

# Civil Society Dialogue Network

## Meeting Report

### Policy Meeting Masculinity and Violence: How Do Gender Identities Relate to Violent Conflict?

Brussels, 22 January 2015

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#### Introduction

This document is a non-exhaustive report of the discussions that took place in the framework of a Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) expert policy meeting in Brussels on 22 January 2015. The CSDN is a mechanism for dialogue between civil society and EU policy-makers on issues related to peace and conflict. It is co-financed by the European Union (Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace), and managed by the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), a civil society network, in co-operation with the European Commission (EC) and the European External Action Service (EEAS). The second phase of the CSDN will last from 2014 to 2016. For more information, please visit the [EPLO website](#).

While it is largely acknowledged that conflict impacts women, girls, men and boys differently, the extent to which gender dynamics and expectations of masculinity and femininity can drive and affect conflict dynamics remains under-explored. Gender norms create expectations about how men and women should conform to masculine and feminine ideals in a way that can contribute to fuelling conflict. In particular, socially constructed gender norms often associate masculinity with power, domination and violence in a way that is not associated with femininity. A growing body of evidence shows that these notions of masculinity play a role in driving conflict by:

- rendering the use of violence acceptable
- encouraging men to turn to violent behaviours to resolve conflicts
- making them more susceptible to forced recruitment by armed groups
- putting pressure on them to conform to acceptable masculine ideals

As the EU and other organisations focus their efforts on breaking cycles of violence and preventing violent conflicts around the world, they can play a key role in recognizing, exploring and tackling the link between gender identities and violence, including in the framework of their support for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and following resolutions.

The meeting focused on the way in which gender identities relate to violent conflicts and how tackling these issues can contribute to peacebuilding. It brought together over 40 experts from civil society, academia, the EU and its Member States. During the first session peacebuilding and academic experts presented the evidence available linking masculinities / femininities with conflict dynamics. The second session focused on the concrete implications of masculinities and violence for peacebuilding work.

Irina Bratosin D'Almeida, Research Associate at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, compiled the report summarizing the discussion and the key recommendations made by participants during the meeting.

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## Session I: Gender identities and violent conflict

### 1. Gender norms and social systems can contribute to violence

Research and analysis on how violent conflict affects differently men and women, boys and girls is abundant. The academic scholarship on this topic showcased already the existence of a **strong correlation between gender inequality and violent conflict**. However the extent to which gender identities can directly fuel or contribute to fuelling conflicts is less researched and understood. A body of academic research suggests that the **system of beliefs and gender norms underpinning inequality** can be drivers of conflict. In many cultures socially constructed notions of masculinity are associated with power, violence and control while femininity tends to be associated with dependency, weakness and the need for protection. This does not mean that men are *naturally* violent and women are *naturally* peaceful but rather it suggests that gender norms create expectations about how men and women should conform to masculine and feminine ideals in a way that can contribute to conflict and insecurity.

Feminist academics have often pointed at patriarchy and militarism as social systems that contribute to reinforcing socially constructed gender norms. **Patriarchy** is viewed as a social system that legitimizes domination of men over women while **militarism** is understood as a social system that legitimizes dominance of military over civilian populations and justifies the use of violence to resolve conflicts. Both patriarchy and militarism rely on particular notions of masculinity and manhood that encourage men to wield power, to take up arms and to defend those in need of protection. They also divide the population in two groups, the protectors on the one side (with license to use violence) and those in need of protection on the other side.

Similar concepts are used by nationalist groups and **ethno-nationalist ideologies** to draw men into serving the nation; *'the call to arms is very much the call to masculinity'* noted one participant. When defending the nation you are also defending particular ideals of masculinity. *"Violence can literally make the man"* as one participant noted. For example, in Kosovo in the 1980s and 1990s political and military leaders deliberately used notions of masculinity to build support for war and to recruit men into the military. A narrative whereby men were portrayed as heroic freedom fighters protecting "their women" was used to attract recruits. These narratives are used to legitimize the attainment of masculinity through violence.

