

Emerging Issues:
Youth, Gender and the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict

February 2008

Preface

Over the course of the development of Peacebuild's five-year Strategic Directions Document (2008-2012), consultations with network members reaffirmed a strong interest in generating and articulating new evidence, analysis, and policy and programming options relating to the changing nature of armed conflict, and governance and democratization processes. Within these broader areas of interest, five priority themes were identified by Peacebuild's membership, one of which was *Identity, Communities and Conflict*.

This report on the Youth and Gender Dimensions of the Changing Nature of Armed Conflict represents a first step in a larger, ongoing process of identifying emerging issues, challenges and opportunities for action on this priority theme by the community of practice Peacebuild is a part of. The research areas and recommendations advanced in this report will be considered by Peacebuild's members, Board of Directors, staff and Working Groups to ensure that youth and gender dynamics are effectively mainstreamed.

The methods used to generate this report were loosely modeled on the 'Fast Talk' process developed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). In January 2008, experts in the fields of gendered/youth identities and armed conflict were identified by Peacebuild. Ibrahim Bangura, Dr. Myriam Denov, Jennifer Klot, Dr. Laura Sjoberg, Dr. Irma Specht and Dr. Christina Yeung, submitted written contributions to a set of questions developed by Peacebuild (listed in Annex 1).¹ These were circulated to the seven experts listed below, who were then invited to participate in a follow-up discussion facilitated by Julie Stevens. Ibrahim Bangura, Jennifer Klot, Dr. Laura Sjoberg and Dr. Irma Specht partook in the discussion.

Maya Ollek, a Gender and Peacebuilding consultant based in Montreal, Québec, drew on both the written submissions and the oral contributions to produce the following report, which summarizes and expands upon all the previous inputs to identify conceptual frameworks, programmatic options, and areas for further exploration and analysis.

Peacebuild would like to extend its gratitude to all the participants who so readily lent their expertise to the development of this report.

¹ Written contributions submitted by expert participants are available on the Peacebuild Forum: <http://www.peacebuild.ca/action/?page=whatsnew&lang=e>.



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Executive Summary:

Contemporary armed conflicts have come to be characterized by a number of traits that have not generally been associated with earlier armed conflicts. Conflicts today tend to occur more within states, where the rules of engagement tend to be defined at the local level. Armed challenges to state power by non-state actors is a defining feature of contemporary conflict, while transnational, multilateral, regional and bilateral actors also play ever more significant roles. Other features include the targeting of civilians and the prevalence of gender-based violence as weapons of war. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has also led to greater civil engagement in combat, further blurring the lines between civilians and combatants.

The dynamics of, and inadequate responses to, contemporary armed conflicts have made clear the need for frameworks and programs that mainstream gendered lenses of analysis. The varied experiences of 'youth' must be acknowledged, as must the fundamental importance of ensuring that both youth and women are meaningfully included in all aspects of decision-making and peacebuilding. The importance of nuanced and context-based analysis is key, as are holistic approaches to programming that, for instance, acknowledge the role of the private sector in conflict and peace, and tackle the root causes of conflict and address the main motivations behind individuals' decisions to join armed groups in the first place. Everyday socio-economic development needs, the absence of good governance practices, and frustrations with democratization processes underlie, in many ways, both causes of conflict and motives for individual engagement. Other emerging issues that demand nuanced responses include the need to acknowledge sexual violence as a weapon of war, transform violent masculinities, and attend to the widespread phenomenon of drug dependency, post-conflict.

Key Points:

The Changing Nature of Armed Conflict

During the past two decades contemporary armed conflicts have come to be characterized by a number of new, more visible traits that have not generally been associated with earlier armed conflicts. While there is some disagreement as to whether or not these traits are truly novel or mark a more substantive shift in the overall nature of armed conflict, it is generally held that conflicts now tend to occur more often within states, where the rules of combat are primarily defined at the local level. Yet, the majority of contemporary conflicts also have regional dimensions with transnational, multilateral, regional and bilateral actors playing ever more significant roles. It is widely noted that contemporary conflicts tend to be more chaotic and thus more difficult to control and resolve at the national or international level.

