

Gender and Conflict Analysis

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Overview

In recent years a number of UN organizations have developed conflict assessment and analysis frameworks to enhance their operations in conflict sensitive areas. However, few conflict monitoring and assessment frameworks to date consider gender relations and gender inequality as triggers or dynamics of conflict. Effective conflict prevention and resolution requires analysis of the causes, triggers, dynamics and patterns of conflict as well as factors and social dynamics that strengthen community's resilience to conflict. Early analysis and on-going monitoring is essential for anticipating conflict, and for transforming conflict dynamics so that social groups committed to non-violent conflict resolution can be supported. UNIFEM, in the course of supporting the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, has demonstrated that bringing a gender lens to conflict analysis, monitoring, and transformative responses can make a significant contribution to conflict prevention. This briefing note outlines basic elements of gender-sensitive conflict analysis. It shares findings from three pilot projects on gender-sensitive conflict monitoring conducted by UNIFEM in 2004 – 2005: in the Ferghana Valley, in Colombia, and in the Solomon Islands.

Gender and Conflict Analysis

As a starting point this briefing paper uses the UNDP conflict development analysis framework¹, which shares with other conflict analysis models², three major elements:

- Context analysis (actors, causes and capabilities)
- Understanding the dynamics of conflicts as they unfold (scenario-building to assess trends)
- Making strategic choices about remedies and responses (with a stress on institutionalizing non-violent means of resolving future conflicts).

The key to bringing a gender perspective to this is to begin with a context-specific analysis of gender relations and to ask how gender relations shape the ways in which women engage in, are affected by, and seek to resolve conflict.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Gender relations intersect with the many other lines of social cleavage such as class, race, ethnicity, age, geographical location, etc, to determine the major actors in a conflict, and the relative capabilities of different actors to intensify or resolve conflict.

ACTORS

The tendency to see women primarily as *victims* of violence – particularly sexual violence – has obscured the many other roles they play in provoking and pursuing conflict or building peace. Women may be combatants or they may provide services to combatants. They certainly number significantly among those afflicted by physical harm and loss of property. Gender relations shape the specific form this harm takes: women are far more likely than men, for instance, to be subject to sexual violence. When engaging major actors in a conflict in negotiation and resolution efforts, women must be involved because their different experiences give them different perspectives on the social and economic ills to be addressed in any peace agreement and in post-conflict governance arrangements.

CAUSES

It is common to distinguish between three types of cause of conflict: the root *structural factors* (systematic political exclusion, demographic shifts, economic inequalities, economic decline, and ecological degradation), the catalysts or *triggers* (assassinations, military coups, election fraud, corruption scandals, human rights violations), and the *manifestations* (surface explanations, means by which conflict is pursued).

- Gender relations, however profoundly unequal and unjust, are *rarely the root cause* of violent social conflict. (See below)
- Gender-based injustices against women or men, on the other hand, can sometimes be a *catalyst for conflict*. For instance, systematic abuse of women by men of a rival class, race or ethnic group can trigger violent defensive reactions.
- Gender-based injustices figure as one of the significant *manifestations* of conflict. The systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a means of prosecuting war has been observed in many conflicts and appears to be on the increase, notably in genocidal conflicts in the Balkans, in Rwanda and Burundi, and in Darfur, Sudan.

¹ Conflict-Related Development Analysis, United Nations Development Programme, October 2003.

² Strategic Conflict Assessment, UK Department for International Development.

It is essential not to confuse manifestations or triggers of conflict with actual causes. In Afghanistan, for instance, Taliban treatment of women attracted international condemnation, though it was not the cause of the eventual international intervention. In the post-Taliban period, improving women's status has been a goal zealously pursued by a range of international actors. This is an essential and worthy project, but it should not be assumed that this will address the root causes of conflict in the country.

Gender Dimensions of Structural Causes of Conflict

Almost all of the commonly listed structural causes of conflict have a gender dimension that should be monitored. The following is a list of most noted root causes:

- History of armed conflict (legacies of previous wars in children of rape, widowed women, orphans)
- Governance and political instability (women's exclusion from public decision-making, corruption as it affects women differently from men)
- Militarization (spending on armies reduces resources for social services)
- Population heterogeneity (communal/separatist mobilization, gender expression of ethnic difference)
- Demographic stress (unemployed young men, infant mortality)
- Economic performance (informalisation is associated with more women in badly paid jobs and in the informal sector)
- Human development (high maternal mortality rate, women's unmet expectations about education and health)
- Environmental stress (women's access to water and arable land)
- Cultural influences (cultural practices restricting women and valuing hyper-masculinity in men)
- International linkages (trafficking in women, few links to international arena) mean fewer chances of CEDAW implementation, or else women's rights seem alien).

