Gender Dimensions in Peacebuilding – Executive summary and take-aways

SWISSINT | Oberdorf/Stans | July 6 2021

The conference "Gender Dimensions in Peacebuilding" held at the Swiss Armed Forces International Command (SWISSINT), Oberdorf/Stans on July 6 2021, was designed as a dialogue platform bringing together researchers, policy makers, peacekeeping officers and stakeholders to reflect UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.
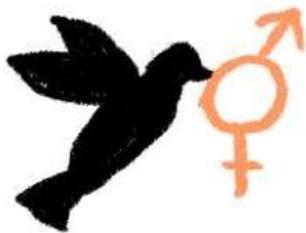
Introduction

The closed workshop sessions and the open debate were based on the 7-year 'Gender Dimensions of Social Conflict' research project[1] challenging the very fact that gender has been mainstreamed into most peacebuilding activities but adequate implementation on the ground is hampered by the current lack of evidence on promising practices. Beyond the dissemination of the project's research findings, the aim of the conference was to create knowledge exchange fora fostering new formats for sharing expertise and experienced-based collaborations. The following summary emphasizes (1) the key elements and findings, (2) insights reflecting ideas, outcomes and (3) recommendations for further initiatives and platforms.

Key elements

The following synopsis formulates the key elements emerging during the conference (see also resource paper for more detail).

1. **Peacekeeping versus Peacebuilding:** Practitioners, military personnel and researchers shared in a first step the very common understanding that the concepts of peacekeeping and peacebuilding have to be treated separately. Peacekeeping missions provide security while the concept of peacebuilding initiates cultural and structural changes of factors causing violence and conflicts. The rationality of the aforementioned is to provide stability and on this basis the latter can develop broader fundaments for peace and peaceful progress. In a further step, however, it also became clear that the concepts are interrelated in terms of content and timing and are mutually dependent (cf. recommendation No. 2).

2. **The term "Civil Society":** The term "civil society" had throughout the conference various connotations and was used by different stakeholders in different ways. The theoretical and academic concept of civil society is driven by an encompassing understanding of civil society as a political space including cultural structures, societal practices and familial experiences. In

comparison, peacekeeping practice emphasizes primarily the role and the inclusion of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGO) present at the respective scenes.

3. **The common understanding of the term "Diversity":** Diversity as concept and practical need is generally shared and accepted. However, "what" diversity is and "how" and with "which" means diversity should be pursued is much more complicated and was the great unknown factor at the conference. The interpretation ranged from a simple balance of female and male to concepts of complex, participatory civil society pluralities. According to the research findings, it is useful to supplement the concept of diversity by the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality highlights that people have multiple identities (e.g. age, gender, etc.) which produce distinctive experiences, needs and thus political agendas. Diversity can therefore not be separated into different and specific groups. The intricate and entangled realities, experienced in individuals, require a multi-perspective approach in translating the very concept of "diversity" and thus, challenges the concept of gender and peacebuilding.

4. **Same basic understanding and terminology:** Different foci and interests as well as various professional backgrounds produced a conference reality in which specific terms were used in different ways and with different concepts (cf. key findings point 2 and 3). The participants found expression in conversations at cross purposes and often led to misconceptions. Therefore, those terms and various conceptualizations need better definitions and explanations. It is not only that practitioners and theoreticians have different interests and scopes but it also hampers conversations, learning and solutions. An engaged multi-stakeholder dialogue can help creating an ability for a culture of dialogue.

This synopsis with four key elements reflects a phenomenon that academics and practitioners often share similar ideas and concepts but the translation into the different realms is demanding and complex. The complexity increases because terms and definitions but also the language used often lack congruence and tend to differ depending on the circumstances.

Insights

Reflecting the four key elements, the following insights can help to develop new ideas and collaboration formats fostering a culture of exchange and mutual understanding.