A key defining feature of contemporary conflicts is the ever-shifting ‘battlefield’ such that wars are often, if not increasingly taking place on the bodies of women and children in what were once considered the safe havens of home, and spaces of worship, healing and education. Armed challenges to state power by non-state actors is another defining feature of contemporary armed conflict, with grievances often framed along ethnic, religious and class lines. Non-state actors often adopt arms to contest power, for self-protection or to defend interests that the state is unable or unwilling to protect. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons has led to greater civilian engagement in combat, further adding to the chaotic dimensions of contemporary armed conflict as lines between civilians and combatants become blurred.

The role of private security firms and mercenaries in armed conflict is also more prevalent today, and the grave human rights violations committed by such actors in places such as Iraq, Angola, and according to one expert participant, Sierra Leone, is extremely troubling. The rise of local security firms post-conflict may be indicative of a failure to successfully demobilize members of armed groups. It also signals an inability of post-conflict governments to control crime and provide adequate security to private sector companies and elites, who have the means to pay for private security, but also to ordinary citizens.

Governments and the international community have failed to adequately respond to the challenges associated with the rising presence and use of private security firms and mercenaries, and the application of international laws and norms to these actors is unclear. This is clearly in evidence in cases of sexual violence, where punishment and accountability frameworks have been markedly inadequate or non-existent. States who contract private security firms and mercenaries should be pressured to hold these actors accountable, and legal frameworks should be strengthened or revised accordingly.

It should be noted, however, that many of the “new” phenomena associated with the changing nature of armed conflict have existed in various degrees in previous conflicts, and in many cases,

improvements in communication technologies and the growing role of the media in shaping perceptions of security risks, humanitarian needs and human rights challenges may have simply made us more aware of them. We should be careful not to overstate the significance of these new risks and discard more traditional analytical tools and frameworks for understanding armed conflict.

Security, Insecurity, and the Gendered Impact of Armed Conflict

“Security is the single greatest need of women and girls—defined and measured by the control they have over their lives in physical, economic, political and socio-cultural terms.”

Jennifer Klot

Security and insecurity are broad, dynamic concepts. Individuals’ relationship to, or place within, their respective communities and state are highly differentiated. Similarly, the sources of insecurity leading to the outbreak of conflict and the motivations driving individuals’ participation in armed groups also vary widely.

Whereas security and insecurity were once narrowly defined with reference to the state, a broad range of non-military and military-threats to people increasingly figure into approaches to insecurity. This view of insecurity sheds light on how women, youth and children suffer disproportionately as a result of conflict. Women suffer loss of employment, loss of goods, and are unable to access ever weakening health care systems. Traditional social support and community protection mechanisms break down, leaving women and youth particularly vulnerable. Child-headed households demonstrate both the weakened state of social support networks and exemplify the particular vulnerabilities of children and youth today. Not only are women and girls exploited as resources in times of conflict, but they are also targeted for sexual violence as a strategy of war. Men and boys are also victims of sexual violence, although this is rarely acknowledged by policy-makers and organizations addressing gender-based violence.

Research conducted by one of the discussants suggests that victims of sexual violence may, in fact, join armed groups as a means of self-defence or because of the social stigma and marginalization resulting from rape, which underscores the need to better understand the motivations driving individuals to engage in armed conflict. Gendered and age-based vulnerabilities certainly play a role, including the lack of opportunities to achieve economic stability or social status via more non-violent or traditional means. When paths to, or traditional definitions of adulthood and/or prosperity are hampered, undermined or rewritten altogether, the taking up of arms may provide an alternative path to security, status and adulthood. (e.g. shortages of land limit a young person’s ability to set up a homestead, a traditional marker of adulthood in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa).

The definition of security, however, is itself gendered, reflecting how men and women are differently situated and assume highly gendered roles in their communities. In keeping with a feminist perspective that evaluates security according to women’s needs, men and women define security

differently. According to one discussant's field research in West Africa, whereas men emphasize personal, economic, and community security, women stress food security, family safety, freedom of movement within and outside their communities, health security, and educational security.

