Gender and
Conflict Analysis

OVERVIEW

In recent years a number of United Nations 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 require analysis of the causes, triggers, dynamics and patterns of conflict, as well as the factors and social dynamics that strengthen community's resilience to conflict. Early analysis and ongoing monitoring are essential for anticipating conflict and for transforming conflict dynamics so that social groups committed to non-violent conflict resolution can be supported. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM now part of UNWOMEN), in the course of supporting the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) 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 (now part of UN Women) in the Ferghana Valley, Colombia and the Solomon Islands.

Gender and conflict analysis

As a starting point, this briefing paper uses the conflict development analysis framework of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP),[1] which shares with other conflict analysis models[2] three major elements:

» Analyzing context (actors, causes and capabilities);

» Understanding the dynamics of conflicts as they unfold (scenario-building to assess trends); and

» Making strategic choices about remedies and responses (with a stress on institutionalizing non-violent means of resolving future conflicts).

An elderly woman coming out of a destroyed building in Vukovar. 04 September 1992, Vukovar, Croatia. Credit: UN Photo/John Isaac

The key to incorporating a gender perspective to this framework 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 many other lines of social cleavage, such as class, race, ethnicity, age and geographical location, to determine the major actors in a conflict and the relative capabilities of different actors to intensify or resolve conflict.

Actors
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. Yet, the tendency to see women primarily as *victims* of violence—particularly sexual violence—has obscured the many other roles women play in provoking and pursuing conflict or building peace.

When engaging major actors in a conflict in negotiation and resolution efforts, it is essential to involve women because their different experiences give them different perspectives on the social and economic ills to be addressed in any peace accord 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, notably in the genocidal conflicts in the Balkans; in Rwanda and Burundi; in Darfur, Sudan; and in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

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.

Dynamics

Analyses of conflict dynamics track the changing influence of different actors and the factors that strengthen the hands of mediators and change agents. UNWOMEN 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, female 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 between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and 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 need to end 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 give autonomy to aggrieved regions. These responses can sometimes undermine women's rights or erode gains made in gender relations, for instance when certain groups are empowered to expand their

The 1992 conflict between the Ingush and Osset ethnic groups led to ethnic cleansing and widespread destruction of housing. This woman sits in her severely damaged, bullet-riddle home. 01 January 1997, North Ossetia, Russian Federation *Credit: UN Photo/T Bolstad*

customary legal systems, or to revive traditional local-level clan or kin-based governing systems, as a means of recognizing their cultural autonomy. 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, and

» information *from* women and men

to understand conflict dynamics, identify actors and processes that would prevent conflict, and 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) [GBV], 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 ongoing 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 rise 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.

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 along with some of the corresponding gender issues:

» History of armed conflict: legacies of previous wars, e.g., 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 reducing resources for social services;

» Population heterogeneity: communal/separatist mobilization, gender expression of ethnic difference;

» Demographic stress: unemployed young men, infant mortality;

» Economic performance: unformalization 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 implementation of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), or else women's rights seem culturally alien.

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Method

Space constraints did not allow a detailed review of the methodology employed in each of the former UNIFEM (now part of UNWOMEN) 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 surveys employed a number of instruments:

- » *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' (staff of non-governmental organizations [NGOs], 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 structured 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, i.e., 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:

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 emmigration as an indicator of the deepening economic crisis of the region, as well as lack of access to water for cultivation. In the 2004–2005 pilot in Colombia, which was centred on 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 internally displaced women.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A KEY INDICATOR

GBV was identified decisively by women as a key indicator of conflict in all three of the former UNIFEM (now part of UNWOMEN) pilot studies. Heightened levels of GBV are both interpreted to signify a breakdown of social controls and 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.

- » Individual understanding of GBV varies greatly: Factors that influence an individual's understanding of GBV include tradition, level of education, economic background, ethnicity, and so on. This could be addressed, however, by educating participant interviewees.

- » GBV information is particularly sensitive: Collecting information on this issue requires a high level of trust from women survivors, 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 and highly trained interviewers, among others.

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

Building women's capacities for conflict prevention

Community-based participatory conflict-monitoring systems such as those piloted by former UNIFEM (now part of UNWOMEN) 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 peace organizations has been built, not just through developing skills in data gathering and analysis, but by 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.

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, but that they result in changed knowledge and actions by policy-makers. In Colombia, the project's results were presented to the Organization of American States Conflict Prevention Office and were used to support efforts to mainstream gendered conflict analysis by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 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. Some national and international organizations used 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."

A United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) peacekeeper plays with a young child in Hera. 2/Mar/2000. Hera, East Timor. *Credit: UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe*

ENDNOTES:
1   *Conflict-Related Development Analysis, United Nations Development Programme, October 2003.*
2   *For instance, the Strategic Conflict Assessment model of the UK Department for International Development.*