Women, Peacekeeping and Peacemaking: Gender Balance and Mainstreaming

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Looking Back

Prior to 1989 there were 15 peacekeeping missions, one-third of which involved Israel and its neighbours. The United Nations Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) is representative of the early missions. It did bring fighting between Greece and Turkey to an end, but it did not achieve peace. Even today the island remains divided and the mission (which began in 1964) continues. Annual expenses are around US$50,000,000 and more than 150 peacekeepers have lost their lives there. While peacekeeping did stop most killing and neither side in the conflict ‘lost’, no incentive to agree to a genuine peace – one that would no longer require the presence of third party peacekeepers – seems to exist.¹

Three early missions should be noted as foreshadowing recent missions. One was the United Nations Security Force in West Guinea (West Irian) (UNSF) which involved the monitoring of elections. In that case authority over West New Guinea was transferred from the Netherlands to the UN, and from the UN to Indonesia in 1962–63.² Two other early missions were involved in civil warfare. One was a 1965–66 mission to the Dominican Republic, the Mission of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Dominican Republic (DOMREP). More important was the large, long lasting (1960–64), multidimensional United Nations Mission to the Congo (ONUC), which cost the lives of thousands of Congolese and more than 200 peacekeepers. It also claimed the lives of Congo Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Ultimately stability was achieved, although the new government was not widely acclaimed.

Many issues raised by the Congo experience were not really examined until the UN became involved in other civil wars and in other multidimensional missions beginning in 1989. One issue involves how the success or failure of a mission should be determined. Was the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) a success even though a large part of the country was not under central government control, and even though the government chosen in the UN supervised elections was
overthrown not long thereafter? A second question is: how can the UN ensure that 'consent' has been given in good faith and will not be withdrawn? The United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) is but one instance of agreements broken. A third question is: how can humanitarian relief be provided in the midst of civil war without compromising neutrality (see the United Nations Operation in Somalia, UNOSOM) and, finally: how can guarantees of 'protection' be made without compromising the commitment to use force only in self-defence (United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNMIBH)?

Many of these sticky questions seem to have arisen from an unspoken but erroneous assumption that because UN troops were well prepared and included personnel from major powers, they would not be challenged – but they were. Also, wars between nations may be suspended and construed as 'peace', but civil wars require an extended development and reconciliation process. This is because former enemies must live with each other; peace is not just a matter of respecting state borders. Finally, when so many functions and the majority of clients in expanded peacekeeping are civilian and women, why do missions continue to be dominated by military men?

Women's Participation in Peacekeeping: Some Data

Data for all missions active in 1993, which includes old but continuing missions like that to Jerusalem (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, UNTSO) but which does not include newer but completed missions like the one to Namibia (United Nations Transitional Assistance Group, UNTAG), show that member states contributed less than two per cent women military personnel. Women were an even lower percentage of civilian police. The largest number of military women (more than 600) served in Somalia. Three-quarters of these were from the US and they represented eight per cent of US troops. Yet women constitute about 14 per cent of the US armed forces, thus, they were under-represented in peacekeeping.

The story was different for UN civilian staff. Women constituted 32 per cent of civilian staff overall. They constituted only six per cent of the 112 policy level staff, and only in the former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR) was there more than one woman at the policy level (3 out of 20). However, women constituted 30 per cent of the other professional staff of 567 and 60 per cent of the 834 members of the largely clerical general service. The field service staff of 720 was 94 per cent men. Of the locally hired staff, 20 per cent were female – with great variation by mission.

Data from 1957 to 1991 show more variation than any clear trends. This suggests that leadership plays an important role in women's opportunities to participate in peacekeeping. Indeed, if the data from one mission, Namibia
(where there were a large number of women, and where women were given significant responsibility) were eliminated from the database, little change would be seen over time.

In recent years the Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been relatively systematic about collecting field data on the balance in employment between men and women. Current or nearly current data from 14 active operations are available. While the military in some missions remains all male, in other missions female military personnel have increased to three per cent, and some missions have increased civilian women police to three and even five per cent. This includes the missions to East Timor and Kosovo, which are the first missions to have gender components. Nevertheless, interviews suggest that no great effort has been made to get member states to contribute women military personnel, while efforts have been made to increase the number of women civilian police.

In operations that are new, large and multidimensional gender balance has not improved overall for civilian staff, but women have attained higher-level posts. In Kosovo women constitute 25 per cent of the professional staff overall and 17 per cent of policy level staff. In East Timor they constitute 21 per cent of the professional staff and 16 per cent of the policy level staff. This includes the missions to East Timor and Kosovo, which are the first missions to have gender components. Nevertheless, interviews suggest that no great effort has been made to get member states to contribute women military personnel, while efforts have been made to increase the number of women civilian police.