Discussants also pointed to the root causes of conflicts, including the legacies of colonial and neo-colonial influences on governance. The social marginalization and disaffection that arises from youth unemployment is one of the biggest threats to peace, as it leads to increased social tensions and so may contribute to pre- and post-conflict instability. This can also be self-reinforcing, for while youth unemployment may increase social instability, conflict also leads to further youth unemployment and alienation.

Post-conflict Gender Empowerment

“There are important opportunities to help shift traditional roles and relations of power, particularly in the aftermath of conflict. However, time and again, history has demonstrated that the once powerful women and children who acted as leaders, negotiators, and resisters of violence during conflict often resume marginalized and excluded roles in the aftermath of conflict.”

Dr. Myriam Denov

In armed conflict, women and girls may adopt new social roles that can lead to gender empowerment. These include participating in armed groups or becoming heads of households in the absence of their male counterparts. Discussants advanced examples of leading roles assumed by females such as the women-led, pro-peace movements in the Mano River Basin conflict (Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea), the Women's Artillery Commandos (WACs) in Liberia, and the “Amazon” units in Congo-Brazzaville and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Women in the internally displaced persons' camps of Northern Uganda have assumed strong community roles, beyond those traditionally assigned to women. However, because shifts in gender relations during armed conflict are due to immediate social and economic need, these may present limited opportunities or may be short lived.

In situations of conflict, women may assume different or seemingly empowered/ing roles, but in the absence of a deeper change in ‘mindset’, these roles are not always preserved in the post-conflict setting. Liberia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone, which have sustained high levels of women's political participation, post-conflict, stand out as notable exceptions. More commonly, gains in females' empowerment are not institutionalized in post-conflict laws and governance structures. Contrary to their male counterparts, female commanders are rarely consulted in decision-making. Women and girls face a glass ceiling with regards to professional advancement, compounded by the disproportionately higher illiteracy rates than their male counterparts. Access to education may be further hampered by child-rearing responsibilities. Also, female ex-combatants may be marginalized and stigmatized by their communities who feel that these girls and women have crossed the lines of acceptable behaviour by having actively engaged in combat.

Post-conflict Programming: The Needs of Women and Youth

The needs of women and youth are typically the last to be considered when identifying post-conflict priorities and programming. Furthermore, when these needs are taken into account, these groups tend to be viewed as homogenous entities when, in fact, members have highly variable needs. Experiences in armed groups are also highly variable, translating into differentiated needs.

The needs of youth are often poorly addressed. Viewed as victims or recipients of assistance, they are rarely recognized as actors or agents of change. It is equally rare for them to be consulted during program development, which inevitably leads to a failure to meet their short and long-term reintegration needs, such as their need for educational support and access to employment opportunities.

Increasingly, DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) is being used as a primary vehicle for program delivery. There is some debate as to whether or not the potential of DDR programs is over emphasized. Some discussants believe such programs have great if unfulfilled potential by virtue of the fact that they are the first to be implemented in post-conflict situations, and so may be best placed to address urgent needs. In spite of the lack of consensus surrounding the role and potential of DDR, what is understood is that the gendered and age-based dynamics of post-conflict programming are in sharp evidence when considering DDR programming.

The international community appears to be using DDR increasingly as a short-term or immediate response framework rather than as a conduit for delivering a specific type of assistance, leading to diffuse programs that fail to recognize or meet women and youths' needs. Girls are largely absent from DDR programming and when they are present, programs do not adequately reflect their lived experience and participation in armed groups. In addition to a failure to incorporate their needs into program design, girls are simply not recognized as combatants. Girls, like women, have difficulties accessing information about DDR in the first place. They may also avoid such programs out of fear of stigmatization and may not want community members to know of their active participation in combat. DDR programs also fail girls by providing them with low-skill training, such as soap-making, in line with their real or perceived traditional gender roles. Such training does not enable women to access gainful employment. Furthermore, the very structure of DDR programs discourages women and girls from obtaining their demobilization cards and accessing benefits. In Liberia for instance, girls and women resisted the five-day demobilization camp for fear of meeting their former captors. Others did not want to bring their children to the camp.

