Chapter 10
Calming the Waters, Ploughing the Sea – Can Gender-Responsive Approaches to Intra-state Water Conflicts Lead to Peacebuilding? Evidence from Lebanon and Nepal

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Abstract Access to water, among other resources, has been and continues to be an implicit or explicit driver of intra-state conflict, and both access to water and conflicts are intimately linked to gendered power dynamics in any given society. While water as a conflict driver and the gendered nature of conflict have received relatively extensive attention from academics, policy-makers as well as practitioners of peacebuilding, the more positive approaches of using water and/or gender relations as entry points to conflict transformation and societally inclusive peacebuilding have been less researched. Drawing on case study examples from Nepal and Lebanon, the chapter explores some of the possibilities, necessary conditions and challenges of gender-responsive peacebuilding in the context of intra-state water conflicts.

Keywords Gender • Peacebuilding • Nepal • Lebanon • Intersectionality

10.1 Introduction

As the contributions to this book highlight, water can play a major role in conflicts, and in multiple ways. It can affect the lives of people differently depending on their location and position in society, with gender often playing a key role in determining potential vulnerabilities or possibilities of agency (see also Schilling and Naujoks, Chap. 9 in this volume). In the context of conflict and peacebuilding, issues around access to water, water usage, and water services have mostly been approached either on the very practical level, or at a more abstract, analytical level. In the former case, the scope of analysis tends to be at the micro-level, for example examining water as an issue that needs to be addressed to ensure the survival of a given vulnerable population (e.g. refugees and internally displaced persons – IDPs) through WASH

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(water, sanitation and hygiene, see also Mosello et al., Chap. 6 in this volume) needs assessments and technical briefing notes.[1] At the macro-level, the analysis has mostly been theoretical, for example examining water as an implicit or explicit driver of conflict, be it between or within states, with less of an examination of micro-level impacts and dynamics. As outlined for example in Wolf et al. 2005, these examinations of water as a conflict driver include inter-state conflicts over access to and management of water resources, or conflicts over water-related issues such as irrigation or the direct and indirect impacts of dams (see also Braun 2011; Zwarteveen 2006).

In terms of research and policy, water has been considered as conflict-driver, as an essential need, access to which needs to be guaranteed even in times of conflict, and as a means to potentially achieve transnational co-operation (see for example Chellaney 2013; Wolf 2004, Wolf et al. 2005; Zeitoun and Mirumachi 2008). There has, however, been far less discussion and research on water resources, their control and access to them as a potential entry point for peacebuilding, or on how people's direct relationship and need for water at the micro-level interacts with more macro-level peace or conflict dynamics. The exceptions in terms of research on water as a peacebuilding platform are analyses of international structures dealing with bodies of water, such as commissions for rivers or the littoral states of a particular sea or major lake;; and analyses of efforts to mitigate negative impacts of water-related infrastructure projects (Goulet 2005; Mehta and Srinivasan 2001; Mirumachi and Allan 2007; Wolf 1998; Wolf et al. 2005; Zeitoun and Mirumachi 2008). However, the use of water regulation mechanisms as an *intra*-state rather than inter-state peacebuilding opportunity has been less explored, and especially from a comprehensive gender perspective.

This chapter examines two case studies from Lebanon and Nepal on how water and access to it can potentially be used as a peacebuilding opportunity, and the role that gender analysis can and should play in this. Peacebuilding in this context is understood as a process of making societies more peaceful by making them more equitable and socially inclusive, and promoting non-violent ways of addressing conflict. The two cases show the potential of water to bring together diverse sections of society and for using the space and the process to help build more inclusive societies – including in terms of gender equality. Both cases focus more on 'small c' conflicts at the local level, which are however indirectly yet intimately linked to 'big C' conflicts at the national and/or regional levels. The case study analysis is based in part on my own field research and personal observations in both countries in 2013 (Nepal) and 2014–2015 (Lebanon), but also draws on secondary research, including 'grey' NGO literature.

Before elaborating on the case studies, I will first lay out the case for taking a broader, deeper and relational approach to incorporating gender into the analysis of, as well as policies and interventions around water, conflict and peacebuilding.

