

Reviving conflict prevention in 1325

Submission to the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security

The adoption of seven UN Security Council resolutions (UNSCRs) on women, peace and security has helped to bring unprecedented levels of attention to the needs, roles and experiences of women in conflicts and in peace processes. Important advances have been made in some areas of the agenda – including increased attention to the issue of sexual violence in conflict – which are to be welcomed. However, other key commitments lag further behind, leading to concerns that the transformative potential of the women, peace and security agenda to reduce militarisation and violent conflict has been compromised.

Fifteen years since the passage of UNSCR 1325, and 20 years on from the Beijing Platform for Action, Saferworld welcomes the announcement of the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security as an opportunity to reflect on progress, reassess priorities, and increase commitment to implementation. As an organisation dedicated to preventing violent conflict, Saferworld is committed to challenging gender norms that cause and perpetuate conflict and insecurity. This submission focuses on the need to give greater attention to the conflict prevention elements of the women, peace and security agenda.

Conflict prevention and 1325

UNSCR 1325 affirms “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts”, yet the ‘prevention’ pillar of the women, peace and security agenda is often narrowly interpreted in practice as referring to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, and not to the prevention of conflict itself. This is despite the UN Strategic Results Framework on Women, Peace and Security describing the ‘prevention’ pillar as including “prevention of conflict” as well as “all forms of violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations”.¹ The lack of attention given to conflict prevention has led some to express concern that the women, peace and security agenda has become limited to “making war safe for women”, rather than preventing the outbreak of war.²

¹ United Nations (2011), ‘UN strategic results framework on women, peace and security: 2011-2020’, p 1.

² See, for example, Cora Weiss, quoted in Cohn C (2008), ‘Mainstreaming gender in UN security policy – a path to political

One reason for this de-prioritisation of conflict prevention within the women, peace and security agenda may be that it is not always obvious what activities ‘conflict prevention’ comprises and how to apply a gender perspective to it. The Strategic Framework focuses on early warning systems, community-level mediation and disarmament initiatives. While these can all be important aspects of conflict prevention, there is a need to articulate what it means to integrate a gender perspective into a more holistic approach to conflict prevention. The following sections begin to set out what that could mean.

A focus on early warning: only part of the picture

The UN Strategic Framework on Women, Peace and Security includes, as one of three key goals of the prevention pillar, ensuring that “United Nations conflict and crisis early warning systems generate reliable information on security threats women and girls face and establish means to gather information on early warning from women.”³ The targets for this output centre on the development of ‘gender-specific’ early warning indicators.

A literature review on gender and conflict early warning conducted by Saferworld highlighted a number of ways in which early warning systems might be made gender-sensitive.⁴ It outlines the benefits of a participatory approach to conflict analysis which includes people of all genders, as well as the need to ask questions about gender roles and relations when identifying structural and proximate causes of conflict and potential triggers. There is a lack of clarity and consensus as to what is meant by ‘gender-sensitive’ or ‘gender-specific’ early warning indicators. Past efforts at developing these indicators have tended to rely on conventional measures of gender equality, such as women’s participation in the labour force, in education or in politics – which may or may not

transformation?’ (Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights), p 14.

³ United Nations (2011), ‘UN strategic results framework on women, peace and security: 2011-2020’, p 3.

⁴ Saferworld (2014), ‘Gender and conflict early warning: Results of a literature review on integrating gender perspectives into conflict early warning systems’, available at <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/810-gender-and-conflict-early-warning>.

provide a reliable indicator of conflict risk.⁵ Furthermore, efforts to develop globally relevant indicators are likely to be less helpful than ones tailored to the individual context. Gender-related factors which could indicate an increased risk of violent conflict in some contexts – such as increased levels of gender-based violence or the promotion of violent notions of masculinity in nationalist rhetoric – may not be applicable across all conflicts, and so a more tailored approach based on context-specific research is needed.

In addition to examining *how* conflict early warning systems can be made gender-sensitive, it is as important to question how central should early warning systems be to conflict prevention efforts in general, and the women, peace and security agenda in particular. Conflict early warning systems are usually designed to pick up on signs of an impending outbreak of violence in order to inform 'light' conflict prevention; that is, for short-term interventions to avert crises, or mitigate their effects.⁶ While this approach may be useful for planning certain types of responses, such as humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilians, or diplomatic efforts to prevent or curtail violence, they do little to contribute to a longer-term, more transformative approach to conflict prevention,