The absence of systematic, just or lawful responses to sexual violence in conflict reflects another area where the international community consistently fails to meet the needs of women and girls, beginning with a failure to recognize rape as a strategy of war. Equally appalling is the fact that the United Nations has yet to deal decisively with sexual violence committed by its peacekeepers. More immediately, the current approach places undue stress on the normative and human rights aspects of sexual violence, while ignoring victims' most urgent needs, such as immediate access to reproductive

healthcare. For example, in Sierra Leone, the transitional justice process received much attention and funding, while attention to the victims of sexual violence remained under-resourced. The role of transitional justice must be critically examined from a gender perspective. Also, the rights, vulnerabilities and needs of children born of wartime rape have been entirely overlooked and must be addressed.

NGOs: International / Local partnerships

International NGOs play a growing role in program delivery, something that can often inadvertently undermine local NGOs. In Sierra Leone for example, the international community entered rapidly to conduct peacebuilding activities without adequately consulting local NGOs about the population's socioeconomic needs. This resulted in programs that did not always meet these needs. Local NGOs have deep context-based knowledge to share with international actors, and can also play an active role in lobbying governments to address human rights issues. For example, a small Liberian NGO, the Association of Female Liberian Lawyers, played a crucial role in getting its government to pass a new rape law.

However, as local NGOs assume the role of implementing partners for international actors, they are often faced with relinquishing their watchdog function and expected to withhold their critiques of donor governments and international organizations. This is particularly disconcerting when NGOs' programs are used to further particular political agendas of faith-based, bilateral, or multilateral organizations.

Conceptual Frameworks:

Gendered Identities and Armed Conflict

“Women before the war [in Sierra Leone] were seen as objects to be used, misused and abused by men. Men never thought women were capable of unleashing mayhem when the opportunity presents itself.”
Ibrahim Bangura

Mapping the intersections of gender and conflict allows us to better appreciate how identity shapes one's experience of conflict and informs one's decision to partake in violence. More often than not, men are represented as the strong warrior-citizens charged with protecting women and children, who are viewed as inherently peaceful and innocent. In such cases, women may be expected to support conflict as part of their maternal role and responsibilities.

In practice, in the hyper-sexualized environment of armed conflict, gender relations are far more complex, challenging and transcending simple binary constructs. Women's identities may coalesce around the need for protection, but they may also form around women's active participation in conflict, including as combatants. In some contexts, a militarized femininity is emerging, whereby a female soldier is viewed as equally capable as her male counterpart while maintaining her femininity.

Masculinity, on the other hand, tends to be consistently manifested through the possession of a weapon and power to dominate others.

Youth as Agents

Women, girls and boys are increasingly taking on roles of responsibility and authority in conflict (as commanders, leaders, and resisters of violence). It would be an important to tap into such agency and leadership in the aftermath of conflict and involve them in decision-making at all levels of society.

Dr. Myriam Denov

A number of key tenets must underlie the work of humanitarian actors and policy-makers, beginning with a more nuanced appreciation of ‘youth’ as a heterogeneous group. Secondly, ‘youth’ must be understood as a culturally defined construct: definitions of adolescence, childhood and adulthood are rooted in local contexts, and function largely independently of actual age, hinging instead upon markers of status, which themselves shift in situations of conflict or social stress. Third, the experiences of youth are highly varied and must be dislodged from simple or romantic notions of childhood as youth may be both victims of armed conflict and active participants. With the breakdown of community social support structures in conflict, youth are also more likely to assume adult-like roles in their communities and in armed groups (although whether or not they are viewed or respected as ‘adults’ in these communities remains unclear and is likely context-dependent). This may continue in the post-conflict period, when youth are expected to contribute to their family income or when they live independently of their families or home communities. Finally, youth must be recognized as agents of change, as potential spoilers but also as key makers and guarantors of peace.

The application of a rights-based framework to youth programming should not detract from their agency. For instance, a rights-based framework may categorize a fourteen-year-old as a child while the individual’s community considers him or her an adult. Post-conflict programming must recognize independence developed by youth during conflicts yet be sensitive to the intergenerational tensions that risk being exaggerated by the individualizing effects of the interpretation, application and promotion of rights-based discourses.