Field service staff continues to be largely male, but in East Timor women constitute 21 per cent of the field service staff, and in Kosovo 24 per cent. This represents a significant increase. Further, five other missions reported more than ten per cent women and three others more than 20 per cent. This may be where the largest change in women’s employment has occurred.

Women constituted 30 per cent of local hires in Kosovo but only 13 per cent in East Timor. There was also wide variation in the other operations. Bosnia and Herzegovina had 53 per cent women, but the usual range was between 15 and 30 per cent.

In sum, in the two new, large, and multidimensional operations that were put into place after the Beijing International Women’s Conference held in 1995, women have been given more responsibility. New UN principles and policies, which will be discussed below, seem to have had some effect. The change in women’s participation in what had been an almost all male field service should also be recognized.
Post-Beijing Principles and Guidelines

The UN has made a formal commitment to gender equality that includes a goal of achieving a 50/50 gender (male/female) balance in all professional posts at all levels. It also includes a goal of gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming refers to ‘the process of assessing the implications for men and for women of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes in all areas and at all levels’.

Gender balance is well understood and easy to measure. Because of the existing imbalance, some men see efforts toward achieving balance as directly affecting (reducing) their opportunities. They also correctly point out that just increasing the number of women in professional positions will not necessarily increase sensitivity to gender issues. This is why understanding and implementing gender mainstreaming is important. Unfortunately, gender mainstreaming is not well understood and it is difficult to measure. Further, it is important to note that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of both men and women, and requires analysis of the concerns and experiences of both men and women. To date mainstreaming may be devoting more attention to the needs and experiences of women. This is because men’s needs are already so well integrated into most policies and programmes that they are not a matter of consciousness. At present women’s needs are more likely to require explicit recognition.

In 1997, in its agreed conclusions, the Economic and Social Council provided a number of guidelines to assist in the implementation of gender balance and mainstreaming. These agreed conclusions were later endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/100 of December 1997. The fact that the UN has adopted such strong policies owes much to women’s hard work in preparation for the 1995 Beijing Conference and the follow-up from that conference.

Some of the agreed conclusion’s more important directives are abbreviated and paraphrased below:

- An assumption of gender neutrality should not be made.
- Accountability for outcomes needs to be monitored constantly and rests at the highest levels.
- Every effort must be made to broaden women’s participation at all levels of decision-making.
- Gender mainstreaming does not replace the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes or positive legislation, nor does it substitute for gender units or focal points.
- Directives rather than discretionary guidelines are appropriate.
• Tools for gender analysis require the disaggregation of data by sex and age.

• Mechanisms for accountability and for evaluating programmes need to be established.

• The role and capacity of gender specialists and focal points including those in the field need to be enhanced.

• Political will and the allocation of adequate and, if need be, additional human and financial resources are important for the successful translation of the concept into practice.

Units concerned with economic development and with humanitarian relief probably recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming to their work earlier than units concerned with peace, disarmament, political and security issues. Thus, there are probably lessons to be learned from the implementation of gender policies in humanitarian and development units. A position adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee for the Integration of a Gender Perspective in Humanitarian Assistance on 31 May 1999 is worth noting:

The efforts of women as mediators, their roles in trying to access communication between warring groups, and so on, are often ignored in official peace mediating initiatives. In the post-conflict phase, the emphasis on the more formal levels of establishing systems of ‘governance’ through political parties leaves out the role and voices of women who, at the ‘informal’ and community level, have much to contribute in helping define terms for peace and security.

In doing so, there is a failure to comply with Article 7 of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which falls upon states’ parties to ensure that women, on equal terms with men, participate in the formulation of government policy, and in non-governmental organizations concerned with the public and political life of the country. Ignoring gender equality in emergencies is not a neutral position. It supports discrimination.