Addressing conflict at its roots

A more comprehensive vision of conflict prevention involves careful analysis of, and strategies for addressing, the root causes and drivers of conflict in any given context. This may include, for example, ensuring equitable access to basic services such as security, justice, health and education for all social groups; transforming political institutions which are exclusionary or corrupt; or reforming economic systems which are perceived to be unjust. In contrast, it has been noted that "1325 is as specific and narrow as the Security Council's mandate";⁷ it focuses more on political and military responses to crises, such as peacekeeping and diplomacy, than longer-term approaches which address the underlying causes of conflict. It is therefore not surprising that the UN's efforts to gender-sensitise conflict prevention have been focused primarily on "traditional political processes such as preventive diplomacy", while less attention has been given to how a gender perspective should be applied to a more holistic approach to conflict prevention.⁸

⁵ For a more detailed discussion of this question, see Saferworld (2014), 'Gender and conflict early warning: Results of a literature review on integrating gender perspectives into conflict early warning systems', p 5; also Herbert S (2014), 'Links between women's empowerment (or lack of) and outbreaks of violent conflict' (London: GSDRC), available at <http://www.qsdrc.org/docs/open/HDQ1170.pdf>.

⁶ Basu S and Confortini, C (2011), 'Weakest "P" in the 1325 Pod? Realizing conflict prevention through UN Security Council Resolution 1325', paper presented at the ISA Annual Convention, 19 March 2011, Montreal, p 4.

⁷ Klot J (2002), 'Women and peace processes – an impossible match?' in Louise Olsson (ed.) *Gender Processes – an Impossible Match?*, p 18.

⁸ Basu S and Confortini, C (2011), 'Weakest "P" in the 1325 Pod? Realizing conflict prevention through UN Security Council Resolution

This gender-sensitive approach would involve analysing and responding to the gender dimensions of root causes and drivers of conflict.

Depending on analysis of the conflict at hand, this could include, for example, ensuring that youth livelihoods programming responds to the needs of both women and men who are un- or under-employed; or challenging cultures of militarised masculinity within the security sector which fuel human rights abuses.

However, one reason why conflict prevention efforts often lack a gender perspective is because they are based on conflict analysis which does not include gender analysis.

Gendering conflict analysis

A literature review of guidance on gender and conflict analysis conducted by Saferworld found that, even where a gender perspective is included in conflict analysis, it is usually done in a limited way.⁹ Two limitations are particularly worth noting here:

- Firstly, 'gender' is often taken to be synonymous with 'women'. This means that the 'gender' section of a conflict analysis consists of an account of ways in which women are affected by conflict, and/or the roles that women or women's organisations are playing in building peace. This is consistent with the framing of this agenda as 'women, peace and security' and the language that the UNSCRs and other UN documents use to explain the agenda. **It is of course crucially important to highlight and analyse the needs, interests and experiences of women in conflict and peacebuilding, which are still all too often ignored or de-prioritised. However, a more comprehensive gender analysis can also provide key information about the role of men and sexual and gender minorities, which is vital for truly gender-sensitive peacebuilding.**¹⁰
- Secondly, gender analysis of conflict situations has tended to focus on understanding the gendered *impacts* of conflicts, and far less on the gendered *drivers* of conflict. Documenting the different impacts of conflict on women, men, boys and girls is of course crucial for ensuring that peacebuilding, transitional justice, relief and recovery efforts are gender-sensitive. However, **analysing gender dimensions of the drivers of conflict is also vital to effectively addressing those drivers in order to prevent conflicts from turning violent.**

1325', paper presented at the ISA Annual Convention, 19 March 2011, Montreal, p 12.

⁹ Saferworld (forthcoming 2015), 'Gender analysis of conflict: Results of a literature review on gender and conflict analysis'.

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the benefits of this 'gender relational' approach vis-a-vis the traditional 'women, peace and security' approach, see International Alert (2014), 'Rethinking gender in peacebuilding', available at <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/rethinking-gender-peacebuilding>.

The following section explores how conflict analysis which takes into account both of these points – going beyond looking at women to a broader approach to gender analysis *and* considering the gender dimensions of conflict drivers – can contribute to gender-sensitive conflict prevention.

Gender norms as drivers of conflict

Political statements about the importance of gender equality and women's rights for peace and security have become commonplace. In 2014, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon described gender equality as “a prerequisite for peaceful and inclusive societies”,¹¹ while the UK National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security states that “Building equality between women and men in countries affected by war and conflict... is necessary to build lasting peace.”¹² Yet rarely is a clear explanation offered as to why gender inequality and conflict may be linked. There is evidence of a strong correlation between conventional measures of gender equality – such as numbers of women in parliaments, or equality in family law – and levels of peacefulness.¹³ Analysis of the explanation behind that correlation highlights the importance of understanding how ideas about masculinities and femininities which are used to justify and reinforce these inequalities might also contribute to militarisation and conflict.

While the purpose of the women, peace and security agenda has been to emphasise and promote women's agency in conflict situations and peace processes, discussions of gender and conflict still frequently cast women primarily as victims. This reinforces socially constructed notions of femininity which – in most, if not all societies – cast women as weak and in need of protection. From this understanding flows a perceived need for men who are strong and willing to use violence in order to protect their families and communities. Indeed, notions of masculinity – while they vary significantly within and between societies – usually associate manhood with power, dominance and control. These gender stereotypes, which are used to perpetuate and justify gender inequalities, also support a militarised view of the world which legitimises violent responses to situations of conflict.

