



Resource Paper

Gender Dimensions in Peacebuilding

The UN-resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security emphasises the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. What does 1325 mean for policy implementation and operational planning? At an event in July 2021, diverse stakeholders discussed research findings as well as political and operational realities. The encounter produced contradictory positions and misunderstandings but also valuable connection points. To empower 1325, the dialogue between research and practice is worth to be taken to the next level.

KEY MESSAGES

- Facilitating the dialogue between gender researchers and practitioners works against misconceptions of the very term “gender”.
- A nuanced and comprehensive understanding of civil society as society at large offers a framework for peace operations to approach and solve problems in areas of conflicts with contested institutions or weak social and political infrastructures.
- The institutional and binary separation of peacekeeping and peacebuilding requires debate to create concepts in which civil society, peacekeeping personnel and international actors are conceptually and strategically interwoven in the huge aspiration of SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.
- Mixed methods, aware of top-down and bottom-up directions, enrich peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations.

After many years of gender mainstreaming and working towards the Sustainable Development Goals 5 (SDG 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) as well as 10 (SDG 10, Reduce inequality within and among countries) gender awareness and inclusion is more than counting women. There is emerging evidence for those who support gender equality, challenge stereotypical gender roles, and display diverse forms of masculinity that inclusion leads to more peace promoting institutions. The following four considerations are building blocks for researchers and security personnel interested in the field of gender studies, peacebuilding and peacekeeping. They are an attempt to bridge the realms of research and practice and to contribute to policy shaping as well as enhancing operational designs. These arguments showcase key insights from the hybrid r4d programme event at the Swiss Armed Forces International Command (SWIS-SINT), Oberdorf/Stans, on 6 July 2021.

The term “Gender”

Having for once in one place various stakeholders, i.e. politicians, civil servants, academics, journalists, civil society activists and military personnel, sharing their experiences and creating an environment of exchange, it turned out that the term “gender” produces semantically different meanings and creates still contrasting realities amongst diverse participants. Throughout the event, the term gender was used along these three lines:

A) Classical gender semantics: within the classical discourse, the term gender reflects the emancipatory dimension of the role and position of women in politics, economics, and culture. Often associated with mainstream feminism and epistemological concepts within Western discourses, gender is often deliberately used as a category of empowering the position of women in society at large. Hence, female quotas, quantitative analysis and other statistics are used to illuminate the position of women in society.

B) Modern deconstructive gender semantics: “gender” used as cypher for deconstructing i) the categories and stereotypes of “male” and “female”, ii) the duality of sexes, iii) the transformation of linguistic terms spurred also by iv) LGBTQ¹-realities discloses the very political dimension of the term. Within this context, gender is an important category of power analysis offering insights into societal, political, economic and cultural dependencies and ramifications. Deconstructive approaches offer analyses of power that create grounds for profound debates on identity politics and criticism of systems.



Film stills of the video “Gender Dimensions in Peace Building”. Visit of the Swiss United Nations Military Observer Course, Switzerland, 6.7.2021.

“I see gender as a resource for activism (...). We also see the results of activism in interfaith dialogues that happen within communities. (...) We need to be (...) focusing on the jobs that happened during conflict, and how we can actually leverage on the positive things that come up during this time for women, especially in disruption of gender identities and the rules, and look at how we can build capacities for women to make empowering decisions during those phases (...)”

— Joy Onyesoh, Nigeria

C) Relational aspect of gender semantics:

often based on the power analysis and its associated political deconstruction, the term gender has

also a relational aspect to it, emphasising its intersectional and practical dimension. Hence, gender as a category of societal empowerment (both organisational as well as for society at large) helps reflecting local customs and practices and nurtures bottom-up perspectives, such as ingrained in social anthropological methods.

At the interface, where researchers, security personnel and other stakeholders meet, researchers are encouraged to emphasise the differences and various definitions, dimensions, and semantics of the term gender. This provides reflection about the various effects produced by different meanings and facilitates cross-purpose exchanges in dialogue with practitioners. A clarification along the three semantic outlets can offer opportunities to avoid misunderstandings and oblivion.

The term “Civil Society”

In contexts of gender and peacekeeping/peacebuilding civil society has been highlighted as an important factor. The term however creates confusion and misunderstandings. A

nuanced understanding of civil society (and of gender) helps to recognise the different roles of stakeholders in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. The discussions during the event revealed two contrasting conceptions:

A) Civil Society = International NGOs: military personnel and civil servants tend to equate the concept of civil society with international non-governmental organisations (NGO), which are active and operate in politically unstable areas around the world. Seldom did they extend this notion of civil society to local NGOs and other institutions.

B) Civil Society = Society at large: in contrast, researchers and NGO representatives tend to define civil society in a comprehensive and inclusive way, as an aspect of a polity. Adhering to bottom-up approaches, thereby shifting the foci, civil society can be conceptualised as a vast web, a network-actor scheme where informal and formal groups and communities but also customs and practices are integral parts of what a civil society is made of. This “thick description” is more inclusive and gives attention to details, which fall short in (ir-)rationalised top-down approaches – often applied within international settings.