Another example of how gender norms can drive conflict comes from research undertaken in South Sudan which showcases the **strong link between cattle raiding, masculinity, violence and marriage**. In pastoral communities cattle raiding is often cause of violent conflict and revenge attacks between and within communities. Participation in cattle-raiding is closely linked to the bridal system and ultimately to manhood as men need to exchange cattle to get married and they are not seen as men until they get married. Cattle-raiding is perceived as a *rite de passage* for boys and young men who can only achieve manhood after participating in these raids and violence is seen as a symbol of masculinity, of virility which confers social status.

### 2. Violent masculinities and conflict

Men, women, girls and boys can all be both perpetrators and victims of violence. Yet there are often gendered patterns in who commits violence, who is targeted and why. Men make up the majority of combatants in conflicts as well as 95% of those convicted of homicide worldwide.<sup>1</sup> In most cultures violence is associated with men and boys in a way that it is not associated with women and girls.

While there are clear costs in becoming a combatant, **notions of violent masculinity can also be attractive for men** who find it difficult to access traditionally accepted masculine roles in challenging conflict environments. The concept of **thwarted masculinities** used to characterize

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<sup>1</sup> UNODC (2013), *Global study on homicide* (Vienna: UNODC), p 13; Peace Research Institute Oslo (2009), 'Armed conflict deaths disaggregated by gender'.

this phenomenon is often found in conflict situations when men find it difficult to be the economic or security provider for the family and they experience the feeling of loss of agency and loss of power. For example, research undertaken in Sudan and Uganda showed how conflict and poverty made it difficult for men to attain traditional manhood expectations leading some to join military or non-state armed groups as an option to regain that lost social status and the sense of masculinity. Men, in particular young men, experiencing political exclusion and social and economic marginalization are more easily drawn into the achievement of masculinity through violence and prone to recruitment into armed groups. Further research is needed to better understand how masculinities interact with social markers such as age, class, sexuality and other economic factors.

These notions of masculinity make men not only **more likely to perpetrate violence but also more vulnerable to violence**. For instance, in the UK 70% of the victims of murder are men. The belief that men are more prone to commit violent acts makes them targets, based on their gender, for voluntary or forced recruitment into the military and into armed groups. Recent examples from Syria, Mali or Nigeria speak directly to this point as men from certain communities have been rounded-up and executed on the basis of their sex as they were seen as potential combatants. Another example from Afghanistan showed how the simple fact of being a man of fighting age in war environments can constitute the greatest risk for a man's safety.

The **use of sexual violence against men** is also based on particular notions of masculinity in that it is used to feminize men. Humiliated masculinities matter in conflict when looked-up against the normative ideals of masculinity. To be dominated by another group is to be feminized, to be emasculated. Using sexual violence against men aims to feminize them and reduce their masculine identities, based on the individual's own sense of masculinity, but also on the way they are perceived within their communities. In addition, entrenched gender norms make it more difficult for men to report on gender-based violence and to seek help.

Forms of violence, oppression and humiliation can be perpetrated not just against individuals but against entire cultures and peoples. The **west colonial past** and the **global war on terror** were cited as examples of attempts to dominate, oppress (and humiliate) other cultures portrayed as inferior and not conforming to western values and ideals. These narratives were used to publicly justify the need to defend nations. Participants discussed in this framework the question of what could be effective alternative responses to current youth radicalisation and Islamic extremism, including in Western societies.

Finally **the role played by women in co-constructing masculinities** should not go unnoticed. In the cattle-raiding taking place in South Sudan in pastoral communities, women contribute to reinforcing violent notions of masculinity by encouraging men to participate in cattle-raiding and shaming those who do not take part in raids.