A focus on youth empowerment that includes youth in decision-making processes, pursued in conjunction with youth protection strategies, is essential to addressing their post-conflict vulnerabilities. This includes the danger of re-recruitment and falling into criminality. Youth are an important source of social capital. They must have the opportunity to participate fruitfully in the post-conflict social order.

Local Contexts

“It is important to look into what a conflict is about, what went wrong, to understand the particular and specific issues. The international community should not use things or projects implemented in other areas thinking that these will just move along in a straightforward manner.”

Ibrahim Bangura

If it is unclear whether or not the nature of armed conflict is ‘new’ or changing, it is certain that the responses and strategic interests of international, regional and national actors have changed and continue to vary across conflict situations. Financing for development, peace operations, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programs are continually changing together with policies and approaches to program delivery. According to one expert participant, coordination amongst the various agencies and actors appear to have improved, at least at the policy-level. However, when standardized programming models are applied to post-conflict settings, these consistently fail to meet the complex needs and specificities of local conflict dynamics. These failures reflect the difficulties of developing (top-down) responses to conflicts that are highly complex and chaotic. Not only are the lines between civilian and combatants blurred, but the rules and regulations governing warfare are, more than ever, determined locally, rendering international and national interventions all the more challenging. Adopting context-specific approaches that adapt existing policies and guidelines to meet local needs is essential for effective programming.

Integrated Programming

Peacebuilding tends to be understood as involving normalizing relationships between groups in conflict. Humanitarian actors rely increasingly on this narrow interpretation of peacebuilding as a framework through which to conduct their post-conflict programs. This contributes to a short-term perspective that fails to emphasize the intimate link between peacebuilding and development. Such a view of peacebuilding also detracts attention from understanding the root causes of conflict or suggests that relationships can be restored to a pre-conflict normative state when, in fact, conflicts tend to be deeply historical and rooted in long-term instability and inequities.

Identifying and addressing the root causes of conflict is essential to establishing sustainable peace. Conflict transformation requires addressing all three elements of the conflict triangle; perceptions and attitudes, behaviour, and context. To do this, humanitarian actors must adopt holistic approaches to programming that integrate peacebuilding and development. For example, ex-combatants are unlikely to attend a life skills course. But, to incorporate these skills as an element of a vocational training course will ensure higher rates of participation.

Conflict Timelines

“Battlefield deaths are but one indicator, yet these continue to be the predominant measure of the state of conflict. Violence against women often increases in the aftermath of conflict in what becomes an extended ‘battlefield’—while collecting firewood, at home—often by the same perpetrators as during conflict.”

Jennifer Klot

Armed conflict is not an event with clearly defined beginning and end points. Nevertheless, policy-makers often treat armed conflict as an event with a fixed timeframe. This approach detracts from the security threats faced by women and girls both prior to the outbreak of large-scale violence and long after the official end of hostilities. Approaching conflict as a defined event risks creating programs that are apt to fail to comprehensively address women and girls' needs and vulnerabilities. It is important to adopt a gendered lens to identify the pre and post-conflict impacts of armed conflict on women and girls.

Emerging Issues and Research Areas:

Private Security Companies and Mercenaries

“(New) participating private military corporations have a higher level of sexual abuse than traditional militaries, without the same (harsh) punishments militaries inflict”

Dr. Laura Sjoberg

The international community must acknowledge the increasing role of private security companies and mercenaries in armed conflicts. All actors must be held accountable for violations of human rights, including sexual violence, in conflict. Research on the punishment structures for non-state actors is required. The Government of Canada can play a key role in promoting the development of policies and guidelines on the application of international norms and laws to private security firms and mercenaries. The Government of Canada can also encourage states to place contractual obligations on these non-state entities, holding these accountable to the same legal norms and standards of behaviour applicable to state militaries. Contracts should also stipulate the requirement of human rights training with a special emphasis on gender sensitivity. Research and awareness-raising is needed to increase the receptivity to human rights training and improve training practices targeting private security firms.

The Needs of Ex-combatants

“The psychosocial transitions of returning combatants are not being addressed. We don’t have models even close to being helpful in these contexts... Urgent attention—intellectual and programmatic—is needed to address the psychosocial issues of recovery and violence and its perpetration.”

