Implementing the United Nations Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security: Integrating Gender into Early Warning Systems: Report on First Expert Consultative Meeting

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International Alert and the Swiss Peace Foundation have produced a draft framework paper entitled Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Preliminary Framework. The paper aims to create awareness among individuals and organisations working in conflict prevention and early warning, and influence the development of early warning systems and related international policy. The paper grew out of the realisation that early warning is the sine qua non of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding and that a gender-sensitive approach is needed for the early identification of conflicts at the micro-level and in order to prepare adequate response options that ensure the human security of both women and men. The paper has been extensively consulted in the academic, conflict prevention and early warning communities and will be finalised in the coming months. Contributions from the Expert Consultative Meetings will be incorporated into the paper and used to identify gaps in the proposed framework on how to engender early warning through gender-sensitive early warning indicators, gender analysis and the formulation of gender-sensitive response options. Subsequent consultations, to take place over the next two months in Berne, Switzerland and London, UK, also aim to identify areas of further research and reflection, and will be used to test the applicability of the framework in four conflict regions. This action research will then form part of a publication with recommendations, launching this pilot project into a greater research and advocacy effort. International Alert and the Swiss Peace Foundation would like to thank the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) and the Africa Peace Forum (APFO) for supporting and co-sponsoring the Nairobi meeting.

Introduction

The purpose of the consultative meeting in Nairobi was to gather the perspectives and experiences of women and women's organisations working in conflict, in addition to other civil society groups and NGOs, government bodies and UN agencies, in order to inform the development of gender-sensitive early warning indicators for conflict prevention, management and response to crises. Forty individuals representing these organisations participated in the meeting. Presentations focused on the link between UN Security Council Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security and the need for gender-sensitive early warning indicators (Feyzi Ismail, International Alert) and an overview of the value of integrating gender into conflict early warning (Susanne Schmeidl, Swiss Peace Foundation).

Background

The historic press statement issued by Ambassador Chowdhury of Bangladesh on International Women's Day 2000, acknowledging that peace is inextricably linked with

equality between men and women, was a key step forward for the international movement pushing for concrete action on the issue of women and armed conflict. For the first time at an international level, it was publicly recognised that the full involvement of women in conflict prevention is essential to the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. The statement was also instrumental in providing the opportunity for both civil society organisations and UN agencies to come together and lobby the Security Council to adopt a Resolution related to the issue. The Namibian Government, together with the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the NGO Working Group on Women and International Peace and Security, continued to work toward this end. The result was Resolution 1325 Women, Peace and Security, unanimously passed at the end of October 2000 under the Namibian presidency. The Resolution has critical implications for the protection of women in conflict zones and the inclusion of women's groups and civil society in peace processes. As the Resolution is legally-binding for Member States of the UN regarding all operational points, it also has implications for the integration of gender into early warning indicators for conflict prevention and the implementation of these indicators to ensure more effective responses in humanitarian crises. The protection and inclusion of women in peace and reconciliation processes, as well as the involvement of women in information collection, analysis and the formulation of response options in order to inform early warning, emerge as critical and cross-cutting issues.

Key Issues Identified

While participants welcomed the idea of early warning in general, and integrating a gender-sensitive focus in particular, many felt that early action and response to humanitarian crises, equally considering the needs of women and men, is more important than even the formulation of response options. Though effective early warning does not necessarily lead to the most appropriate or effective response, it does increase the chance for a response and therefore the opportunity for conflict to be prevented or mitigated. In many conflict zones, however, people are already suffering and early warning and preventive action are too late. In these situations, effective response must include linking relief efforts and post-conflict support with preventive efforts. It is also crucial to consider gender inequities not just before conflict breaks out, but also when formulating response options.

A. Women and Gender in Early Warning

An important point highlighted throughout the consultation was that any response should not merely focus on how to include women into early warning processes, but also men, thus truly engendering early warning. Many participants felt that if women were to work on issues of conflict prevention separately from men, it would create further tensions between them, especially in societies with clear gender hierarchies that discriminate against women. Mutual inclusiveness of both men and women into early warning and response, in addition to raising awareness among men about the specific experiences, perspectives, needs and rights of women in conflict situations, is key. Activities such as training and education, establishing structures or organisations, developing strategies or

methodologies for peace reconstruction and reconciliation and conflict prevention, should involve and encourage women and men alike.