### 3. What happens to militarized masculinities in the aftermath of conflict?

One of the consequences of violence is that it enables men to acquire power in the public but also in the private sphere. Once the conflict ends **the surplus of violence, the trauma, the militarized masculinities do not just disappear**, they sweep into the private life. During and after the conflict the demarcation between public and private spheres become more elusive and what happens in the public sphere also affects the private one.

The use of domestic violence by former combatants on their return to civilian communities is thought to be related to the violent notions of masculinity they have acquired during conflict. For example in Colombia, Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs faced **difficulties in reintegrating former combatants into civilian communities** due to the militarized masculinities they had developed during their training and combat experiences.

In the case of Northern Ireland, as in many other conflicts, the **arena of violence was seen as normative for men**. Men fought in the conflict and therefore they had the right to participate in its resolution. When the conflict was over and men were demobilized and reintegrated into society, they were not viewed as men but purely as combatants. This meant that their right to be the gender that should have and wield power was never questioned in the conflict transformation phase.

For women instead, the arena of violence was never seen as normative in Northern Ireland. **Women were considered the back-bone of society** as they were trying to deal with the consequences of the 30-year conflict. They held badly paid community jobs to support the healing of the communities affected by conflict. When those jobs became well paid and allowed the job-holder to take important decisions men became interested in them. Despite women's active roles during the conflict they were marginalized during the peace process.

## Session II: Implications for peacebuilding work – opportunities and challenges

Over the past years the peacebuilding community focused primarily on recognizing the different impact conflict has on women and girls, combating sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and ensuring equal participation of women in post-conflict decision-making. The extent to which **gender dynamics and expectations of femininity and masculinity can drive conflict has gone largely unnoticed**. The slow pace with which this topic is addressed by peacebuilding actors is largely due to these issues not being tackled by UNSCR 1325, the key reference document for international actors and civil society. This year could provide a useful window of opportunity to bring these issues back into the agenda with the High-level Review and the Global Study on UNSCR 1325.

During the discussions peacebuilding practitioners mentioned several key dilemmas they face when working with gender, masculinity and violence issues, among which:

- 1) Who to engage with in the aftermath of conflict when men who have been involved in the fight are considered the only legitimate interlocutors
- 2) How to incentivize peace activism when men are often “rewarded” for being violent (given that they are invited to the peace table)
- 3) How to deal with barriers imposed by patriarchal societies, militarism and conservative religious leaders
- 4) The risk of replacing a negative masculinity with a positive one without dealing with the power dynamics

### 1. Opportunities and Tools

#### a) Gender analysis (including power analysis)

Gender analysis can have real implications for programme design and should be the starting point for any programming. **Gender analysis can help identifying who to involve and how** by providing information on who the actors more amenable to change are and what challenges different groups face. For example, the experience of a peacebuilding NGO working with men and masculinities in Burundi and Uganda showed that men find it difficult to report Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and to seek support for their trauma. This allowed the NGO to develop peer support programs and create safe spaces where survivors can find support. Gender relations are very dynamic and change throughout the conflict cycle and in the aftermath. Therefore, as for the context analysis, the gender analysis must also be regularly updated.

#### b) Integrating men and masculinities into National Action Plans and other policies

Including a focus on working with men and masculinities into policy frameworks can also contribute to better target interventions and funding allocated by governments and international organisations. In this sense the second Irish National Action Plan (NAP) of 2015 on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 can constitute an example of good practice. The NAP includes,

under Pillar 2 on Empowerment, Participation and Representation of Women in Decision Making, a focus on men and masculinities. The NAP also includes actions regarding awareness raising about Women, Peace and Security issues among young people, girls and boys.