Jennifer Klot

In spite of the number of DDR policies and program guidelines, there remains considerable scope for research on the needs of ex-combatants. Recognizing that ex-combatants are a heterogeneous group is an important first step. Identifying and understanding the motivations driving young people to join armed groups is fundamental to the development of effective needs-based DDR programs. For example, if girls join armed groups to escape domestic violence, then returning them to their homes of origin during over the course of the reintegration process is not a sustainable solution.

The psychological damage endured by combatants is a significant threat to post-conflict social cohesion. Yet, there are few models for treating the psycho-social impacts of war on ex-combatants' and easing their transition to civilian life. This issue requires more research and, again, must take local specificities into account.

The needs of drug-dependent, ex-combatants are also poorly recognized and under-researched. Armed groups offer or coerce recruits into taking drugs, fostering destructive dependencies long after the end of conflict. Left untreated, the phenomenon of widespread addiction promises to threaten post-conflict security. Agencies implementing DDR programs are ill-equipped to address the challenges of drug addiction.

Masculinities

“Creative thinking of potential alternative sources of non-violent masculinities is crucial in war-to-peace transition periods.”

Dr. Irma Specht

“Obviously a strong disassociation between the use of violence/ use of arms and macho notions of masculinity need to be encouraged. But this again, often reverts back to the idea of creating political space and social/ economic opportunities for youth, especially boys”

Dr. Christina Yeung

Subject formation is highly context specific, but it is also relational. In other words, identities are not shaped in isolation. One's self-identity is formed by relationships and power vis-à-vis others. The makings of what it means to be a woman or a girl cannot be considered independently of that which is understood to make a man or a boy,² underscoring the need to better understand the formations and definitions of masculinity, particularly in violent contexts where sexual violence committed by men as an act of war and power is endemic.

The study of masculinities is a relatively new area of requiring more research. There is an important need for research on the application of theoretical knowledge about violent masculinities to the transformation of these identities through programming. Where violent masculinities lie at the heart of conflict, breaking down these identities is central to transforming and resolving conflicts. Few programs consider the transformation of violent identities – be they masculine or feminine – with the exception of counseling programs. One initiative worth investigating and possibly supporting includes the University of Sierra Leone's establishment of a gender documentation centre and its study of the reversal of violent masculinities.

² This is not to suggest that gendered identities are formed as strict binaries. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered identities should not be overlooked, however muted.

In a post-conflict setting, transforming violent masculinities requires an integrated strategy in which new forms of empowerment replace men's perceived loss of power and status associated with DDR. Fostering opportunities for economic empowerment, for instance, may be one example of how this may be done. Changing the mindsets of leaders of armed groups is an important first step when seeking to transform violent masculine identities. Leaders of faith-based organizations may be well positioned to bring about such a change. However, programs must also target women's role in preserving or perpetuating violent masculine identities. In Northern Uganda, for example, women have encouraged men to participate in violent cattle-raiding out of economic need and as a means to attain or secure social status.

Opportunities for Action:

Socioeconomic needs

*"You can't eat peace."
Dr. Irma Specht*

Addressing individuals' socioeconomic needs is one of the most pressing post-conflict issues. This requires a two-part strategy that includes immediate humanitarian assistance alongside programs to improve living standards over the long term. To achieve this, international donors, must support the emergence of good governance practices and sound macroeconomic policies in post-conflict countries. They must also do so with a view to the gendered impact of such practices and policies so as not to inadvertently undermine efforts to promote gender equality.

Addressing human rights abuses through legal frameworks is clearly important. However, more immediate and basic needs should not be overlooked. For instance, victims of sexual violence require access to medical facilities as soon as possible. Attention to a population's immediate needs, including access to food security and health care, must also include attention to the needs of children born of rape, who are particularly vulnerable to discrimination and marginalization.

Role for Local NGOs

Local NGOs can play an instrumental role in post-conflict peacebuilding by providing insight into local dynamics and contexts, by assisting in the identification of a population's immediate and long-term needs, and by carrying out program delivery. They also have an important role as long-term service providers after the end of short-term peacebuilding programs. Local NGOs can also act as watchdogs, overseeing institutional and governance reforms. They also engage in vital advocacy and lobbying activities.