¹¹ Ki-Moon B (2014), ‘Secretary General’s message to Security Council Open Debate on Women, Peace and Security’, accessed at <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=8139>.

¹² UK Government, ‘United Kingdom National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2014-2017’, p 1.

¹³ Caprioli M (2000), ‘Gendered conflict’. *Journal of Peace Research*, 37(1), 51-68; Caprioli M (2005), ‘Primed for violence: the role of gender inequality in predicting internal conflict’. *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(2), 161-178; Melander E (2005), ‘Gender equality and intrastate armed conflict’. *International Studies Quarterly*, 49(4), 695-714; Institute for Economics and Peace (2011), *Structures of peace*, p 17-18; Hudson V, Ballif-Spanvill B, Caprioli M and Emmett C (2012), *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press), chapter 4.

What does militarisation have to do with gender?

‘Militarisation’ is used here to refer to a process of increasing preparedness for war. This can take the form of increased spending on arms, investment in growing and capacitating military institutions, or the increasing prominence of military personnel and infrastructure in civilian society. It also includes the development and promotion of values, cultures and practices which support and give legitimacy to the use of force to resolve or manage conflict.

The term ‘militarised masculinities’ is sometimes used to describe notions of masculinity which support these militarised values. It can refer to particular forms of masculinity promoted within militaries, which often link manliness with preparedness for combat. However, militarised masculinities which valorise toughness and willingness to use or support the use of violence are often also widely accepted in civilian life. In militarised contexts, both women and men, as well as groups or institutions, may act out militarised versions of masculinity.

While ‘militarised femininities’ are less frequently discussed, socially constructed notions of femininity can also support militarisation. For example, the depiction of women as weak, defenceless, and embodying the honour or purity of the nation or community has been used to motivate men to fight to defend them. Women's roles as mothers and wives are often idealised during conflict, including a willingness to sacrifice their sons and husbands in support of the war effort.

Saferworld recently published a collection of evidence demonstrating the role of gender norms in driving a range of conflicts.¹⁴ These include:

- The use of narratives deliberately promoting violent notions of masculinity by political and military leaders on both sides of the conflict in Kosovo in the run up to the outbreak of war in 1998. These appealed to nationalist portrayals of men as heroic fighters, while men refusing to fight or to support the use of force against the enemy were denigrated as feminine.
- The close association between masculinity, gun ownership and cattle in pastoral communities in parts of South Sudan, which perpetuates a cycle of violent cattle raids and revenge attacks within and between communities. Participation in cattle raids is seen as a rite of passage for many young men,

¹⁴ Saferworld (2014), ‘Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens’, available at <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/862-masculinities-conflict-and-peacebuilding-perspectives-on-men-through-a-gender-lens>.

as well as a means to obtain cattle to pay the bride price and get married – another key symbol of manhood. Women also often reinforce this masculine ideal by encouraging men to raid cattle and shaming those who refuse or who come back empty-handed.

- The role of ‘thwarted’ masculinities highlighted in studies of gender and conflict in Somalia, Uganda and elsewhere. Circumstances where some men are unable to meet traditional expectations of masculinity, such as by getting married and becoming the provider and protector of one’s family, are common where poverty, inequality and insecurity are widespread. For some men this can make joining armed groups or militaries a more appealing option for regaining lost masculinity.

Though these case studies are far from exhaustive, they provide examples of how gender norms can fuel the militarisation of societies. It is also important to note that the militarisation of masculinities and femininities – much like conflict itself – is not something which only occurs locally or nationally in ‘conflict-affected countries’; rather, it is also influenced by international factors. For example, training delivered to national security sectors through international peace operations may serve to import and valorise militarised masculinities prevalent within a foreign security sector. Attention to the external factors which drive militarisation and conflict is therefore needed, meaning that the provisions of the women, peace and security agenda should be applied not only to local and national level actors in contexts currently or recently experiencing violent conflict, but globally. Governments in contexts usually thought of as peaceful should give greater consideration to what UNSCR 1325 means for domestic security provision and decision-making, as well as all aspects of their engagement in conflict-affected countries.

While the need to address militarism was directly addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action’s calls to “reduce excessive military expenditures” in favour of “co-operative approaches to peace and security”, this was less reflected in the text of the UNSCRs. Indeed, recent initiatives to end sexual violence in conflict have often prioritised militarised responses over efforts to prevent sexual violence by addressing its root causes.