#### **Men and masculinities – 2<sup>nd</sup> Irish National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325**

**Commitment:** *support engagement of men in advancing gender equality and other initiatives, which promote the principles of Women, Peace and Security.*

**Action:** *Support programmes that work with women and men on gender equality, in particular those which aim to reduce violence in communities and that promote awareness raising among men and boys of Gender Based Violence, domestic violence and women's rights.*

#### **c) Training on non-violent activism**

Some women peacebuilding organisations have successfully engaged with men peacebuilders in their trainings on issues of **gender-sensitive non-violent activism** and masculinities as part of their strategic focus. While concerns about diverting funds from women to men were raised and had to be addressed, engaging men and training on masculinity, violence and conflict, are seen as key to contribute to gender-sensitive peacebuilding. Lessons from these trainings show that in order to maximise the impact of the training, it is important to start from men's own experience of conflict and personal transformation and to provide alternative models or positive masculinities. While men trained continued to face a number of challenges in their own context, including the feeling of isolation that often comes from challenging the patriarchal structure of society, militarism and conservative cultural norms, most of them reported to have trained other men on masculinities, to have set up organisations looking at masculinity and violence, to be engaged in advocacy work on these issues and to continue to work with women's organisations.

#### **d) Working with youth and children**

Gender norms and behaviors are modeled early on in life therefore it is important to work with children and youth **to change entrenched gender dynamics and paradigms**. In societies that have experienced conflict for several decades, such as Sierra Leone or Colombia, children were born during conflict and only experienced violence. These dynamics interact with their understanding and enacting of gender norms in a way that can contribute to perpetuating conflicts. Most of them experience psychological and emotional traumas, displacement, loss of family members, sexual abuses. Helping children to recover from conflict-related traumas and to adapt to different societal models in peacetime requires long-term commitment from donors.

#### **e) Conflict narratives and positive role models**

Narratives about the past defined by governments, the media, and influential public figures shape the way people understand conflicts and gender roles during and after the conflict. They can provide alternative or positive masculinities/role models that are pro-peace and pro-gender equality. The 'forgotten men' as some peacebuilders call them are those men that did not fight and supported women in their struggle during the conflict but who were sidelined as soon as the conflict ended and excluded from DDR programs because they were not former combatants. In Northern Ireland as in many other conflict settings, these positive role models tend to be overshadowed by the violent men or the men that tried to stop the violence, portrayed as the heroes of the nation. A counter good example is the case of Philippines and Moro women that one of the participants shared. The local imam who believed women have a role to play in the future of the community supported Moro women in their fight to gain a place in the decisions regarding their communities.

### **Possible entry points for the EU**

#### **a) Further integrate gender into conflict analysis and early warning tools**

In the past years the EU has developed a number of tools that are meant to contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. Most recently a growing focus on conflict analysis and on early

warning systems has emerged. While these tools already integrate gender to some extent, more could be done to make sure gender dynamics are analysed as **potential conflict catalysts and contributing factors** as indicated above. An in-depth and more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in the countries concerned could shed light on the way people engage in, are affected by and seek to resolve conflicts. Indicators of conflict should also reflect this complexity. For example, while the frequency of domestic violence as a sign for the possible outbreak of conflict is a relevant indicator, it is not the only one with a gender dimension. Participants suggested the development of other gender sensitive indicators including for example, indicators that are looking at youth mobilization strategies by armed groups.

**b) Gender and masculinities in mediation**

The EU as part of its preventive diplomacy is engaged in a number of mediation processes including through political, financial and technical support. The EU aims to meaningfully support women's participation to peace negotiations by providing trainings to high-level mediators on gender and UNSCR 1325, supporting the UN Mediation Standby Team and sometimes by deploying women mediators (as has been the case for Catherine Ashton in the Serbia-Kosovo talks). These good practices should be continued and further reinforced.

**c) Funding for research on gender and masculinities**

For gender to become a truly transformative agenda funding needs to be made available. There are research gaps regarding **the role of positive masculinities or of women in co-constructing violent masculinities**. However gender and masculinities have been absent from the EU security research agenda. Horizon 2020, the biggest EU research programme, includes a section on secure societies which also looks at EU's external security policies and recommends to take gender into account. However it does not provide for specific research items linking gender and security issues.