[1] For examples of these, see Oxfam's WASH technical briefing notes collection at http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/water-sanitation-and-hygiene/wash-technical-briefs

10.2 Gender, Conflict, Peacebuilding

Gender – understood to encompass the ways in which we are, and are expected to be, women, men, girls, boys, trans or intersex persons – is a central element in both conflict and peacebuilding. I use gender here as follows:

> Gender is one of the factors that influence, positively and negatively, the ability of societies to manage conflict without resorting to violence. Since gender analysis can help us understand complex relationships, power relations and roles in society, it is a powerful tool for analysing conflict and building peace. (International Alert 2010, 19)

Therefore, "building inclusive, sustainable, positive peace in societies affected by violent conflict requires analysing and addressing gendered power dynamics as well as gender roles and expectations" (Myrttinen et al. 2014, 10). The various elements are in a dynamic, mutual relationship: gender roles, expectations and identities, as well as gendered power differentials both affect conflict and peacebuilding, and are themselves affected by these processes.

Gender roles, identities and expectations are socially, culturally and politically constructed through the power relations between men, women and those identifying with other gender categories – as well as through the power relations within these groups. They are also constructed in relation to each other: for example, the masculine is defined in relation to the feminine; the heterosexual in relation to what is societally defined as the homosexual. Gender is, however, broader than just people's identities, their roles, relations and expectations placed on them. Gender is also about societal power dynamics, about institutions, practices and the symbolic meanings attached to them (Cohn 2012). For example, both the institutions that play key roles in war and conflict, such as the military, and the domain of warfare itself, are predominantly coded masculine and dominated by men. Care work and caring for children, the elderly or the sick tends, on the other hand, to be coded feminine, and much of the public and private care work globally is undertaken by women. When it comes to water, private and small-scale use tends to be coded feminine, while decision-making masculine, in particular with regard to major water projects (e.g. dams), community use, control and dispute (cf. Braun 2011; Zwarteveen 2006).

Although gender is often a key variable in determining one's position in society, it is not the only determining factor: vulnerability to violence, poverty, disease or other forms of physical harm can often be heightened for example by low social or economic status, age-related factors or diverse sexual identity. Gender identities, roles and expectations and gendered power differentials thus do not exist in separation from other identity markers, such as class, age, marital status, disability, sexuality and the like, but are closely tied to these in multiple ways, co-defining each other as well as defining positions of agency and/or vulnerability. Gender, in its interplay with other identity factors, is central to power dynamics and identities that form both conflict and peacebuilding.

Taking these dynamics into account in practical peacebuilding work requires a comprehensive, gender-relational approach, based on the premise that "peacebuilding can be more effective if built on an understanding of how gendered identities are

constructed through the societal power relations between and among women, men, girls, boys and members of sexual and gender minorities" (Myrttinen et al. 2014, 5). The need to take gender into account in understanding conflict and building more peaceful and inclusive societies has not only been accepeted in research (e.g. Cohn 2012; El-Bushra 2007; Väyrynen 2010) and policy (Conciliation Resources 2015; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Wright 2014) but has also been enshrined in a series of United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) starting with UNSCR 1325 (2000).

With respect to water, conflict and peacebuilding, this means for example that depending on a given society, it may be either men or women (often of a certain age or class) who are charged with water collection, with taking decisions in a water users' board, on when to evacuate in case of a flood, or who have access to information regarding water-related issues (cf. Braun 2011; Mustafa et al. 2015; Zwarteveen 2006). Those in the weakest positions of the gender hierarchy (e.g. poor transgender persons, widows) often experience an exacerbation of their gendered vulnerabilities in times of conflict or disaster (Mustafa et al. 2015). With respect to conflict, it is often men, also of a certain age or class, who are more likely to be forcibly recruited or expected to fight and also be targeted as potential combatants, or face other gendered vulnerabilities due to societal expectations placed upon them (Carpenter 2006; Turner 2016). Women and girls, on the other hand, may be expected to take on non-traditional tasks men are not able to carry out or be more vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) (Cohn 2012; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). The positions of gendered vulnerability or agency, as well as the gendered expectations which women, men, girls, boys and those with other gender identities find themselves in in situations of conflict, can often be contradictory and fluid. For example, women may be both able and forced to out of necessity to take on new roles, which can be both empowering and burdensome, while expectations on men to be protectors and breadwinners can both lead to them joining armed groups or fleeing a conflict zone (Khattab and Myrttinen 2017; Utas 2005).

