

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?

Although it was originally meant to be used as a lens for analysing and transforming unequal power relations, gender has unfortunately with time often come to be seen in peacebuilding programming and policy as something that is merely a technical add-on. The view of gender being a ‘ticking the box exercise’ has meant that a lot of emphasis had been placed on quantitative aspects, such as the number of women involved or participating in certain sectors or events. Such programming has only brought about limited success, as little attention has been paid to the quality of participation, structural and other barriers to achieving equality, the role of other social markers such as age and class, or to meaningfully engaging with men *as men*.

We would therefore see integrating gender seriously into work on peace and security as the main objective, i.e. using it as a starting point for analysing power imbalances, identities, and societal dynamics that are driving forces of insecurity and conflict.

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

To successfully advocate on gender, peace and security means to present the broad array of intertwined power relations on the ground that influence gender norms and relations, which leads to having a comprehensive picture of social realities and thus using and developing the right tools and mechanisms for advocacy. This requires

- Thorough research which takes into account the roles played by local masculinities and femininities in conflict and peacebuilding,
- Increasing tolerance for the complexity of and time needed for programming on gender, peace and security,
- Lobbying international institutions, donor governments, civil society and media together with local partners based on a grounded understanding of the issues.

This requires a re-thinking of approaches, away from attempting quick fixes on the cheap with one size fits all approaches to devoting more time, patience and resources to understanding the contexts and issues where we are working. This does not mean endless deliberations or increased inefficiency, but that already by taking 1,5 months for scoping rather than 1,5 days we will have a better understanding of what is/is not possible, what the underlying issues are and what entry points we can or cannot use.

Importantly, broadening the scope from women, peace and security to gender, peace and security should not be seen as a zero sum game: taking a more holistic approach to gender issues does not mean dropping issues of women’s empowerment, but rather working on these more effectively.

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

In its gender in peacebuilding work, Alert seeks to collaborate closely with local partner organisations who have nuanced understandings of the immediate context and the gendered power relations on the ground. In both Somalia and Pakistan, for example, Alert has been collaborating with local partners to

tackling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), working through local community members, and crucially involving men and women in the work. In Burundi and DRC, we have worked with local organisations and communities, again involving men and women, to increase gender equality through increased women's participation in decision-making processes and women's economic empowerment. In Lebanon, we are working on 'gendering' security sector reform in a way to take into account the needs and specific vulnerabilities of women, men, and sexual and gender minorities.

Alert advocates for these broader and deeper approaches to gender at national and international levels, together with a broad coalition of partners, both from the global south and north. We aim to base our advocacy work on the insights we gain from our work and research in the field, drawing more general conclusions where possible and also highlighting context-related specificities.

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?

UNSCR 1325 and the subsequent sister resolutions have been extremely important in terms of raising the need for gendered approaches to peacebuilding and provide useful tools. After UNSCR 1820, a trend however emerged of ever-narrower and increasingly technical resolutions focusing mainly on VAWG in conflict alone, disregarding other issues of gender, peace and security. Fortunately, this narrowing of the agenda seems to have recently been reversed. Alert supports and advocates for the continued and improved implementation of the resolutions by civil society organisations, national governments, international and regional organisations.

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

Due to the often tokenistic and gender-blind ways in which women, peace and security goals have been approached, the impact to date has been limited. Their implementation has been hampered by a tendency to frame them as 'technical' and apolitical issues. Successful implementation will require acknowledgment of their intrinsically political nature. It will also require fully acknowledging women's, men's agency, and sexual and gender minorities' needs and vulnerabilities in conflict and peace, rather than merely sticking to outdated stereotypes. Approaches which do not properly take into account gender role expectations can result in backlash or at times violent resistance, which can only be avoided by better understandings of these norms and working with the whole of the community to change them.

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?

Ensuring that women's empowerment and gender equality remain 'on the table' while broadening and deepening the understanding of gender, peace and security requires continuous stressing of the intertwined nature of gender relations: that increased women's empowerment requires the buy-in of men *and* women, that men and women create the gender norm expectations that increase or decrease their own and each others' societal capacities for violence and peace, and that the different needs, potentials and vulnerabilities of different men, women, girls, boys, trans- and intersex people need to be understood. A listing of these various groups can (and often has) easily become a stock phrase that is inserted into documents without further engagement with what this means in practice. In order to avoid this, advocacy would ideally be based on practical examples from 'real-life' peacebuilding processes which make the issues understandable to decision-makers.

For a more detailed explanation on International Alert's approach to gender, peace and security, please see visit the following webpage: <http://www.international-alert.org/gender>