

## **Learnings From Sri Lanka: Theorizing of Grassroots Women's Participation in NGO Peacebuilding Activism Against Transnational and Third-World Feminist Perspectives**

**Authors :** Piumi L. Denagamage, Vibusha Madanayake

**Abstract :** At the end of a 30-year civil war in Sri Lanka in 2009, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) played a prominent role in post-war development and peacebuilding. Women were a major "beneficiary" of NGO activities on socio-economic empowerment, capacity building for advocacy, and grassroots participation in activism. Undoubtedly, their contribution to Sri Lanka's post-war transition is tremendous. As development practitioners and researchers who have worked closely with several international and national NGOs in Sri Lanka's post-war setting, the authors, while practicing self-reflexivity, intend to theorize the grey literature prepared by NGOs against the theoretical frameworks of Transnational and Third World feminisms. Using examples of the grassroots activities conducted by the NGOs with war-affected women, the paper questions whether Colombo-based feminism represents the lived realities of grassroots women at the transnational level. It argues that Colombo-based feminists use their power and exposure to Western feminist approaches to portray diverse forms of oppression women face at grassroots levels, their needs for advocacy, and different modes of resistance on the ground. Many NGOs depend on international donor funding for their grassroots work, which also contributes to their utilization of Western-led knowledge. Despite their efforts to "save marginalized women from oppression," these modes of intervention are often rejected by the public, including women at local levels. This has also resulted in the rejection of feminism entirely as a culturally root-less alien Western ideology. The analysis connects with the Transnational and Third World theoretical feminist perspectives to problematize the power relations between Western knowledge systems and the lived experiences of grassroots women in the peacebuilding process through NGO activism in Sri Lanka. It also emphasizes that the infiltration of Western knowledge through NGOs has led to the participation of grassroots women only through adjustments of their lived experiences to match the alien knowledge rather than theorizing based on their own lived realities. While sharing a concern that NGOs' power to adopt Western knowledge systems is often unchecked and unmitigated, the paper signifies the importance of adopting the methods of alternative theorizing to ensure meaningful participation of Third World women in peacebuilding.

**Keywords :** alternative theorizing, colombo-based feminism, grassroots women in peacebuilding, NGO activism, transnational and third world feminisms

**Conference Title :** ICGSDS 2024 : International Conference on Gender, Sexuality and Diversity Studies

**Conference Location :** Vancouver, Canada

**Conference Dates :** May 20-21, 2024