

Broadening the women, peace and security agenda: Conciliation Resources' view on the future of advocacy on gender, peace and security

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What should be the objectives of advocacy on gender, peace and security?

The main objective of advocacy on gender, peace and security (GPS) should be to further understanding about the links between gender, peace and security.

While there is increased attention for gender in peace and security institutions, particularly since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, this interest does not always originate from a genuine belief in the value of gender-sensitising peace and security efforts. Rather, paying attention to gender is often simply seen as the right thing to do, something to please superiors and impress colleagues. Most struggle to make their engagement on gender truly meaningful, resulting in an approach that does little more than 'add women and stir'.

Most approaches to women, peace and security (WPS) treat gender and women as synonymous. Men are either excluded from the equation, treated as default category, as if unaffected by gender roles, identities and institutions. When men are brought into the picture, it tends to be as mere perpetrators of violence against women.

Current approaches also ignore the variations and hierarchies within and across women and men, produced by the interaction of gender with other power structures such as age, class, race, and sexuality.

Gender is ultimately about power, and gender analysis can help us better understand power relations.

GPS advocacy should ensure that there is a better understanding of the value of integrating gender into peace and security efforts and institutions. It should shed light on the links between gender and violence. It should also clarify how gender (and other) power hierarchies are (re)produced through, inter alia, peace processes, and what can be done to counter this.

What strategies should we use to meet these objectives?

We could do more evidence-based advocacy. Often, GPS advocacy takes place along the lines of 'there's a commitment to be gender-sensitive' or 'women's participation is a human right'. While these are valid claims, and it is important to create awareness of existing (legal) framework and to ask for their implementation, they do not really help to further understanding of why it is important to pay attention to gender from a peace and security perspective. To ensure real buy-in to our agenda, we need to connect to available research on the links between gender, peace and security. (NB/ By this we do not mean a mere focus on the links between gender equality and peace/conflict, but greater attention for research on the links between gender and violence, or on the value of inclusive peace processes).

Secondly, it might be helpful for us to spend more time developing concrete suggestions and tools to enable a move from rhetoric to practice on gender, peace and security. As explained, there is generally buy in to 'do something' with gender but there is little understanding of the why and the how.

We think it is important to go beyond a focus on UNSCR 1325-related efforts. While it certainly valuable to engage in the design, monitoring and evaluation of national action plans (NAPs) on women, peace and security, it is equally

if not more important to ensure that attention is paid to GPS beyond the NAP, and that the NAP is properly linked to other relevant efforts and frameworks.

We should not just focus our advocacy efforts at convincing decision-makers, but also engage with others trying to influence the GPS debate, such as fellow civil society representatives, to make sure our messages are supported – and at a minimum not criticised.

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

We link our thinking to existing research, and also seek to document practice. For example, we recently documented the experiences of women peacebuilders in our Accord publication series.

Furthermore, we develop suggestions and tools that can help others move from rhetoric to practice on gender, peace and security. We co-authored with Saferworld a paper on gender, peace and security in the post-2015 agenda. We are also developing a resource pack on gender-sensitive conflict analysis.

While we participate in efforts to further implementation of UNSCR 1325, particularly in the UK and at EU-level, we also reach out to other peace and security initiatives, or other relevant discussions (e.g. post-2015).

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?

We see the WPS framework as an incredibly important and useful tool. It has most certainly helped to put gender on peace and security agendas. As a result of UNSCR 1325, there is much greater attention for and discussion on women's participation in peace and security initiatives. There is also greater attention for women's experiences, and greater recognition of the potentially different needs of men and women in conflict-affected areas. If well developed, NAPs can help ensure that WPS commitments are transformed from being nice words on paper to actual changes on the ground. We would most certainly recommend continued advocacy for their implementation.

However, we do think UNSCR 1325 has become a victim of its own success. Implementation of the resolution (and related commitments) has become siloed, and seen as the task of those with 1325 in their portfolio.

UNSCR 1325 is also often seen as an absolute truth in itself, rather than as a political document developed through compromise. The WPS framework has been successful in advocating for increased women's participation, but has not triggered a more substantial shift in how we approach peace and security. It only mentions gender analysis in the sidelines, rather than calling for this to be the basis of any intervention. It asks for women's participation but does not link this to the realities of existing gender relations.

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

The approach we suggest to be taken is two-fold. On the one hand, we would argue for the need to engage with the 1325 agenda, to ensure further implementation, but also to help a broader approach to gender to be integrated into the existing WPS framework. On the other hand, we suggest that we should not limit ourselves to 1325. We should reach out and be heard in other debates on peace and security too, particularly those that are likely to change the paradigm in which we operate. We should not limit ourselves to calls for implementation of the resolution, but also explain the value of gender analysis and how to integrate such analysis in approaches to peace and security.

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?

It is very important that the two are not seen as mutually exclusive. If we are serious about women's empowerment and the equal rights of women then we urgently need to start talking gender, and we need to go beyond what we call the 'add women and stir' approach. We do not think you can secure change by simply adding women to the mix; it is important that we also acknowledge and discuss the rules of the game.

We fully understand the concern that a shift to gender might result in less funding for women's organisations. Working on a broader GPS agenda should not mean that we forget where we came from, or that such a shift will mean working predominantly with men. The point is to bring in more attention for gender analysis, and greater engagement with underlying gender relations and other power dynamics. We would argue that this would actually mean more attention and support for those working outside the official sphere, such as women's organisations.

It is not helpful to present ourselves as opposed or juxtaposed to the women's rights movement. In fact, most peacebuilding organisations would embrace a vision of peace that values social justice, inclusion, and equality. However, it is important to note that most peacebuilding organisations work on the basis of local realities. As a result, we would not necessarily emphasise international commitments to human rights, but rather focus on the value of context-specific gender analysis to enable better peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Our advocacy should reflect this better.

Conciliation Resources' suggestions for collective action on gender, peace and security targeting EU institutions:

- Promote better understanding of the links between gender and conflict, and the benefits of conflict analysis for effective peacebuilding response.
- Promote the relevance of the gender, peace and security agenda in discussions on UNSCR 1325 and the EU's Comprehensive Approach.
- Continue to support efforts to recognise the importance of civil society, including women's groups, in building inclusive and sustainable peace processes.
- Compile and share evidence of the effectiveness of peace processes which include the voices of women and marginalised groups (for example, in order to counter or convince those who say there is not enough evidence that having women at the table makes a difference to effectiveness)
- Conduct institutional analyses that not only assess gender balance in top positions but also the decision-making structures and organisational cultures that determine top-level appointments.

For a more detailed explanation on Conciliation Resources' approach to gender, peace and security, please see our two-pager on gender and peacebuilding on the following webpage:

<http://www.c-r.org/theme-page/gender>