Gender norms and expectations also change depending on particular contexts, and unless this is understood and taken into account, peacebuilding interventions can easily end up missing their stated objective or even exacerbating vulnerabilities. Assumptions, for example, of women's and girls' 'innate peacefulness' have often led to a side-lining or ignoring of female ex-combatants and support troops in reintegration programmes; focusing solely on female survivors of SGBV has often left male, trans- and intersex survivors without aid; and heteronormative assumptions of family structures have often left people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, but also heterosexual women and men living in arrangements other than families without outside aid in disasters and conflict (Coulter 2008; Dolan 2014; Dominey-Howes et al. 2014; Mustafa et al. 2015; Myrttinen et al. 2014; Naujoks 2016; Richards 2010). Equating women and girls in conflict with passive victimhood or with essentialised notions of feminine peacefulness has also often led to a side-lining of women from other political processes in post-conflict arrangements (Cano 2015; Debusscher and Martín de Almagro 2016).

10.3 Water, Conflict and Peace

While academic literature has mostly addressed water as a resource over which inter- and intra-state conflicts are fought, the relationship between water and conflict, and therefore peace, is more complex. In addition to possibly being one of the resources over which there is (violent) conflict, water and access to it also can play a role in contributing to other conflict drivers, exacerbating tensions and either increasing or decreasing people's vulnerabilities. Echoing the introductory chapter of this book, the relation between conflict, water and gender can change over time, depending on the stage of the conflict and the situation of the people in question. Water, be it through scarcity or overabundance, can be:

- a direct or indirect source of, or contributing factor to conflict, (e.g. directly in cases of conflicts over access to water or indirectly in cases of conflict over loss of land due to the construction of a dam),
- a necessary resource and source of vulnerability or resilience in a conflict-affected situation (e.g. for displaced persons), or
- an external factor that either exacerbates or diminishes conflicts, (e.g. in the case of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, which exacerbated tensions in the Sri Lankan civil war but was a motivating factor for finding a peace settlement in Aceh, Indonesia).

These conflicts can be both inter-state and intra-state (Wolf et al. 2005), or, as for example in the case of Helmand Province in Afghanistan, be a mixture of both, where local, intra-state water conflicts contribute to a complex conflict involving local, national and international actors as one of the root drivers (Martin 2014).

Beyond being a factor in exacerbating or diminishing conflict, the need to access water resources, which is often a task women, girls and boys rather than adult men are expected to carry out, can often expose them to violence, including SGBV. While this is something that occurs in peacetime as well, risks around water collection are exacerbated in times of violent conflict (Anwar et al. 2016). As with risks and vulnerabilities generally, these are heightened or lessened through the interplay of gender with other social identity markers such as age, ethno-religious background, dis−/ability or marital status (e.g. married, woman-headed household or widowed), the saliency of which changes in different contexts.

Water resources and peoples' relationship to them can, however (at least potentially), also act as a peacebuilding opportunity. These potentialities have mostly been explored at the inter-governmental, macro-level, examining the potentials of institutions for rivers such as the Danube Commission, the Nile River Basin Initiative or the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine, or the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission and the Black Sea Commission for marine bodies. What has received far less attention both in terms of research and of peacebuilding programming is how water has been, is and could be used for addressing broader societal conflict drivers and dynamics of exclusion at the local level, thereby diffusing intra-state conflict. The following two examples from

Lebanon and Nepal will showcase two imperfect cases, where water, rather than gender or peacebuilding, were at the centre, but which nonetheless highlight the possibilities of using water as an entry point on these broader issues.

10.4 Lebanon – Water as a Convening Issue

Lebanese society is in many ways marked by the shadows of past wars and its immediate proximity to several on-going armed conflicts. In addition to the long-term impacts of the Lebanese Civil War 1975–1990 and war with Israel in 2006, the country also still hosts over 450,000 Palestinian and perhaps 8000 Iraqi refugees as a legacy of the Israeli-Arab wars since 1948 and the wars in Iraq. Following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, Lebanon, with its estimated population of 4.5 million people has seen an influx of an estimated 1–1.5 million Syrian refugees. Already prior to the influx of Syrian refugees, access to and control of increasingly scarce resources in a small and highly populated country had caused tensions. The stark rise in additional people has placed an immense strain on an already fragile, at times poorly managed and often over-stretched provision system for basic services, including for water (Banfield and Stamadianou 2015; Bekdache 2015, World Bank 2013).

Gender identities in Lebanon are often closely tied to location and confessional background, with the two often overlapping, as confessional groups tend to coalesce in particular areas, be it in the cities or the countryside. While age and class also play a major role in defining gendered positions of power, in many ways confession is a key determinant. In part this is because a number of laws and regulations pertaining to personal status, which often have different provisions for men and women regarding for example marriage, divorce or inheritance, are not defined by national law, but rather formulated and judged upon by the respective confessional groups (Khattab 2016). Furthermore, confessional background interacts with family and clan networks, which often overlap with economic and political networks of power and patronage, all of which have historically been male dominated (Johnson 2001). Access to these networks often is a key factor mediating access to services, be they private or public.