The Government of Canada and Canadian NGOs should focus on supporting local civil society in post-conflict environments. This requires the development of funding mechanisms that allow it to disburse small funding packages to support smaller and local NGO initiatives, which it currently is

unable to do. Canada could, for example, require recipients of its funding to involve local NGOs in their programming activities. Canadian NGOs may also provide capacity-building training to local organizations.

Gender Programming and Empowerment

“There are always gender-disparate impacts of conflict and of changes in conflict—what is important is that we look at each conflict through gendered lenses, to see where these disparate impacts fall in each conflict. Some are generalizable, most are unique.”

Dr. Laura Sjoberg

Canada should promote gender mainstreaming across all peacebuilding, peace operations and humanitarian aid programs and activities. A gendered lens of analysis is required to identify and address the gendered impact of conflicts. International donors should also be designing flexible programs that meet the needs of women and girls. This requires adopting a focus on gender empowerment that taps into their agency and leadership potential as a form of social capital. Women and girls must be included in decision-making processes in order to design programs that reflect their needs and concerns. For example, programs exclusively focused on female ex-combatants risk exposing participants to further stigmatization. Consequently, women and girls tend to support and benefit most from programs that address the needs of their community as a whole.

Centering gender empowerment in peacebuilding also requires a move away from focusing entirely on traditional ‘gender’ programming, such as micro-credit programs, to consider women and girls’ long-term needs and enable them to access meaningful opportunities, post-conflict. Programs must not pigeon-hole women and girls or reinforce traditional gender occupations. Enabling access to secondary and tertiary education is one way to increase women and girls’ employment opportunities and build the human capital and intellectual leadership necessary for any country’s development and transition to peace.

Armed conflict may foster openings for change in gendered and generational relations of power. However, in order for such shifts to last, post-conflict, a deeper change in society’s collective mindset is required. More research is required to explore the relationship between women’s roles in conflict and post-conflict gender relations.

Governing powers must acknowledge that men and women are not equally situated in society, and these must act to rectify power discrepancies. Women’s contributions to both armed conflicts and the establishment of sustainable peace must be recognized. International donors must ensure that gender empowerment is a central feature of all types of governance reform. Canadian civil society can also promote gender empowerment by supporting the activities of local civil society, such as awareness-raising campaigns about women’s human rights and lobbying activities.

Youth Empowerment and Participation

“Youth empowerment requires strategies that respond to (the) different needs of youth across the development cycle and to the very different impacts that the conflict has on boys and girls.”

Jennifer Klot

“In the child DDR programs in Liberia, they set up youth groups that allowed young people to come together and to define roles for themselves in the communities. This showed them that they can still be important members of community without their guns.”

Ibrahim Bangura

Youth are vested with negative and positive potential in post-conflict settings. They must be recognized as a valuable form of social capital for peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery. However, if marginalized and alienated, they may become spoilers of peace by falling into criminality or re-recruitment. To break the cycle of violence, youth need not only positive social incentives but the support of a legitimate and capable state.

Programs that focus on youth empowerment and participation, including economic, social, and political empowerment, need to be supported. Integral to a youth empowerment strategy is the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes, including program development and implementation. Youth must be consulted in order to better understand their motivations for participating in armed groups, but also to identify their priorities for, and expectations of, post-conflict programs. Also implicit to a youth empowerment strategy is the recognition of the role of choice in a young person’s participation in armed groups.

It must also be acknowledged that all armed groups espouse, impart and symbolize particular value systems, elements of which may be positive and meaningful to youth, post-conflict.

Public Sector Development, Service Delivery and Governance

“In some places, war is the biggest employer of youth.”

Dr. Irma Specht

Economic empowerment, namely the provision of employment opportunities, has an essential role in combating youth and women’s vulnerability, and supporting their reintegration into civilian life. Meaningful economic empowerment requires the state to adopt a two-pronged approach that couples strong macroeconomic development with micro-level initiatives that affect individuals most immediately and directly. The construction of basic health, transportation, energy and social infrastructure is a necessary precondition for local economic development. For instance, roads are required to facilitate the delivery of goods and products to markets, and energy is necessary to revive production, post-conflict. Attention to these priorities must be balanced with support for domestic and household energy needs and local transport requirements. The Government of Canada and

Canadian civil society should be working harder to encourage states to develop an environment conducive to business sector development through good governance practices. This includes working with relevant government ministries (e.g. Ministry of Labour).