DYNAMICS

Analyses of conflict dynamics track the changing influence of different actors and the factors that strengthen the hands of mediators and change agents. UNIFEM stresses the transformative role many women play in urging an end to conflict, in mobilizing social movements for peace, and in building social reconciliation after conflicts. Another significant dynamic of conflict is the way it can transform gender relations. Women may acquire unaccustomed social and political leadership roles when they are left in charge of communities when men leave to fight. Alternatively women combatants may experience an unaccustomed degree of social equality in various military groups. This has been a characteristic of long-entrenched conflicts such as the Vietnam war, the conflict in Ethiopia/Eritrea, or peasant insurgencies in South Asia, and is

reflected in combatants' egalitarian marriage arrangements or leadership roles. After a conflict there is an understandable desire to return to normal life, but this can mean a reversion to previously unequal gender relations. In many contexts, women's rights advocates have resisted this and have sought to institutionalize the social and political gains made in wartime.

STRATEGIC RESPONSES

The urgent often drives out the important in peace negotiations and in decisions about post-conflict governance and development priorities. The need to find means of ending the violence can often mean placating belligerent parties with important concessions like land and natural resource exploitation rights, or governance systems that reserve representative positions for minority voices, or that give autonomy to aggrieved regions. These responses can sometimes undermine women's rights or erode gains made in gender relations. This can happen when certain groups are empowered to expand their customary legal systems, or to revive traditional local-level clan or kin-based governing systems, as a means of recognizing their cultural autonomy. Strategic responses aimed at remedying long-standing grievances over economic or cultural inequalities can also overlook women's immediate needs for justice, security and economic support after conflict. In consequence, crimes of sexual violence can go unpunished, or women's poverty can worsen when they are left out of land reform. Strategic responses, therefore, should aim to respond to women's practical, immediate needs, and at the same time, challenge the gender-based inequalities that prevent women from taking public decision-making roles that would enable them to contribute to long-term conflict prevention.

Gender and Conflict Monitoring

THE ESSENTIALS

Conflict monitoring systems involve data-gathering and analysis to study and predict conflict. There is a growing interest in linking macro-level structural data to information generated at a community level through participatory means. Gender-sensitive conflict monitoring systems use:

- information **about** women and men, and gender relations
 - information **from** women and men
- to understand conflict dynamics, to identify actors and processes that would prevent conflict, and to build peace in a gender-sensitive way.

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

- The focus on information **about** women, men, and gender relations implies an understanding that tensions in gender

relations (gender-based violence, rapid changes in marital relations in ways that harm women's sexual or property rights, or radicalization of unemployed men) can add to our understanding about the structural causes of conflict, the triggers of conflict, or the manifestations of a past or on-going conflict. This information also highlights the varying capabilities of women and men to engage in conflict prevention.

- The focus on generating information **from** women and men separately implies an understanding that women, because of their structurally different position from men even within the same race, class or ethnic group, perceive social, economic, environmental, and political changes somewhat differently from men, and react differently to certain social phenomena. They might, for instance, react with greater alarm at an increase in domestic violence, and understand this to be related to a sudden hike in the availability of small arms. Men, likewise, may have awareness about conflict-provoking social and political processes in arenas not accessible to women – for instance in all-male traditional governing tribunals.

METHOD

Space constraints forbid a detailed review of the methodology employed in each UNIFEM conflict-monitoring pilot, so just the Solomon Islands approach is reviewed here. The 2005 pilot project in the Solomon Islands used three different surveys to generate data on 46 indicators that had been identified in participatory and consultative processes. The survey instruments were:

- *Self-Monitoring Templates* were completed by the 20 male and female project participants who were trained in monitoring peace and conflict indicators at the community level;
- *Community Surveys* were carried out among 200 respondents in the five communities where the project operated;
- *National Surveys* were conducted among 200 'informed specialists' (NGO staff, religious authorities, government personnel, and international agency staff).
- Additional forms of non-indicator-based data included sex-segregated focus group discussions at the community level; a structural data set compiled with national statistics, and a daily media scan of the local newspaper.

To emphasize the conflict prevention aspect of the work, a set of "Response Options" for each of the 46 indicators was developed simultaneously with the data gathering process. Participants reviewed a matrix showing each indicator and its color-coded "risk level" as indicated by the surveys. Participants then contributed ideas for policy and practice responses at the community level – initiatives that communities themselves could undertake – as well as proposals for the

national level, including policies for government, national NGOs, churches and donors.

GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED INDICATORS OF CONFLICT

Gender differences emerged in the divergent 'risk level' assigned by women and men to the same types of indicators. The box below highlights some of the most important indicators to which women and men assigned differential weights:

Factors associated with conflict given more weight

BY MEN

- **Male youth unemployment:** Destabilizing factor during the tensions as unemployed male youths used compensation demands as a means of gaining cash incomes. Increased criminal activity is still associated with young male unemployed school drop-outs.
- **Incidence of crime:** Especially linked to male youth unemployment. Crime is seen to be on the increase in Honiara, and as becoming more violent.
- **Trust between ethnic groups:** Linked to prevalent negative stereotypes about different ethnic groups, and to strong in-group identification, especially among men. This played a significant role in fueling violent conflict in the past.