Gender and the Impact of Conflict

- While gender relations are often carried over from pre-conflict to all other stages of conflict, they can also change after conflict has erupted. It is important, therefore, to fully understand pre-conflict gender relations in order to formulate appropriate response options. It is also important to recognise the role of women in different contexts and cultures and acknowledge that gender dynamics are not the same in all conflict situations.
- Conflict can be an opportunity for producing changes in gender relations, as during conflict, women take on non-traditional roles, and in many cases, become heads of households. Yet personal and psychological factors, such as rape, abuse and insecurity, as well as economic factors, such as access to land and property, can have serious negative impacts on the empowerment of women.
- Issues threatening women include both physical and psychological, and thus both must be considered in the development of effective protection mechanisms, which is an emerging issue integral to building effective early warning systems.

The Role of Women in Early Warning

- Women should play a role at all levels of early warning, including information collection, analysis and the formulation of response options. Fundamental to this inclusion, however, is the great challenge—equity with men.
- As many women work at the community and grassroots levels, an increased involvement of communities in the development of early warning and early response would begin to ensure that the voices of women are heard.

B. Early Warning at the Community Level

It is important to acknowledge that early warning and response can and do occur at different levels. In many cases, local communities have far greater knowledge of issues on the ground, and can therefore be more effective in preventing and mitigating crisis.

The Role of Local Communities: Early Warning for Whom?

- A crucial consideration in early warning processes is who is responding to crisis. Too often the focus is on large NGOs, UN agencies, governments and intergovernmental bodies as the sole response-vehicles. Local communities often do not need to wait for external involvement, yet if they do, the parties involved need to ensure that the response is co-ordinated and complementary, rather than counterproductive. Working on the basis of equal partnerships, therefore, is crucial. Local initiatives and capacities can be strengthened, built upon and supported, and international organisations can be informed as to how to develop more effective response.

- Women and women's organisations can play crucial roles not just as providers of information, but also as leaders that can both formulate and implement response options. It is important to consider, however, varying cultural contexts which will influence this potential role in early warning. Any capacity-building at community level, focusing on the analysis of information, how to use information or building confidence among communities, should target women specifically.

Operationalising Early Warning at the Community Level

- Formulating concrete methods of implementing the theory of early warning and making these relevant to practitioners is essential. For example, proposals on how to incorporate women into information collection processes, or how to overcome security issues when getting information from women in conflict situations or how to influence institutional set-ups to integrate women into all aspects of early warning and conflict prevention.
- In Kenya, and to some degree Uganda, there are Peace and Development Committees, existing at both village and District level. These are interesting examples of existing institutionalised methods of collection, analysis and exchange of information, as well as collaboration between state and civil society in the formulation of responses. These and other similar efforts could either be linked up with local early warning systems, or built upon to create early warning systems, if none existed previously.
- Creating sustainable structures for the purposes of early warning is crucial. If traditional mechanisms can be utilised and adapted, they are more likely to be accepted and effective.

3. Early Warning Theory and Practice

Practical and effective early warning systems involve local communities and ensure a transparent process, where the collectors of information benefit from imparting their knowledge to those who are responding. Learning from local efforts and skills can only happen when members of the community, including women, are incorporated into the process of scenario-building for action and formulating and implementing response options. In order to ensure the development of appropriate response options, however, it was highlighted that analysis must be done together with affected populations, as most early warning analysis uses context-specific qualitative methods, requiring community involvement and as many contributions as possible. Strategies of early warning, therefore, will vary depending on the type of conflict, the histories and background of the different communities, the location of the conflict, timing and many other factors. Women and men already engaged in developing early warning and conflict prevention activities must be recognised, supported and worked with.

Women as Providers of Early Warning Information

- There are several platforms for the exchange of information that are often used by women. Examples include religious gatherings, markets, self-help groups around

specific issues, merry-go-rounds, micro-credit schemes and others. The degree to which women can utilise these platforms will differ and change in different contexts. For example, the market in conflict situations can become less secure. However, if women are to be included in information-sharing processes and use these platforms to implement responses, the capacities of women need to have local, national and international support in order to be strengthened.