Note the Inter-Agency Committee’s emphasis on the contribution women can make to the peace process and to peacebuilding even if they are not part of the formal political system. Women’s organizations have been energetically advancing this position and while resolutions supporting this view have not been adopted by the Economic and Social Council, on 31 October 2000 the Security Council did adopt an 18-point resolution on women and peace and security which ‘encourages’ the Secretary-General to
increase the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes (see Appendix II in this collection). Extensive gender-related policies and guidelines already exist for peacekeeping operations. A note should especially be made of the Committee's emphasis on the importance of UN bodies adhering to UN principles and of the importance of considering gender even in emergencies.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) often works in a crisis mode. It also works in dangerous environments. Both lead to careful if not cautious recruitment. Also, DPKO frequently has difficulty obtaining contributions of troops and/or civilian police of either sex from member states, and the pressure to recruit civilian staff in a short time can lead to using already known individuals and to tapping already developed candidate pools. Both these processes work against the rapid achievement of gender balance. Given these difficulties, directing energy and resources to gender balance and mainstreaming may seem a distraction and a drain on resources. However, it is worth remembering that pursuing gender balance has the potential for greatly increasing the pool of talent, and that gender mainstreaming can enhance understanding of a complex situation. It may lead to new assumptions and definitions. It may suggest different approaches to the desired end. It may reveal overlooked resources and talents. Rather than a distraction, then, the pursuit of gender equality can actually enhance a mission's chance of success.

The Three 'I's

The fact that UN policy so strongly supports gender balance and mainstreaming is important. However, to achieve gender equality goals one must bear in mind the three 'I's. The first is that Inertia must be overcome. Institutions tend to continue as they are. The second is that energy and resources must be given to Implementation, to putting policies in place. Third, once policies have been implemented, they must be Institutionalized. They must become routine.

As a first step towards implementation, the Lessons Learned Unit of the DPKO conducted a workshop on 'Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations' in Windhoek, Namibia in May 2000 for the purpose of discussing a report by that title [prepared by this author]. That report was the basis for the 31 May 2000 'Windhoek Declaration' and for 'The Namibia Plan of Action on "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations"' (see Appendix I in this collection). The report and these two documents were later presented to the Security Council for the October discussion on women, peace and security led by the Namibian representative to the
Security Council who was able to secure the 18-point resolution discussed above.

Securing firm policies and having a plan for implementation are heartening first steps. However, every student of political science knows that implementation of new policies is not always easy, and that a variety of strategies may be needed to secure the desired effect. These include demanding and monitoring enforcement of policies, becoming candidates for policy positions, educating or, more emphatically, agitating and thus creating pressure for implementation, providing resources for the implementation of policy, and, sometimes, privately creating a model programme to serve as an example for others.

In devising a strategy the goal must always be kept in mind, in this case, gender equality. But a winning strategy does not try to do everything at once. Instead, it attempts to identify specific points where action or pressure is likely to have the most impact - often by yielding second- and third-order consequences. In a UN peacekeeping operation process there are several areas to which strategists should give particular attention.

First is the construction of the Security Council mandate, the authorization for a peacekeeping operation. The mandate shapes all mission decisions (including budgeting) and is usually narrowly constructed by implementers. This is why it is important that UN principles related to gender equality, balance and mainstreaming be enunciated in the mandate. It gives legitimacy to efforts related to gender, and, equally importantly, it serves as a constant reminder to those leading the mission that they have responsibility for gender concerns. Since the Security Council is small, the strategist’s target for winning inclusion of gender language is easily identifiable and those who must be persuaded are not numerous.

Mission leadership is also of great importance. This is especially true of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), who is in charge in the field. The selection process for an SRSG is not transparent, involves a good deal of political manoeuvring, and occurs at a very high level. Strategists need to identify, publicize and champion a pool of men and women qualified for SRSG appointments. But they should also develop a set of criteria to be applied as a measure of the gender competence of all candidates for SRSG. And such competence should be a prerequisite of appointment. Since these appointments are at a high level, candidates will have a public record. It should be possible to determine whether or not they have themselves had gender training, whether or not they have taken a public position on gender equality, and to determine the gender of the ten most senior staff selected by him/her while holding his/her current position.

The recruitment process as a whole merits analysis, too. In recent research it was found that those in the business of recruiting expressed regular
frustration over the lack of qualified women available for employment in peacekeeping, while apparently qualified women expressed frustration over not finding a way to gain such employment. It was as though welcoming ads and announcements entered one end of a dark tunnel and expressions of interest and résumés entered the other end, and never the twain did meet. This is an area in which research and education might pay off.

Planning and budgeting begin even before the mandate is completed and, of course, continue until the mission ends. While each mission is unique, standard planning procedures also exist. This is an area in which institutionalization of gender balance and especially gender mainstreaming should be the goal. Standard checklist items need to be developed which consider the different circumstances and needs of men and women, and which raise the question of how decisions and programmes affect women and men. These items need to become routine and to be a part of all planning and budgeting. Until gender equality is more closely approximated, gender units and specialists should probably be a part of every mission.

