



Interview of the Month – December 2013
Carolyn Hayman, Chief Executive, Peace Direct

1. GenderHopes: In a few words, can you tell us about Peace Direct, the International NGO for which you are the director?

Carolyn Hayman, Peace Direct: Wherever there is conflict there are also local people finding non-violent ways to deal with it. We believe they are the best placed to do this because they understand the context, they are there for the long term and they have the moral authority, through the sacrifices they make, to challenge people to change their behavior. And with small amounts of funding, they can create big changes. Peace Direct finds outstanding local peacebuilding organisations, funds them and promotes the importance of their work to people with power and resources.

2. How did Peace Direct begin and how did you come to be involved?

After I made some money as a venture capitalist, I joined a giving circle called the Network for Social Change. I was in a meeting of the Peace Pool, where we made 8 grants to organisations, all of which were based in London. I asked myself why we weren't funding organisations on the frontline, and thought what a great idea it would be if we could create a trusted conduit whereby people could fund in rich countries, knowing the funds would get into the right hands in a conflict zone. I looked for someone else with the same idea, found my co-founder, Dr Scilla Elworthy, and after 18 months of trying to get Peace Direct off the ground we succeeded and I became the Chief Executive.

3. How does Peace Direct support local Peace Builders in action?

First and foremost, we raise funds for their work. They generally have much more imaginative ideas than we could ever come up with! We raise funds from individuals, foundations and governments. We also act as impresarios, showcasing the talent of local peacebuilders. For example, recently our Burundian colleague visited the UK. He did interviews on BBC World Service in French and Kirundi, talking about the Early Warning and Response system he and colleagues are creating in Burundi. We also help strengthen our partners systems for finance and monitoring so that they can handle larger grants and thereby grow their impact, and we introduce them to other funders. They are so appreciative of our support that we recently won the top place among 62 organisations in an independent survey by Keystone.

4. One of the major issues stated by Peace Direct is the impact of conflict on women. What are some of the unique challenges faced by women and how does Peace Direct work to overcome these?

I think there is a narrative about women as victims which doesn't do justice to the fact that very often women are holding their families and communities together and are the strongest force. So we try to build on the strength that women have. Here are two examples from the Congo. In North Kivu, we have created a microfinance scheme specifically aimed at the wives of ex-combatants and also female ex-combatants, but which also includes members of the community into which the ex-combatants are being reintegrated. So far, the repayment rate has been 100%. In South Kivu, our partner has created community courts – barazas – where people can get justice without having to pay or travel long distances. They perceived that there were issues that women did not feel comfortable bringing to the main court, so they created women's courts, embedded in the main court so that it has the authority of the main court, but composed entirely of women. Our external evaluation shows that the second most important impact after access to justice is the empowerment of women, as in this quote:

'We are already standing up for rebuilding in our community and the men are convinced about us because they now say that the women have the strength to work for the good of the community' (Suzana, Swima, July 2013).

5. In your experience working with Peace Direct, do you feel that female builders face unique challenges?

I think in many parts of Africa women are expected to have a subordinate position, and we have fewer women among our African partners, than in Asia where all four of our partners are women-led. But they also have opportunities. Women who are effective in peacebuilding often use, to good effect, the fact that they are not considered threatening – they are able to take opportunities to influence the promoters of conflict because no-one thinks they will have any impact. And then men are surprised!

6. What can the international community do to address the challenges and needs faced by women in times of conflict and post-conflict reconstruction?

Peace agreements provide a unique opportunity to enhance the role of women in governance – for example Burundi has 30% women MPs because a list system putting this into effect was included in the Arusha agreement. Women need to be represented in peace negotiations because they will have different priorities from men. We are still a very long way away from securing them an adequate voice, alongside the 'men with guns' who tend to take centre stage in negotiations.

Secondly, women ex-combatants have very specific needs that are often neglected – for example in a massive multi country disarmament programme run by the World Bank, it is estimated that 30% of the people who needed to be included were women, but only 2% of those who actually received help in livelihoods and reintegration were women. This means that for many, sex-work becomes the only option.

Then, the role of women in peacebuilding and community reconstruction needs to be recognized, not because it's the 'right' thing to do, but because that's the way to get the most effective programs.