The impact of the Syrian refugee influx has been felt across the country, although some areas have far higher concentrations of refugees than others. The feelings of insecurity caused by the influx vary regionally and often with gendered differences, such as women in northern communities expressing concerns over real or perceived increases of sex work and men focusing on economic aspects (Khattab and Myrttinen 2014). The strains placed by the dramatic increase in population on public and private services as well as on natural resources have caused resentment in host communities. With respect to water, the already precarious situation, due in part to poor management of water resources, was exacerbated in 2014 by a drought (Bekdache 2015).

Water has and continues to play both a direct and indirect role in conflict and peacebuilding in the western Asian region which Lebanon is a part of (Beaumont 1997; Fröhlich 2012). The role of water as a possible regional conflict driver has

been especially prominent in public and policy debate (e.g. Homer-Dixon et al. 1993), as has its corollary, in particular cross-border water co-operation along the River Jordan (e.g. Wolf 1998). Following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the degree to which drought has been a contributing factor has been keenly debated (Fröhlich 2016, Selby et al. forthcoming). Restricting the civilian population's access to water has also been directly used as a weapon during the Lebanese Civil War, such as for example in the Tal al-Zaatar massacre in 1976 (Khalili 2007).

The following analysis is largely based on the findings of a project focusing on three communities in different parts of the country with different confessional identities[2]:

- Wadi Khaled, in the north of the country, close to Syria, predominantly Sunni,
- Hermel, in the east of the country, close to Syria, predominantly Shi'a, and
- Badghan, in the central region of the country, predominantly Druze.

The project aimed to first understand people's perspectives on the conditions in their regions before and after the influx of refugees into their communities, after which workshops were conducted on conflict analysis and advocacy. Following on from this, representatives of the three communities were brought together to formulate a joint advocacy plan. Out of the multitude of issues initially raised, the participants chose water as their common platform for advocacy. Water was seen by the participants as a pressing issue that affected all community members, and also one that was simultaneously neutral enough to work on without exacerbating political or sectarian divisions but connected enough to other problematic issues to allow for an entry point to discuss these.

In addition to capacity-building on advocacy, networking and conflict management skills, participants were also trained on the water sector in Lebanon and water projects being implemented in other regions. Through this joined platform on water, the project not only sought to build local resilience and social cohesion, but also build linkages between the three communities from different parts of the country with different confessional compositions and political allegiances. In addition to building more inclusive community relations, the project also sought to improve state-citizen relations. Furthermore, by focusing on root causes of water scarcity, the project also sought to diminish mistrust and resentment between the Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees, which has at times crystallised around access to scarce resources and services (Bekdache 2015).

Arguably, one of the elements which was given less attention at this stage of the project was gender, although both men and women were actively involved in its implementation, including in advocacy. The gendered dynamics of water usage (e.g. by women in charge of domestic chores), access to water, decision-making on water as well as socio-political issues more broadly was not explored in detail due to a lack of resources. Future projects, in order to better understand the gendered dynamics of local-level decision making in Lebanon, need to focus more on how this varies depending on locality, confessional background and political affiliation, and

[2] The project, 'Harnessing local capacities for resilience in the face of the Syrian crisis', was jointly implemented by International Alert and the Lebanese NGO Permanent Peace Movement.

what openings this might offer for building a more inclusive and peaceful society. As argued above, gender needs to be approached intersectionally to account for the different positions of power and vulnerability. Nationality and refugee status play an obvious role here, but so do confessional background and socio-economic status, which for example places different Lebanese citizens into different positions of agency (cf. Khattab 2016). Considerations of refugees' vulnerability have in the past often failed to consider male refugees' vulnerabilities (e.g. International Rescue Committee 2016; Turner 2016) or those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identitites (Myrttinen et al. 2017), but also differences between Syrian refugee women (cf. El-Masri et al. 2013; Syria Research and Evaluation Organization 2013). These gendered positionalities also need to be seen as dynamic, and positively empowering dynamics can be encouraged, such as in this case the emerging increased participation of Syrian refugee women in refugee communities in the Bekaa valley which we have witnessed over the course of the project.