Gender training for peacekeepers has been developed both at the UN and privately over the last several years. Several curricula are available. This is an area where the priority is implementation. Contributing member states have the responsibility for training their troops in their own countries, although the DPKO can supply materials and, on occasion, trainers for gender training. Home country training, though, tends to be uneven, and so further training is provided to troops on their arrival at an operation. The problem there is time: there are only a few days available and much to be done. Further, civilian police and civilian staff should also receive gender training; so should the large number of non-governmental organization personnel who are important to and work closely with many missions. Training, then, is an area requiring first, implementation, and second, institutionalization. Training is by definition education, but having materials available is only a first step. Materials must also be used, and then behaviour must be monitored. Monitoring of behaviour may need to be done by outsiders, but training must be done by those who command, administer or employ UN personnel. Because the norms for gender interaction are highly variable among the countries providing peacekeeping personnel and may be different in the countries to which peacekeepers are sent, it is important that UN standards be clear, understood, and adhered to. This is an area in which condoned misbehaviour can affect the legitimacy and even the success of a mission.

Finally, just as leaders should not be eligible for appointment without meeting minimum standards related to gender equality, so leaders, other administrators, and even individuals need to be held accountable for their
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performance in matters related to gender equality. This requires the creation of formal accountability measures, their application, and consequences for those who excel or who fail on the basis of such measurement.

Conclusion

The new, multidimensional peacekeeping missions have profound effects on women. Current UN policies and guidelines have recognized this, and fully support women’s participation in peacekeeping and also support attentiveness to their needs and circumstances, that is, gender mainstreaming. The UN’s commitment to gender balance and mainstreaming is clear; however, that commitment is new and implementation is far from perfect. Implementation is an immediate concern. For the most part institutionalization lies further in the future.

Supporters of gender balance and mainstreaming will have to develop a variety of strategies including education, agitation, service in policy positions and as volunteers, and creative example setting to assist in the process of overcoming inertia and resistance. Good targets for the supporters of gender equality are the creation of the mandate, the selection of senior leadership, the recruitment process, planning and budgeting, training, and the creation, application, and use of accountability measures.

Even though women’s participation in conflict resolution and peace processes is now encouraged, it is likely to be difficult to achieve. Effective participation for women, their perspective, and their needs in the peacemaking and the treaty creating process has been rare. Traditionally participation in peacemaking and treaty creation has been restricted to those who have the will and capacity to resort to arms if not satisfied. Democratic theory, however, calls for participation by all who will be affected by a decision. It is particularly in small but deadly civil wars that women, some of whom have fought, and others who have refused to participate in the fighting, have begun to insist on participation in the shaping of peace. This has been particularly true of women from a variety of African countries. While women have to some degree been included in the post-peace, post-peacemaking process of peacebuilding, reconciliation and economic development, there is still a long way to go.

Because women’s role in peacekeeping and peacebuilding follows the construction of peace agreements, the crucial issue may be their participation on the shaping of peace accords. There the bottom-line question is: how can the unarmed be effective participants in processes now dominated by the armed?
NOTES


2. The 1999 UN-sponsored elections creating an independent East Timor (then governed by Indonesia) did not have a happy result.

3. And what should a reconciliation process include? Truth commissions? War crimes trials? Shared activities? And do we fully understand the second- and third-order consequences of innovations like truth commissions and war crimes trials? And can any peace be stable without a restored economy?

4. By definition a peacekeeping operation has a military component; however, a mission does not have to be led by its military commander. To date two missions have been led by civilian women. Dame Margaret Anstee led one of the missions to Angola and Elisabeth Rehn led the mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina for a period of time.

5. UN civilian police do not police; they train and observe. This means that they must be senior and experienced officers, which makes the recruitment pool for women small.

6. Presumably this is because the US tends to send a high percentage of combat troops on peacekeeping missions, and combat restrictions are still in place for US Army women.

7. Persons classified as P-5, D-1, D-2 or ASG/USG are included as 'policy level' personnel. There are four lower levels of professional staff (P-1, P-2, P-3, and P-4); these are not considered policy makers.

8. These data are from 1993, prior to the existence of most UN policy directing gender balance and mainstreaming. They are available from several sources including the article by Stiehm (n. 1 above).

9. Note that policies on gender balance and mainstreaming were in place when these data were collected.

10. The Cyprus mission reports 5 of 35 police are women.


12. UN jobs are in demand by the local population because the pay is relatively high.

13. Gender units were also part of the planning for these operations; however full accounts of how the units have worked out in practice are not yet available.

14. A more detailed account of UN policies and guidelines appears in Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations, a report prepared by Judith Stiehm for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Lessons Learned Unit, August 2000. It is available as an official UN publication.

15. See Stiehm cited above and Louise Olsson's case study of Namibia (UNTAG) in this volume.