As the international private sector takes a growing interest in the natural and mineral resources of many countries in crisis, and offers models for basic service delivery, caution should be exercised about the potentially negative consequences for the ability of national governments to develop the requisite capacity to deliver basic services to its citizenry. Nevertheless, the private sector has the potential to play an important role in creating employment opportunities for youth and women. This role is, as of yet, largely unrecognized by the United Nations and humanitarian actors. Private sector organizations with a long-term presence in post-conflict states may provide important sources of gainful employment. The provision of vocational and business training programs will enable women and youth to access these opportunities. Business mentoring programs should also be encouraged as these provide bridge support and valuable work experience, post-training.

Eliminating Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

To achieve greater long-term security for war-affected populations, including women and girls who have experienced sexual violence, human security initiatives aimed at individual protection and empowerment must occur alongside the reformation of existing social, political, economic and educational structures and institutions, particularly as they relate to gender.”

Dr. Myriam Denov

“Sexual and gender-based violence and exploitation is an often unrecognized, invisible, and critical impediment to effective peacebuilding.”

Jennifer Klot

Too little attention is paid to sexual violence in armed conflict and, for the most part, this attention occurs after the fact, too late to effectively combat sexual violence during conflict. Moreover, the definition of sexual violence in armed conflict is too narrow. To effectively combat sexual violence, it must first and foremost be recognized as a weapon of war. Discussants identified a number of policy and programming opportunities with regards to the elimination of sexual violence in conflict. These include:

- Early advocacy and prevention work, such as highlighting sexual violence as a crime, creating haven houses, launching international campaigns, and holding discussions with warlords
- Supporting evidence-based research on the prevention of sexual violence and the protection of women and girls
- Promoting comprehensive, gender-sensitive security sector reform, including of national armies and police forces, to improve protection mechanisms for women and girls and facilitate reporting sexual violence crimes



- Identifying perpetrators, including members of private militaries and mercenaries, and holding them publicly accountable, including through prosecution at the national and international level
- Identifying and supporting local cultural reconciliation and healing processes
- Improving women and girls' economic security and control over their lives
- Encouraging states to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention Against Torture

The Government of Canada and Canadian civil society can play an important role in supporting these areas for action.

Annex 1. Questions for Discussants

Youth & Gender dimensions of the changing Nature of Armed Conflict

1. How do you see the nature of armed conflict changing?
 - a. Is armed conflict changing? If so, how?
 - b. What conflicts in particular do you see as representative of new forms of armed conflict?
 - c. How have these changes affected men and women and girls and boys differently (in the conflicts you have named)?
 - d. What are the most compelling needs of women, girls and boys in these conflicts?
 - e. What have been the greatest failures in responding to the needs of women, girls and boys in these conflicts?
 - f. Are there any opportunities for changing the way that policy makers and civil society actors respond to conflict that arise out of these shifts in the nature of conflict itself?
2. What does the changing nature of armed conflict imply for the security, protection and empowerment of women and children/youth?
 - a. Does 'security' always trump attention to the different needs of women, men, girls and boys? Should it? Why/why not?
3. What are the implications of the changing nature of armed conflict for local response strategies and local hierarchies of power?
 - a. Given that armed conflicts often force a shift in traditional roles and hierarchies (female or child-headed households, for example), does this represent an opening for changes in relations of power?
4. How does conflict affect the relationship of women, men, boys and girls to the state differently? How important is that relationship to creating more equal relations of power and assuring that needs are addressed adequately and appropriately?
5. How may masculinity(ies) be constructed differently as a result of the changing nature of armed conflict, and what are the implications for the making of both boys and girls, and their relationship to one another?
6. What can be done to acknowledge and eliminate sexual violence as a weapon and strategy of war?
7. What other critical areas or questions should be explored?