

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT AND GENDERED RESPONSES

INSTITUTIONAL LEAD

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

MODERATOR

Dylan O’Driscoll

Researcher, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

OVERVIEW

This session examined the role of gender norms and gender inequalities in driving conflict and violence, as well as the gendered impact of conflict. Using a number of case studies (Ukraine, Nigeria, Liberia, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), it explored how peacebuilding and development at the local and national levels can, and should, address gender norms, tackle gender inequalities and be inclusive.

FOCUS AND OBJECTIVES

The session examined the links between gender, violence and conflict, as well as how gender matters in responses to these, and made recommendations on best practice.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Gender matters from the onset of conflict and into the peacebuilding phase. For example, conflict is more likely to breakout in countries with high levels of gender inequality. Masculinities, and particularly militarized masculinities, are important as they increase violent attitudes. In contrast, gender equality is associated with less conflict and less reliance on violence for conflict resolution.

Case studies have shown that expectations of men are important for the violence playing out in conflict contexts (e.g. toxic masculinities). It is important to question gender roles in particular contexts and not assume stereotyped gender roles. In addition, gender should not be understood only in the binary of male and female; issues relating to the intersectionality of discrimination and a more diverse gender definition need to be better researched and addressed.

The roles of women in conflict are complex. It is important to see women not only as victims but also as actors in various roles. These roles will differ in different contexts, as the different case studies discussed show with ample examples.

During conflicts, women often have to take on economic responsibilities as breadwinners in their family. However, whether this leads to the empowerment of women or increased violence against them depends on the socio-economic context and family background.

Intimate partner violence is often overlooked by those working on violence in conflicts, despite evidence that it affects women more than conflict-related sexual violence.

It is surprising that the participation of women in peacebuilding is still very low, despite the action taken by many actors to work towards change. Conflict often leads to women being pushed further away from political structures, as these structures became the focus of violent struggles. Yet international players also restrict the impact that women have in political processes as the issue of women’s rights is deprioritized or is deferred as the responsibility of the conflict actors (e.g. in Yemen).

General violence is higher in post-conflict societies than in pre-conflict societies. No systematic evidence is available, but people working on the ground regularly report this.

Reintegration of (male and female) combatants is gendered. Gender and gender roles are not taken into consideration when setting up reintegration programmes, even though gender norms influence the experience of being a veteran or an injured ex-combatant as well as the mental health of ex-combatants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support gender analysis as key to adapting and designing interventions for particular contexts. Avoid integrating gender perspective into policies in a stereotyped way that is not based on local context as this leads to the perpetuation of gender norms and to maladapted interventions. Do not overlook changes in gender roles and gaps between former norms and current realities, since this leads to the perpetuation of old power structures in society, hindering change.
- Develop a bottom-up approach to achieving gender equality. Increase support for women-led organizations, which work at the grassroots of society and are well placed to work bottom-up on issues of women's rights.
- Recognize that norms of masculinity and women's empowerment need to go hand in hand; that men play an important role in changing gender norms and roles in local contexts, and post-conflict situations often lead to fragile situations in which men cannot live up to the masculinity norms of society; and that, therefore, when women are empowered there is often a backlash from men in the society. Look at the repertoire of examples of working with men to find positive masculinities when designing future interventions.
- Train and fund staff, since well-trained staff are key for gender-sensitive interventions.