BY WOMEN

- **Avoidance of markets / gardens due to fear:** It is generally women who walk to remote gardens, or take produce to markets. During the actual tension and violence in 1998 – 2003 women were too afraid to carry out this work, which in turn reduced food security and cash income.
- **Fear of reprisal from prisoners:** An issue highlighted by women, with evidence that women are being threatened and subjected to retribution from men released from prison over crimes related to the 1998 - 2003 conflict.
- **Informal negative discourse (gossip):** Significant prior to and during the tensions. A gendered issue, as women admitted to gossip during the tensions that they felt may have fuelled conflicts.
- **Marriage breakups:** Incidence of marriage break-ups rose significantly during the tensions, and is associated with alcohol abuse and with the increasing incidence of second wives or mistresses. This is perceived as a high risk indicator by women, but not by men.

Gender-based Violence: A Key Indicator

GBV is identified decisively by women as a key indicator of conflict in all three of the UNIFEM pilot studies. Heightened levels of GBV are seen both as a sign of a breakdown of social controls, and are also recognized as one of the legacies of violent conflict. Obtaining comparable GBV data is extremely difficult for four main reasons:

- **Lack of an international agreed framework** - Conceptually, the definition of GBV varies greatly within countries, from very narrow definitions including only physical and sexual violence, to broader frameworks that consider emotional and economic violence. Currently, the WHO framework is the most used.
- **Individual understandings of GBV vary greatly** - depending on traditions, levels of education, economic background, ethnicity, etc. This could be reduced by educating participant interviewees.
- **GBV information is particularly sensitive** – Collecting information on this issue requires a high level of trust from women victims, who tend to feel ashamed, guilty and sometimes afraid of communicating. Special methodologies and provision of coping mechanisms are required to reduce this problem, but the result will tend to be biased as long as GBV continues to be stigmatized.
- **Collecting data on GBV is expensive** – This is a direct result of the special requirements, including culturally specific design of instruments and survey methodologies, highly trained interviewers, among others.

These difficulties should not prevent efforts to improve data collection on GBV. Moreover, measuring people's perceptions of increases in GBV, while it will not yield a comparable measure of the magnitude of the problem, can serve as an important indicator of changes in perceived generalized violence, and quite possibly an indicator of actual increase of violence that is not yet visible.

The gender-specific indicators of conflict identified in the Solomon Islands are highly specific to context and culture. This is precisely what makes them valuable as a sensitive conflict-monitoring tool. Similarly, in the Ferghana Valley 2005 pilot, indicators derived from focus group work were highly sensitive to the evolving manifestations of conflict in the three-country region, and to its root causes. Women and men, for instance, identified the growing influence of religious organizations on unemployed male youth as a worrying sign. They also identified out-migration as an indicator of the deepening economic crisis of the region, as well as lack of access to water for cultivation. In the 2004-5 pilot in Colombia with emphasis in the two Departments of Cauca and Bolivar, indicators were derived to focus specifically on the two categories of concern raised by women themselves: domestic violence, and the situation of women IDPs.

For more information on these pilot projects and other UNIFEM Peace and Security work, please visit www.womewarpeace.org

Building women's capacities for conflict prevention

Community-based participatory conflict-monitoring systems such as those piloted by UNIFEM serve an important function beyond the collection and analysis of data. They become, in effect, a social resource for the prevention of conflict. In the Solomon Islands and Colombia, the capacity of women's organizations working for peace has been built, not just through developing skills in data gathering and analysis, but through establishing communication channels with public authorities. In Colombia, for instance, the women's organizations in Cauca and Bolivar were able to input their concerns about gender-based violence to the government's Early Warning System. Connections between women's organizations and national security systems, decision-makers, and media are not always possible, of course, particularly where the citizen-state relationship is tense. In such contexts, conflict monitoring must proceed with caution, and there may be greater benefits in building knowledge-sharing systems with international rather than with national institutions.

Building system capacity for gender- sensitive conflict monitoring

A positive engagement by national authorities is essential for the effectiveness of gender-sensitive conflict monitoring for several reasons. First, without a positive engagement from the national authorities, conflict monitoring may expose participants to unwarranted danger. Second, those who engage in any participatory exercise must be able to see that their energies are not wasted and result in changed knowledge and actions by policy-makers. Evidence of the applicability of the data is its use by other international organizations to conduct conflict assessments and indeed to warn about the heightening tensions that may erupt. In Colombia, the project's results were presented to the OAS Conflict Prevention office and were used to support efforts to mainstream gendered conflict analysis to OCHA, OHCHR, and other UN agencies active in the country. In the Solomon Islands, the National Peace Council was strongly committed to its partnership role in the project, and on this basis promoted a gendered conflict prevention project, despite relatively little previous gender work. Some national and international organizations utilised the data and response options to inform strategic planning processes (Save the Children, Department of National Unity Reconciliation and Peace, Oxfam). Indeed, the head of the peacekeeping mission saw the pilot work as "the only diagnostic tool available".