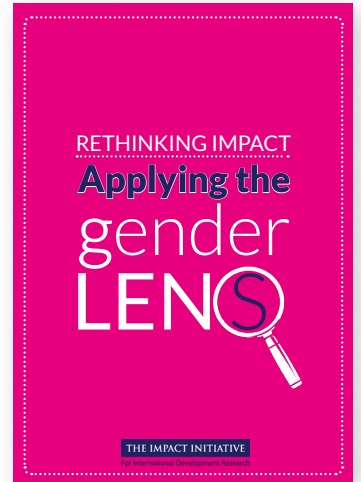
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This booklet brings together examples of cross-cutting work on gender. It includes research which explicitly focuses on gender inequality, and projects where the gender dynamics emerged during the course of research. Highlights the opportunities and collaborations that show how a gendered lens can truly help understand the realities of people around the world.

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## Women's life choices

This collection identifies the critical elements that need addressing if women's and girls' lives are to change for the better. It explores mobility constraints experienced by girls and how lack of transport options hamper their access to paid work, health services, and schooling; looks at the barriers that women face regarding lifesaving diagnostic treatment and maternal health-care services; and highlights the role of education systems in enhancing women's economic opportunities. It draws on research from Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Lesotho, Laos, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, and Yemen.

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## Gender and education

This report provides valuable evidence on strategies to ensure commitments to eliminate gender disparities in education can be met. Beyond ensuring that every child - both girls and boys - is in school and learning, it highlights new approaches to how gender equality in and through education can be measured, which is crucial to achieving more than just gender parity in education.

For more details: <http://bit.ly/34ockQA>

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## THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

This summary highlights the key messages from research focusing on women and conflict from the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation and is an output of the Impact Initiative for International Development Research.

It is written in collaboration with research teams, and collated by Kelly Shephard, Head of Knowledge, Impact and Policy at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Becky Mitchell, Research Officer, IDS. The academic reviewer for this paper was Becky Faith, Research Fellow, IDS.

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with the world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research; and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme. We seek to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant-holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities and facilitate mutual learning. The Impact Initiative is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

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