10.5 Nepal – Water for More Inclusive Politics

One of the main driving forces of the civil war in Nepal (1996–2006), which pitted the Royalist government against Maoist insurgents, was the structural exclusion of a vast majority of the population from access to power and resources. This exclusion was based on a complex feudal system of stratification based on caste, ethnicity, religion, age, location, and gender. This system also laid and continues in part to lay down the societal expectations of what it means to be a man or a woman of a given caste, age, ethnic origin, and so on. The complex web of expectations and norms means for example that in some instances, lower caste women may find themselves in positions of relatively more freedoms, but also of more vulnerability, than higher caste women (Tamang 2002), or place expectations on some men to engage in physical violence but not others (Maycock et al. 2014, Sharma and Tamang 2016). The Maoists, at least rhetorically, demanded an overthrow of the feudal regime, including calls for the empowerment of women, creating among their cadres and supporters expectations of a more or less radical re-structuring of Nepali society (Myrttinen et al. 2015; Sharma and Donini 2010; Shrestra-Schipper 2009). During the conflict, Maoists explicitly campaigned against traditional practices of gender- and caste-based discrimination in areas they controlled, although the post-conflict period has seen a degree of roll-back in this respect (Naujoks and Myrttinen 2014; Naujoks 2016).

As in all societies, Nepali gender roles develop and change over time, with different gendered expectations placed on men, women and other gender identities of different ethnic, regional, cultural, religious and social backgrounds. Caste, in conjunction with gender, continues to play a major role in many parts of the country in terms of the expectations placed on men, women, boys, girls and third gender persons, as well as in terms of their possibilities and vulnerabilities (Maycock et al. 2014; Naujoks 2016; Naujoks and Myrttinen 2014). In spite of the broad variety, there are certain traditional expectations that tend to transect most social, religious

and ethnic groups – such as respect for elders and the pre-eminence of men over women. These values and expectations underpin traditional family structures, which can often be an important source of support and care; however, they can also be a source of repression and violence, especially in contexts of economic pressure and social change (Naujoks and Myrttinen 2014).

One of the water-related projects International Alert was working with was in Kailali district in the southwestern Terai region. The Terai covers the Nepali side of the plains of the Ganges river basin, and has been a historically marginalised part of the country, which saw heavy fighting during the civil war. Following the end of the war, feelings of continued marginalisation have led to repeated protests and even the formation of armed groups, often mobilising around Tharu and Madhesi ethnic identity (UNRCHCO 2013; Naujoks 2016). Many of the Hindu communities in the Terai are highly patriarchal and continue traditions such as the dowry system, early marriage, preference for sons, the stigmatisation of widows, seclusion (*purdah*) of women and *chhaupadi* (the physical segregation of women during menstruation), practices which the Maoists had sought to, and partially succeeded in abolishing (Naujoks and Myrttinen 2014; UNRCHCO 2011). Decision-making, especially in public fora, tends to be an exclusively male privilege in the more traditional Hindu communities in the Terai, and women's economic activities are limited, although in some matriarchal Tharu societies gendered roles can be quite different (Verma 2009). On the whole, however, power tends to be concentrated in the hands of older, majority-ethnic, higher caste men, while much of the economic power in the rural areas is in the hands of absentee landlords (Maycock 2012; Pandey and Myrttinen 2014).

In the target area of the project, community participation in the irrigation system was very high as the systems were managed by the farmers themselves (cf. Sugden et al. 2014; Suhardiman et al. 2015). A traditional system of irrigation management called *Deshawar* is still in place, in which thousands of farmers from each household in the area contribute their labour and time for at least a week annually to clean the silt from the mouth of each irrigation system and to repair any damages. This process would be led by *Badghars,* who are elected traditional leaders/elders, almost always male.[3] In addition, *Badghars* in a given area lead water users' committees (WUSC), which regulate the use of canal water for irrigation (Pandey and Myrttinen 2014).

Although the Tharu indigenous population are involved in the *Deshawar* process, most of the agricultural land in the district is not owned by them. Participation in decision-making has also traditionally been limited to non-existent for women, members of lower castes and ethnic minority groups. Furthermore, a bonded labour system called *Kamaiya* has existed, and to an extent still exists despite a ban, wherein men and women, as well as girls and boys, were tied to mostly non-Tharu landlord families and forced to work for them (Cheria 2005; Pandey and Myrttinen 2014).