- In environments that are particularly insecure, church and international organisations may be the only channels for information transmission. Faith-based organisations particularly have intimate contact with constituencies.

Improving Channels of Communication

- Ways to strengthen channels of communication are to improve access to technologies and increase trust between local populations and authorities. Changing attitudes and building trust and confidence can to some extent be facilitated by peacebuilders holding forums, mediating and facilitating discussion on issues of concern.
- Many organisations and individuals do not have an early warning agenda and do not think they have useful information to share. There is a need to facilitate communication between organisations who have information and then to overcome the challenge of sharing it through encouragement, building trust and empowering both men and women. Women's organisations must be supported in order that women can have fora to meet. The only way we can talk of empowerment is to bring women to the centre of peacebuilding.
- Coding and decoding information is important in order to interpret signals accurately. In order to understand codes of communication, experience and knowledge of the culture, history, context and power relations, is necessary.

The Role of Institutions

- When developing the framework on early warning indicators, it cannot be assumed that gender is already a priority within institutions, governments or international organisations or that gender-sensitivity already exists within institutional cultures. For example, it is difficult for gender-blind institutions to address and attend to gender-sensitive indicators, when they are developed, if there is still debate over whether information coming from women is actually valid.

D. Indicators for Early Warning

Conflict early warning is about being able to predict the resumption of violence and prevent it from recurring. In discussing early warning indicators during the consultation, it was suggested by one of the working groups to structure early warning around the following components: signs (e.g. the use of scouts to gather information; the unwillingness of women to meet); sensors (e.g. churches and church sensitivity); signifiers, which are a measure of changing trends (e.g. changes in market production,

trade or governing institutions); and signals (e.g. women becoming involved in politics or being briefed by elders; the beating of drums to alert others).

Additions to the Indicator List

- Increased activity of women in the preparation of food prior to the launch of an attack by the community, particularly men.
- Increased activity of women in the production of weapons, particularly traditional ones, for the purposes of defense or attack
- Children informing mothers of recruitment into military or armed groups.
- Context-specific indicators—In rural Kenya, women wearing belts to protect their sons from being killed in war.

Recommendations

- Develop indicators that are most commonly present prior to the outbreak of armed conflict.
- Develop training modules for gender-sensitive early warning for policy-makers, governments and local, national and international civil society organisations.
- Provide concrete suggestions on how to build gender-sensitive early warning systems through institutional efforts, including how to build effective partnerships.
- Consider the biases that are contributing to and affecting the quality and accuracy of information transmitted and ensure that gender-bias does not cloud the indicators or response options.
- Develop concrete suggestions on improving the security for information providers and collectors of politically-sensitive information.
- Discuss in consultation and collaboration with communities how to mobilise and harness the energy of civil society for effective early warning i.e. training; establishing early warning structures; sharing and collecting information etc.
- Discuss solutions to the problem of extracting information from the community and how structures of early warning and information feedback to the community can be created in areas where they do not currently exist.

APPENDIX ONE

Questions Raised by Participants for Discussion in Working Groups

1. What are the issues that affect gender relations and women at different stages of conflict that should be reflected in the early warning indicators and the formulation of response options?
2. What are the main gaps in the framework presented?
3. Where and how do you see the role of women in early warning systems with regard to the collection of information, analysis and response options?

4. How best can gender be integrated into existing early warning indicators to maximise their effectiveness?
5. Do have any suggestions for the improvement of the indicators put forth?
6. What kind of responses would best address women's needs in conflict situations?
7. How can the use of gender-sensitive early warning indicators best be integrated into early warning activities, reports of policy-makers, humanitarian agencies and others in order to ensure a gender-sensitive response?
8. How can early warning be made more operational, in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice?
9. What structures exist locally that can be used for early warning purposes?
10. How can these structures be made more effective for conflict early warning? Where do they need to be supported and how can they be made more inclusive?
11. What channels need to be strengthened in order to improve the communication aspect of early warning? How could these channels be strengthened?
12. How can women be empowered to play a more effective role in conflict early warning at all levels?
13. How can other excluded groups be brought into the process of early warning in order to enhance its comprehensiveness and inclusiveness?

APPENDIX TWO

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