**d) Funding for medium-size peacebuilding organisations**

Profound transformations on entrenched gender norms in societies require long-term commitments explicitly addressing these issues. It is usually small and medium-size organisations engaging in the most challenging tasks at community-level and working towards incremental changes in society, including by dealing with the legacies of conflict, promoting reconciliation between communities, providing trainings and education on non-violent peace activism. These organisations are also often the ones struggling to access funding and are in need of better support from large donors.

**e) Take into account the impact of peacebuilding interventions on gender dynamics**

Peacebuilding interventions in conflict settings both by international NGOs and by regional and international organisations **impact local gender dynamics**. Peacebuilding organisations become part of the equation once they engage in a conflict and can play a crucial role in reinforcing or breaking traditionally accepted notions of masculinity and femininity including by providing positive (or negative) models. Actors should be wary about reproducing and reinforcing gender patterns by, for example, failing to appoint women to leadership positions in their own structures and missions. One example to consider could be the current lack of women acting as Heads of a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions or as European Union Special Representatives (EUSR).

### **Recommendations on masculinities / violence at the policy level:**

- Integrate masculinities issues, including male vulnerabilities, more consistently into the Gender, Peace and Security agenda at the international, national and regional level
- Ensure there is a clear distinction in policy documents between engaging with men in furthering the GPS agenda and addressing violent masculinities

### **Recommendations on integrating masculinities / violence into peacebuilding tools and approaches:**

- Adopt a theory of change and carefully decide who to target in programmes tackling notions of masculinity / promoting alternative models of non-violent masculinity
- Strengthen the engagement with male champions on issues related to masculinity and violence and promote positive male role-models
- Engage with youth and children to deal with gender norms in society
- Recognise the impact of peacebuilding interventions on gender dynamics in the conflict-affected countries and adapt programs accordingly
- Address issues related to violent masculinities in post-conflict transformation, including DDR programmes

### **Gender and conflict analysis:**

- Use gender analysis of conflict to assess, among others, how masculinities interact with conflict dynamics in a particular conflict and regularly update it
- Ensure a gender perspective is included into conflict analysis and the assessment of the drivers of conflict
- Use participatory methodologies and involve both men and women in the process of developing a conflict analysis

### **Early warning systems:**

- Include a gender dimension in indicators for early warning systems (not limited to the rise of gender-based violence)
- Explore options for indicators looking at how gender norms contribute to drive conflict
- Explore options for an indicator looking at the mobilization strategies of young men by armed groups

### **Mediation and negotiation:**

- Encourage training on gender, including on masculinities and violence, for all those involved in conflict prevention and mediation, in particular EU mediators and advisors to mediation process;
- Appoint women as high-level mediators and negotiators
- Ensure the role played by gender dynamics as potential driver / contributing factor / catalyst of conflict is addressed in peace negotiations and peace agreements

### **Recommendations on peacebuilding funding:**

- Ensure gender is explicitly integrated into funding for research programmes looking at security issues at national and regional level
- Dedicate funding to further research into masculinity and violence issues and the impact of gender identities on conflict dynamics
- Make funding flexible enough to cater to small and medium-sized organisations
- Include a long-term and a short-term component to address not only immediate post-conflict situations but also the longer-term transformation of societies

### **Recommendations on organisational structures:**

- Acknowledge, analyse and tackle gender dynamics in decision-making and recruitment processes in peacebuilding organisations
- Provide positive examples by appointing more women to top positions in the EEAS, including as Heads of CSDP missions and EUSRs
- Integrate a gender perspective into strategies for professional development including for issues such as training and other capacity-building opportunities.

## Selected further reading resources

Fidelma Ashe, *From Paramilitaries to Peacemakers: the Gender Dynamics of Community-Based Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland*, in the British Journal of Politics and International relations, Volume 11, Issue 2, pages 298 – 314, May 2009, available at :

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