1. **Simulations:** peacekeeping operations require careful preparation and planning. The enlisted military personnel undertake several weeks of preparation and training. The inclusion of latest research findings and the consulting of researchers help to design more comprehensive and multidisciplinary exercise scenarios. Moreover, field experiences of peacekeeping officers might help to design new research projects. The simulation of research could raise the level of awareness, mission preparation and research frameworks.

2. **Exchange:** Exchange among practitioners and scholars enhances effectiveness in dealing with complex contexts and issues. A platform of mutual exchange supports dialogue and understanding. Sharing the respective ecosphere nourishes a foundation of common understanding and helps to sharpen personal and professional profiles. Gender and peacebuilding/peacekeeping is a very sensitive theme with direct and long-lasting effects. Therefore, it is important to establish and cultivate exchange platforms.

3. **Foster linguistic culture:** beyond establishing exchange platforms, it is important to develop a common way of talking to each other and enabling (if only temporarily) a common language. This linguistic premise emphasizes the very fact that language establishes concepts, norms and realities and produces therefore metanarratives. Those narratives are often used as an umbrella term for different ideas and concepts. The exchange platforms might help to foster a linguistic culture which could eventually grow into a general canon to feed into specific discourses.

4. **Eureka moments:** in order to establish exchange platforms and foster linguistic cultures, eureka moments might help and support new insights. These are moments of unexpectedness, unease, surprise, discomfort, agreements and are lived through and shared by experiences, participations, and embedded research. They give rise to a new culture of common understanding.

5. **Academic methods:** the academic methods applied and developed in the social sciences, particularly gender studies, anthropology and linguistics, are not only important references for scholarly outputs, but they also offer a methodological framework for a powerful toolbox for coming to terms with practical challenges within social and political realities. Methods and the transfer of how to use methods are important assets for practitioners.

The creation of platforms, fostering a culture of exchange and shared experiences might help to translate theory into practice but also support field research.

Recommendations

1. **Follow-up events:** the conference offered an opportunity to bring different stakeholders into discussion, demonstrating and exposing different foci but also respective mindsets. Follow up events and knowledge sharing among participants and interested parties are recommended to inform and shape future research project designs but also nuanced planning of peacekeeping operations. Especially the conceptual difference between peacekeeping and peacebuilding highlighted at the conference needs to be challenged. The separation between peacekeeping and peacebuilding is from an institutional point of view understandable. However, in practice peacekeeping and peacebuilding are in a fluid space of (militarized) security; e.g. a Liaison and Monitoring Team (LMT) operates in that perspective as well as peacebuilder. These discussions and shift of perspectives are considered to be fruitful.

2. **Creating shared experiences:** in order to foster a culture of intellectual and conceptual challenges, a process with events stimulating shared experiences is recommended. Such events might initiate the attitude that "things" need to be done and it is less about talking than creating prototypes and minimal viable products (MVP) or white papers. Through these shared experiences the so-called eureka-moments could be purposefully produced, overcoming discussions that bypass the issues at stake and creating a common language. The cultivation of a common language is much needed, if research and practice want to exchange on new and fresh perspectives on gender and peacebuilding.

3. **Method transfer:** the translation of scientific methods and models are helpful and fruitful to frame practical approaches in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Especially social anthropological frameworks might help to conceptualize and plan missions but also support peacekeeping officers in their everyday reality. They offer a much-needed holistic approach on conflict, civil society and gender.

4. **Toolkit:** Based on the discussions and key elements to develop a "Gender and Peacebuilding toolkit" offering handy instruments for academic and mission-oriented field operations is recommended.

These recommendations shall help to continue the dialogue between researchers in the field of gender and peacebuilding and peacekeeping officers planning and designing peacekeeping operations around the world.

Swiss Institute for Global Affairs | www.globalaffairs.ch
Dr. Remo Reginold
Urs Vögeli

Conference Video Summary

Resource Paper «Gender Dimensions in Peacebuilding»