

The other side of GPAC2



When organizing or participating in a dual career PhD programme, we all meet in Maastricht, having research in mind. During year one of the programme, we shortly inform each other on our “daily life activities”, and of course over lunch or drinks we generally share some of our experiences with our co-fellows. But still, on average the general life of the GPAC² fellows of all is far away with exception of a few weeks a year. This is a pity, for two reasons. Firstly, GPAC² fellows all have jobs that our full time PhD fellows dream off (which is why they work so hard to get their PhD), and information on the daily activities of GPAC² fellows is simply interesting. Secondly, GPAC² fellow’s daily work very often is located in the centre of global activities, and reaches us at the 8 o’clock news in any country in the world. This also means a GPAC² fellow is often more informed than even the best journalist we rely on for our information. So, I intend to share some information from “the other side of GPAC2 with you, using our Blog.

Greetings

Mindel van de Laar

February 2012: Catie Lott

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This fourth short contribution has been delayed a bit. As such, the immediate news-relevance has faded, but the topic is still highly relevant. The Nobel price in 2011 was awarded to 3 women, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkol Karman that try to change the position of women , for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work. Within GPAC2, Catie Lott is working passionately on the topic of gender and governance, wondering why so few women make it to the top of public institutions, and if they would make it, if that would make a difference in terms of sound public policy development and implementation. Which is why I asked her to comment on the Nobel price for peace in 2011. Catie is from the 2011 cohort, her proposal was accepted this month and she will start her second year now.

Catie Lott is the director of the Democracy and Governance office for USAID/Kenya. The goal of the office and team is to help strengthen Kenya’s democratic institutions. Following a bad election in late 2007 – that fell apart along ethnic lines – approximately 1,300 Kenyans died and more than 600,000 were displaced. A coalition government was formed, which promised to implement massive reforms (electoral, judicial, police, etc.). So, for the past three years her team has been implementing programs to help the government achieve these reforms (including passage of a new Constitution), supporting civil society to advocate for and oversee the government’s reform progress, and working to mitigate conflict in some of the country’s most violence-prone areas. Her 10-member team manages around 15 projects at any one time; our annual budget is around US \$20 million.

She spends most of my days trouble-shooting (as the work is highly political) and making sure programs and results are on track.

Catie, how does your job relate to your research topic, being violent elections as well as gender balance / more women in power. Did your job make you choose this topic on purpose? If not work, what made you choose your topic?

My work has definitely influenced and shaped my research topic. On a daily basis I see the marginalization of women, their second-class status in developing countries, and their continued exclusion from decision-making. In most of these countries I also find an entrenched, incredibly corrupt, poorly governed, and male-dominated system of politics. I'm not saying a massive influx of women into politics will fix the world's problems...or maybe I am.

The Nobel price this year was awarded to 3 women that try to change the position of women , "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work". Do you believe this was a good decision. How do you feel this may aid the position of women in developing countries, or women in general?

I think it's important to note that the Nobel Prize was given to not only women, but women living in countries with some of the most unequal gender situations in the world. So the Committee was not only sending a message about the importance of women's participation in peace, but also a message to the countries themselves about the status of women in their societies. We know conflict disproportionately affects women and children. The international recognition of this fact, through the Nobel selection, has absolutely given more impetus and weight to this issue.

Do you believe the hypothesis, that more women in powerful positions would indeed lead less violence, and do you, for instance in Kenya, see a gender shift as a result of the violence last time?

I absolutely believe more women in powerful positions would lead to less violence. But "more" is a loaded word. "More" for some may be 10%, 20%, or 30% more women. We need a cultural shift that not only elects "more" women, but also values their role as a decision maker and leader. Also, despite gains being made in women's political participation, in most countries women continue to be completely shut out of the security sector – defense, police, intelligence, etc.

This is part of the problem in Kenya. We've seen a massive gender shift with the passage of the new Constitution. So on paper women are making huge strides. But in reality, there is little representation of women in the security sector. Reforms around the police (who were responsible for many of the post-election atrocities) has been excruciatingly slow. So we need more women in power, but equally important more women in these male-dominated sectors to have a voice in how conflict and violence are being addressed.