

Think-piece on Gender, Peace and Security

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What should be the objectives of advocacy on gender, peace and security? i.e. what are we trying to change?

To enhance the participation of women to peace and security structures, patriarchal power relations and dynamics of exclusion along the gender line have to be analysed and structural causes of inequalities and discourses need to be transformed. Particularly the design of protection programs must be linked systematically to the different forms of exclusion, discrimination and violence at any time in order to foster participation on the long run.

Empowerment through advocacy provides organisations with capacities for action in order to contest patriarchal power structures and processes even if they are labelled as being “gender sensitive”. Therefore one of the objectives must be to enhance and broaden the possibilities to analyse and understand structural causes of gender injustice and exclusion along gender lines.

What strategies should we use to meet these objectives? i.e. how are we trying to change things?

It is important to carefully analyse the organisational logic of all stakeholders and to understand the intrinsic value of gender and other categories of distinction in the stakeholders’ institutional functioning, since this determines the way gender is implemented and reflected in their programs and politics. Therefore any gender specific analysis must reflect organisational limitations and confinements.

Case studies generate data for baselines and evidence as a frame for action. Such data must be used for the so far missing outcome indicators to monitor effects of peace building. Long-term observation of change should focus on the conditions of everyday life of women and men. This can only be monitored if the relevant institutional setting and the respective changes at all levels are part of the analysis.

Lobbying strategies on gender, peace and security should be more inclusive: instead of only involving institutionalized NGOs which receive regular funds for projects, local and less institutionalized organizations should be included into the discussions and consultations in order to back up advocacy with diversified views. Men’s perspectives and organisations must also be increasingly and systematically consulted when it comes to advocacy.

Advocacy for change implies the need for resources to guarantee a space for analysis and transformative action. Indeed, civil society should not only be given space for technical project implementation but also space for critical reflection, networking and discussing issues related to WPS, for example about exclusive decision making structures. This can be done in meeting platforms or working groups. This “space” can also be understood as free expression of opinion and free access to information about WPS.

What strategies does your organisation embrace in the advocacy on gender, peace and security?

KOFF has a mandate to monitor the implementation of the NAP for 1325 in a technical way. According to the commitment (NAP), civil society was consulted and shared critical statements which are partly reflected in the new NAP (goal 5). In workshops facilitated by KOFF the possibilities of using 1325 for NGOs is discussed as being very limited and not really useful. On the other hand they underline their experience and expertise from projects defending women's rights. The challenge for KOFF and the NGOs is to find a way to capitalize such experiences and share them more broadly without becoming too dependent on federal departments in charge of 1325. KOFF supports civil society (NGOs) in its task to critically observe governmental action. The NGOs are committed to making sure that politically sensitive aspects don't disappear from the agenda (politically and budget wise). KOFF organizes expert meetings and guarantees enough space for discussions, capacity building, and new knowledge for transformative action. Nevertheless the political commitment and the activities should be promoted as strongly as possible in order to enhance the impact of such processes!

Do you see UNSCR 1325 and following resolutions as useful tools and would you recommend continued advocacy for their implementation to national governments, international and regional organisations?

Civil Society sees UNSCR 1325 as an instrument used by governments, the NAP as an instrument to ensure its implementation and as a basis for further advocacy. It can also serve as frame of reference in order to get financing. This new opportunity allowed many NGOs to become more professionalized, while voluntary women's groups did not have enough flexibility and resources to apply for funding. Evidence of the last decade shows a widening gap between nonprofessional voluntary women's rights groups and institutionalized NGOs: the latter having greater networks, robust structures and therefore receiving significant funding for projects linked to the implementation of UNSCR 1325, whereas voluntary women's rights groups might have a more political agenda but often lack technical and administrative capacity. This might divide civil society and KOFF has to address the actors accordingly. UNSCR 1325 may not have the same importance for all actors, and the resources of the first group may be insufficient for the participation in the monitoring process. Are there other possibilities to involve them as important actors, for instance by contributing with case studies etc.? Civil Society should play an important role in translating 1325 monitoring results into political claims addressing the decision makers and representatives of power (accountability) instead of spending resources in the direct process of consultation (political action as a response to the results of the technical monitoring).

The framework UNSCR 1325 offers is useful in that it is one of the few we have at our disposal. It defines broad guidelines and can be used by governments as well as for advocacy by civil society. Yet, most goals and objectives are vaguely formulated so that the framework's significance really comes down to what different actors make of it (see answer to question 5). In other words, the effect UNSCR 1325 has depends on the way different actors interpret its content and allocate earmarked funds.

UNSCR 1325 has some value in contexts where countries have developed good NAPs (Norway, the Netherlands, Rwanda and the UK) and where civil society organisations closely monitor their implementation. However, contextualised implementation could still be improved as it is not only "about changing the players, but also about changing the game" (UN Women), which means changing power relations, institutional systems of rules and attitudes.

If you think UNSCR 1325 and following resolutions as limited / misleading, what alternatives do you see?

The question is not so much about alternatives, but about who uses UNSCR 1325 and what for. We have to rethink the conditions under which a critical peace policy where gender equality is a core value can be stimulated and pushed forward. These conditions would be the following: a basic, common understanding of the role, relevance and importance of gender in peacebuilding, room for discussion on gender issues during peace negotiations, political will to challenge existing underlying power structures beyond those that actually triggered the conflict, and the capacities to modify these power structures.

Civil Society needs space for debate, exchange, action and evaluation using the available instruments in a smart way and by challenging sometimes the 1325 normative framework when relating to evidence. When it comes to challenging the frameworks themselves, NGOs might, through their monitoring, point out deficiencies and suggest revision (formulation of goals and objectives, choice of indicators etc.). Based on the diversity of civil society, different viewpoints and experience might help identify strategic entry points to improve the process of implementation as well. Recommendations can then be fed back into decision making structures and might be, ideally, formulated as political claims. Networks are an important method to pool the diversity of NGOs and women's rights groups based on their different instruments and resources, different emphasis and thematic expertise, and different experiences. Network space gives the opportunity for exchange and the possibility to articulate political claims. KOFF and other networks/platforms such as WILPF, WIDE+ or AWID give this space, yet at the same time it should also provide resources for civil society initiatives such as collective independent studies and political action

How do we ensure that issues related to women's empowerment and equal rights of women do not get diluted in the gender, peace and security debate?

We would further argue that the focus on "gender" as a relational concept helps to understand the dynamics of discrimination based on the category of gender, it helps to analyze under which conditions and with what kind of intention gender difference becomes relevant or not and when causes of conflict are analyzed, described and linked to certain strategies of resolution and peace building policies. To advancing women's rights and participation we need a sound understanding of how decision makers relate to gender roles, how gender specific ascriptions are used to legitimize certain decision and how they finally impact on post conflict state building processes. Indeed the different concepts of gender, gender equality and women's rights need to be explained and clarified even among women's organizations; this should happen in an open and democratic space for participation in order to generate different concepts for gender justice absorbing a diversity of situations and positions. In transformation work the need to include as much individuals and groups, that is why the use of other identity markers such as age, social class makes sense.

For a more detailed explanation on KOFF's approach to gender, peace and security, please see visit the following webpage:

<http://koff.swisspeace.ch/what-we-work-on/gender-peacebuilding/>