Following the end of the civil war, the new republican government has sought to address some of the root causes of the Maoist insurgency by seeking to ensure more

[3] One Badghar is elected among a certain area/population and is responsible for decision making for his own group of people. Traditionally, the position was passed down dynastically, whereas currently Badghars are locally elected.

gender-, class-, caste- and age-equitable access to and control of natural resources, including water. As with other decision-making bodies, WUSC are in theory required to have one third women members as well as be representative of ethnic minorities and members of lower castes. Our research in Kailali showed, however, that while in some places important steps had been taken towards more gender equality and social inclusivity, often the changes were either symbolic or non-existent in practice (Pandey and Myrttinen 2014). These findings were also echoed in our assessment of Asian Development Bank funding for WUSCs in Baglung District (Stephen 2014).

While the setting up of more inclusive provisions are an important step forward in terms of peacebuilding and social inclusion, these are on their own not enough to guarantee more equitable access. In spite of being nominally on the board, our field research showed that women's voices were often ignored (if they spoke at all), decision-making often continued to be in the hands of dominant men, often from ethnic majority groups or higher castes. Women who did participate were often linked in one way or another to powerful men (Myrttinen et al. 2015; Pandey and Myrttinen 2014; Stephen 2014). Dominant patriarchal and caste-based social norms continue to promote deference and prevent challenges to the authority of men and high caste individuals in both public and private spheres, making participation a symbolic act (Stephen 2014).

One of the aims of the work in the Terai has been to promote a symbiosis of traditional forms of inclusive governance (e.g. Badghars and Deshawar) and more egalitarian and inclusive approaches which incorporate women more generally, as well as members of marginalised castes. This is in line with the broad goals of the post-war settlement that strives for a more inclusive and equal Nepal, even if progress on this has frequently stalled due to a lack of political will and the staying power of entrenched interests and established ways of decision-making.

10.6 Conclusions

The two cases presented here from Lebanon and Nepal show how, albeit imperfectly and tentatively, water can be used as as an entry point for peacebuilding in conflict-affected societies by increasing social cohesion and inclusivity, including more gender equality. In both cases, water provided an opening, be it for cross-confessional advocacy in Lebanon or for more inclusive resource management practices in Nepal. Neither have been all-out, immediate successes, but given the entrenched nature of societal norms, including on gender, this should not surprising. Societal change processes require time, and can not be imposed from the outside. Given the centrality of water to people's lives, it can be seen as a pressing, relatively non-partisan issue that needs to be addressed (Lebanon case) or as a comparatively un-political and practical issue to be addressed as a matter of course (Nepal).

Gender, as a salient co-determinant of societal power and/or vulnerability, was addressed more in the Nepal case than in Lebanon, in part due to the nature of the

post-war settlement in the former. Both cases, however, show that simply equating the promotion of gender equality with adding women is not enough – even if it is an important first step. In Nepal, where women were 'added' based on a quota, their participation was often symbolic or reduced to attendance rather than active participation, let alone influence. In Lebanon, women along with men participated in the capacity-building and advocacy, yet the gendered nature of the power dynamics that are in part at the heart of the woes of water management in Lebanon were not explicitly raised. Both cases thus, through their shortcomings, highlight the need for a comprehensive, broader and deeper understanding of gender for peacebuilding to be successful. While women's political and social empowerment is immensely important, it needs to be promoted along with a critical engagement with men's roles and expectations, as well as of the patriarchal power structures co-produced by women and men alike. Gender needs to be approached not only as a technical 'add-on' whereby women's involvement is increased numerically. Rather, gender needs to be analysed intersectionally and examined in the way it plays a relational and dynamic role in determining access to power and resources for different individuals. Such an analysis can inform understandings of vulnerabilities of individuals and communities, but also help in discerning drivers of conflict and openings for peacebuilding.

Understandings of gender in relation to conflict, peace and water resources have tended in the past to focus on women, often treating women as a homogenous group. The debate should be broadened to examine the roles, needs and positions of power of men and boys, and also include the needs and vulnerabilities of those whose sexual orientation and gender identity transcends dominant heteronormative ideals. The understanding of gender should also be deepened by examining it intersectionally: not all men in the Terai have the same needs, vulnerabilities and possibilities of agency; nor do all women in Lebanon. Gender needs to be examined in conjunction with other determining factors that may be influential, such as age, location, marital status, class, dis−/ability, ethnic background, or in the case of Lebanon confession, and in Nepal caste. Although peacebuilding may often seem like an act of ploughing the sea, the entry points of gender and water can potentially be the beginning of longer-term processes of societal change, and, thereby, of calming the waters.

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