¹ LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer

Impressions of
the Open Debate
“Gender expertise and
mainstreaming in peace
operations – good or harm?”
at SWISSINT,
6.7.2021.



A more nuanced understanding reflects different circumstances and is much needed in complex and highly volatile environments. Such an understanding of civil society offers to practitioners, such as peacekeepers and security personnel, an intellectual framework to approach and create solutions to problems in areas of conflict with contested institutions as well as weak social and political infrastructures.

“It seems like so much of the engagement is really less with local populations, but with NGOs (...) and other internationals and, you know, (...) there is kind of a sense that civil societies don’t actually exist and that they get destroyed in the war. (...) And I do think there is kind of a preconception that there isn’t anything there (...) what we were trying to do in the [research] project is just to say, ‘Well, yes, there is a lot there. Women’s markets don’t disappear, right, they become something different’”.

—Elisabeth Prügl, Switzerland

Peacekeeping versus Peacebuilding

As recent developments show, peacekeeping and peacebuilding are not automatically sequential stages in finding a way out of armed conflict and violence. However, in contested contexts both peacekeeping and peacebuilding happen and could mutually enforce each other. While peacekeeping via military interventions aims at creating a stable and secure environment, peacebuilding has no or very little military component and is much more supported by local and international actors building up social relationships, institutional infrastructures and cultural connectivity.

Acting in highly complex historic circumstances, where armed conflicts and violence are reality and people trust in organisations is low, the difference between peacekeeping and peacebuilding is mostly an institutional one. Researchers can demonstrate theoretically and empirically that peace is a complex phenomenon and the operational difference between peacekeeping and peacebuilding is ultimately artificial. The separation might help

to define and delimit peace missions. However, e.g., liaison-officers, who are part of a peacekeeping operation and responsible for stabilising regions and areas, might already contribute to what is conventionally labelled as peacebuilding by way of how they approach locals.

The added value of “Mixed methods”

The concepts of peacekeeping operations are often designed based on existing experiences and theoretical references, thereby referring to mainstream methods of economics, international relations, or grand strategy; methods which work mostly in a top-down direction. A reflection on methodological approaches and awareness for multidimensional mixed methods offer other ways of approaching complex phenomena and help foster a culture of applying diverse concepts while designing peace exercises and operations. In addition, methods stemming from established disciplines like social anthropology or comparative literature create attentiveness to societal and political issues in peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. Applying diverse methods is an important aspect researchers can offer to peacekeeping practitioners. Hence, conceptualising methods creates opportunities to guide policymakers and supports security personnel in nuancing their analysis and accentuating their operational skills.

To advance gender-sensitive approaches in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, a method-catalogue and method-training could help practitioners to design policies and operations. Such a catalogue is ideally co-created based on mixed stakeholder contributions, as present in the event at SWISSINT in July 2021 (cf. [executive summary](#)).

“Actually, in the military, we think about the role of the military in an operation, but we don’t think about this construction of identity and the role of these constructions within the operations. (...) On the other hand, is the scope to change them in order to de-conflict? Or is the scope to accept how they are and use them at the best (...) ? That’s a different approach to the problematic actually, of the [so called] constructed rules [and identities]”.

—Michael Freudweiler, Switzerland

Outlook

Awareness of the notions (1) “Gender”, (2) “Civil Society” and (3) “Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding” as well as a toolbox for (4) “Method Training” emerged as connection points in the exchange between research, security, politics and administration. Services providing for these would facilitate the conversation between theory and practice in the continuum of armed violence and conflict, peacekeeping and peacebuilding – a dialogue which is much needed. The news from Afghanistan in August 2021 demonstrated clearly that the international community has never clearly defined what civil society could mean in Afghanistan. Also it has never been eager to apply different methods to foster bottom-up approaches thereby creating an “environment of mutual understanding”.² These are tasks which can only be challenged and settled if there is a fruitful and sustained dialogue between research and practice as a foundational layer. There is a need to cultivate common denominators and concepts. This is where research can be turned into practice.

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CONTEXT

This resource paper and the executive summary were authored by members of the Swiss Institute for Global Affairs (SIGA) and reflect the content and outcomes of the conference “Gender Dimensions in Peacebuilding” held at the Swiss Armed Forces International Command (SWISSINT), Oberdorf/Stans (NW) on 6 July 2021. This event was co-organised by the Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme), the Swiss Armed Forces International Command (SWISSINT) and the Swiss Institute for Global Affairs (SIGA).

MORE INFORMATION:



[Executive Summary](https://www.globalaffairs.ch/events/gender-and-peacebuilding/executive-summary)

<https://www.globalaffairs.ch/events/gender-and-peacebuilding/executive-summary>



[Video-clip](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiB7FytVpal)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PiB7FytVpal>

² Schenk and Korf in NZZ article, 28.8.2021, <https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/der-westen-scheiterte-in-afghanistan-am-moralischen-anspruch-ld.1641828>.



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