



Policy Brief

Gender and Human Security: A Case Study of the Resettlement of Rotan Batu “Widow’s Village” in Narathiwat Province, Thailand

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1. Introduction

My research studied the widow's village or *Baan Rotan Batu*, in Narathiwat province, which is one of the three Southern Border Provinces, and aimed to assess the peace and security situation in the ongoing conflict in that area.

Since 2004, there has been an increase in unrest in the three southern border provinces. Then, there is a threat to human security in the area facing the unrest and those living in the areas of suspicion. There is uncertainty in the safety of life and property, as well as stress and fear in such situations. The unrest situation affects women and families. Women are becoming widows, particularly widows who are responsible for being single parents. These women act as both parents, including caring for the elderly in the family.

Most of them died as teachers, police officers, soldiers and government officials. In the same year, through Her Majesty Queen Sirikit's charitable work, donations have been made to shelter the widows, Buddhists, and Muslims, with the commitment to treat their bitter suffering, harmonize Buddhists and Muslims, and teach the lifestyle of self-sufficiency.

The elimination of women from conflict resolution is a major issue the community is only beginning to resolve. Women are greatly affected by armed violence, but they normally play no role in solving the problem. Women are left to deal with the hard work of implementing livelihoods.

While all the UN Member States agree the role of women must be improved, there is sharp disagreement over how to present their perspectives, what are the exact roles they must play, and what is the ability of other actors—especially men—to represent women's needs. Can the parties to a conflict craft their own solutions, while justifying excluding or limiting the role of women because of their immediate priorities? Or can the community demand specific terms, like including diverse women's voices, leaders and groups throughout the conflict resolution process?

The failure to include women in conflict resolution and peacemaking processes makes women's suffering less visible and less liable to be addressed. Otherwise, the problems are unlikely to be heard, seen or dealt with. Including women into the political process, assuring them permanent roles and giving them a clear voice are necessary.

Basically, women are not found at the borders of conflict, but at the center. In conflicts of the modern era, civilians, who are mainly women and children, are usually the major victims.

Women are the majority regarding the number of relocated individuals, and they are increasingly victimized. Women became physically, emotionally, and mentally vulnerable during times of war and conflict.

2. Current Situation

A case study by the widow's village or *Baan Rotan Batu*, found that women make up a minority of fatalities from armed violence, but they still suffer serious and poorly recognized effects.

Accurate data on female suffering from armed violence is rare on the more extensive effects for women. Although they are less prone to die from armed violence, a far greater number feel other effects. When male relatives die or are wounded, women often fall into poverty, condemning them to lives of everyday suffering and crippling their chances for a better life.

Women, and widows especially, have also been neglected in the delivery of higher education and effusive vocational training. Women being fully committed to work and family is an impossible task that they have to take on. It can be exhausting and they are often perceived as not fully present as a breadwinner or a mother. Because of dislocation, the destruction of the economy, and the resulting poverty, many women and widows are forced to head households and do not have legal access to land, property, housing and essential services.

Dislocation internally is unsettling and threatening. However, it withdraws women of the security of their community and exposes them to hunger, disease, violence, and poverty. Within conflict areas, vast numbers of people have been forced out of their homes by fighting, and by the destruction of their means of livelihood.

While these women are heading households, in many cases, they struggle to do so without income, basic resources, or control over decision-making. Women and their children are relocated by conflict or suffer from human rights violations. Their husbands and partners are either deceased, in hiding, or fighting. Presently, the displacement of women continues unalleviated.

The affected movement of persons and their separation along identity lines limit their access to natural resources, as the natural environment itself is transformed during conflict. The resulting

decline in employment opportunities, worsening of working conditions, and the deterioration of social infrastructure can further intensify conflict situations and prolong them.

In such a situation, conflict settings affect women in ways both similar to and different than men, including in the way they compensate for the lack of formal social protection. Many women tend to be hesitant to return home even after a conflict has dissolved because they consider the security risks too excessive.

In times of conflict, family structures as well as gender roles and responsibilities within them may go through dramatic changes along with political and economic shifts. Women's needs are also ignored from disarmament and demobilization aid in the post-conflict era.

Actually, men are typically more mobile and assume more risk, whether to secure an income in dangerous areas, or to engage in conflict-related activities. Meanwhile, many women start playing multiple roles as breadwinners, activists, fighters, political prisoners and martyrs in the face of displacement, loss and destruction. Women's more restricted physical mobility, a result of their household responsibilities and prevailing social norms, is compounded during conflicts, which further constrains their ability to fulfill their multiple roles.

The encounters that women find themselves include being strange surroundings, without a home, often without extended families, and faced with the need to earn money. In the widows' village, economic and physical insecurity has led to immense movements of people and family separations, with the burden of family support now lying almost entirely on the Royal Projects of the past King and Queen of Thailand. Many of these women were not fully trained professionals who had worked as teachers, as economists, and in manufacturing and healthcare, among other trades. Which of these skills will allow them to find ways to provide basic income and food for their families, such through selling crafts or garden crops? Furthermore, those who do so are rejected or treated with suspicion and disdain when reunited with their families. Accordingly, women may need to stay in the widows' village.

3. Conclusion

Gender-specific threats to women offer a cluster of challenges for ensuring their protection. Thus, women's protection in armed conflict and their significance to conflict prevention must be a primary concern of the national community.

Some basic issues to contemplate by stakeholders, especially the state, include:

- sufficiently including women's participation sustainable over the longer term, even if incomplete over the short term.
- addressing the needs of women in specific conflicts, attending to situations as they emerge, adapting their reactions to each situation; all of these should determine the basic initial levels of action in guiding the Thai government and international responses to armed conflict.

Recommendation: Women must be represented at every level in these processes, from the distribution of food to patrolling the village (camp or shelter) to planning and participating in educational and vocational training programs. As it should be recognized, women share authority with men. These issues will remain as long as women have neither the voice nor authority in the institutions and processes that mediate the conditions under which they live.