This analysis should be of central concern to any effort to apply a gender perspective to conflict prevention. Clearly, gender is just one of many factors which influence militarisation and conflict, and the relationship between gender norms, conflict and violence differs over time and between contexts. Nonetheless, an analysis of the drivers of any particular conflict which does not take into account the role of gender may be missing crucial pieces of information. Therefore, subsequent efforts to address those drivers of conflict are also likely to be lacking.

Challenging militarised gender norms: practical approaches

Saferworld recently undertook a review of programmes which aim to challenge and transform attitudes towards masculinity.¹⁵

There are growing numbers of NGO programmes working to engage men (and sometimes women) in rethinking masculine identities and norms, many of them run by members of the MenEngage network. However, the review found that very few of these are envisioned as peacebuilding programmes. Rather, most aimed at promoting roles for men in caregiving, improving sexual health, or preventing domestic violence – all worthy aims in themselves.¹⁶ With further analysis and research, approaches which have been developed for these purposes – which include group education, community outreach, and policy advocacy – could be used to contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. This could also contribute to fulfilling the Beijing Platform for Action’s mandate to “Consider establishing educational programmes for girls and boys to foster a culture of peace, focusing on conflict resolution by non-violent means and the promotion of tolerance” and “Promote peaceful conflict resolution and peace, reconciliation and tolerance through education, training, community actions and youth exchange programmes”.

Some NGOs, including Women Peacemakers Program and Promundo, have piloted projects which explicitly aim to transform masculinities as a contribution to peacebuilding. While Saferworld’s review and the projects highlighted in it focus primarily on masculinities because this area is relatively under-examined, many project implementers emphasise the importance of challenging notions of femininity and masculinity at the same time, working with both men and women.

This is a relatively new area of programming and policy work in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and as such there is not yet enough experience to provide well-developed, evidence-based guidance. There are a number of questions which need to be thought through, including around developing theories of change for demilitarising gender norms; how best to engage with the security sector, including militaries and police services; and how to bring about change on the scale that is needed.¹⁷ Social norm change is a long-term process which does not lend itself to quick fixes, and requires a shift toward longer-term investments than are commonly offered by existing funding streams.

¹⁵ Saferworld (2014), ‘Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens’, chapter 2.

¹⁶ Saferworld notes that these can be framed as peacebuilding objectives, however in the case of these programmes they were not envisioned as such.

¹⁷ These and other considerations are discussed at greater length in Saferworld (2014), ‘Masculinities, conflict and peacebuilding: Perspectives on men through a gender lens’, chapter 3.

Furthering this agenda will require a willingness by donors to invest in longer-term research and programming aimed at challenging gender norms that drive conflict, going beyond approaches that work only with women. Saferworld contends that a focus that includes men and masculinities as well as women and femininities is needed in order to realise the conflict prevention objectives of the women, peace and security agenda. While this entails an approach that sees 'gender' as being about more than just 'women', it must nevertheless recognise and continue to address gender inequality and discrimination against women.

Conclusion

The women, peace and security agenda has two broad goals: furthering women's rights and gender equality, and promoting peace and security for all. If it is to make progress in both of these areas, we must not lose sight of commitments to conflict prevention contained in the Beijing Platform for Action and the seven UNSCRs on women, peace and security. Addressing the use of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict and increasing women's participation in decision-making on peace and security are essential, and greater investment of resources and political will are needed to fulfil international commitments on this. However, if the women, peace and security agenda is to go beyond 'making war safe for women', the prevention pillar – including conflict prevention – must be taken seriously. This requires, among other things, a gender analysis of the causes of conflict and militarisation.

Recommendations for the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security

Saferworld recommends that the Global Study on Women, Peace and Security should emphasise the importance of:

- **Making clear that the 'prevention' pillar of the women, peace and security agenda includes the prevention of conflict, and giving greater priority to this aspect of the agenda**
- **Focusing not only on short-term approaches to conflict prevention but on longer-term approaches which address the root causes of conflict, and applying a gender perspective to them**
- **More consistent and thorough inclusion of gender analysis in conflict analysis, which analyses gender dimensions of the drivers of conflict as well as the impacts of conflict**
- **Taking a broader approach to gender which also seeks to analyse the roles of men and sexual and gender minorities from a gender**

perspective, despite the framing of the agenda as 'women, peace and security'

- **Ensuring that this broader approach to gender in peacebuilding does not come at the expense of increased efforts to ensure women's full and equal participation and the protection of women's human rights in conflict situations**
- **Analysing the role of militarised masculinities and femininities in driving conflict and violence**
- **Developing strategies for challenging militarised gender norms in 'developed' as well as 'developing' contexts and including these as a key part of gender-sensitive conflict prevention efforts**

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

Saferworld – 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT, UK
 Registered Charity no 1043843
 Company limited by guarantee no 3015948
 Tel: +44 (0)20 7324 4646 | Fax: +44 (0)20 7324 4647
 Email: general@saferworld.org.uk
 Web: www.saferworld.org.uk