

CONFLICT, PEACE-BUILDING, DISARMAMENT, SECURITY

a) Post-conflict initiatives & equality between women and men

Why are gender equality issues relevant in post-conflict initiatives?

To date, most post-conflict initiatives have not incorporated an understanding of gender inequalities. Although there have been specific initiatives (often marginal) aimed at women, it is rare for a major project to have incorporated a gender analysis and then designed its activities and intended impacts accordingly.

Recent decades have been marked by frequent and diverse conflicts: Rwanda is different than Kosovo, which is different from Guatemala. Each situation must be understood on its own terms. Similarly gender differences and relations must also be explored in their context. In addition to understanding the differences between women's and men's experiences, it is important not to assume that women have a common experience.

Despite the caveat against over-generalisation, several trends highlight why gender equality issues should be taken into consideration.

- **Gender relations in pre-conflict situations often set the stage for women's and men's options during conflict.** The dominant social, political and economic norms often influence the scope and potential women and men have for action in actual conflict situations. For example, if women are not active in political structures they will find it hard to influence political decisions that precipitate increased military tensions.
- **Women and men experience conflict situations in very different ways.** The options and resources women and men have during wartime are very different. Men are often the primary combatants (either voluntarily or forced). Women's experiences may center on ensuring survival for other family members. Therefore, their needs and the resources they can draw on in post-conflict situations tend to be different.

Recent attention has focused on the specific gender-based violence experienced by women in times of conflict. Although both women and men are affected by sexual violence during conflicts, women are more likely to be subjected to this type of violence than are men and are targeted for different reasons.

- **Social structures and networks are thrown into confusion during conflicts.** Families and

communities are generally in crisis. Basic survival is paramount. Gender roles and expectations are under stress and in flux. Women may take on new responsibilities. It will be important for post-conflict initiatives to understand these dynamics and respond to them. Previous assumptions about who does what work or who has what responsibilities may no longer hold.

- **In post-conflict situations, men and women have often been involved in building peace in different ways.** Women tend to be excluded from the formal negotiations. Yet there is a long history of women's participation in grassroots efforts to minimise hostility and begin reconstruction efforts. Without an explicit gender equality focus, post-conflict initiatives may fail to gain from women's contributions – both formal and informal – to the reconstruction of their societies.
- **Outside agencies and institutions often have preconceived ideas about 'appropriate' gender roles and responsibilities and tend to lack the skills required to deal with gender equality issues.** For example, human rights investigators may be unequipped to respond to gender-based war crimes. Demobilisation initiatives focus attention on male ex-combatants, overlooking female combatants and neglect the changed social and family structures that may no longer be equipped to 'welcome' back the soldier.

By failing to consider gender relations and inequalities, organisations may overlook potential resources or possible tensions in reconstruction initiatives. Furthermore, without a clear gender equality focus, outside agencies will most likely fail to capitalise on opportunities to support more equal gender relations and often may even reinforce inequalities.

- **Gender analysis highlights both women's and men's roles as actors, not just victims.** Many visions of post-conflict situations have cast women as victims of physical and mental abuse and over-work. A more careful analysis can uncover how both women and men respond to difficult situations: their coping and survival strategies, their careful use of scarce resources and their determination to construct a better society.

Refugees and Gender Equality Issues	Gender Equality and Post-Conflict Reconstruction
<p>In the last decade significant work has been aimed at raising awareness of the specific needs and interests of women refugees. For example, UNHCR has developed guidelines and training designed to draw attention to gender equality issues and ensure that emergency workers are aware of both the potential capabilities and vulnerabilities of refugee women.</p> <p>Concrete lessons have been learned. A recent publication looking at refugee women in camp management outlined strategies that had been successful in improving the conditions of refugee women and increasing their participation, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use strategies that allow the community to analyse themselves and their traditional practices, while selecting the best ones to maintain, and those to change, in collaboration with all members of the community. ▪ Equip refugee girls and women with life-long skills through the means of practical life related adult education programmes (formal and non-formal) ▪ Make efforts to talk with refugee women in various ways. Food distribution is a good chance to get opinions from refugee women, because refugees generally talk more freely on the occasions of food distribution. ▪ Implement projects that target males and male leaders for attitudinal and behavioural changes. <p><i>Source: Refugee Women in Camp Management, Best Practices for Refugee Women Series, Volume 1, June 1998. Senior Coordinator for Refugee Women Unit, UNHCR.</i></p>	<p>A recent study from the War-Torn Societies Project provides a comprehensive review of experiences and documentation relating to gender equality issues in post-conflict situations. Full of concrete examples, the report has two aims. The first is to go beyond “conventional images of women as victims of war and document the many different ways in which women make a contribution to the rebuilding of countries.” The second is to “shed light on how post-war reconstruction processes influence the reconfiguration of gender roles and positions in the wake of war, and how women’s actions shape the construction of post-war social structures.”</p> <p>The report outlines key questions to be posed in post conflict situations:</p> <p><i>In political reconstruction:</i> “will the emerging political system recognize and protect women’s rights and interests? And will women be enabled to influence and participate in the political process?”</p> <p><i>In economic reconstruction:</i> “will the emerging economic environment be conducive to women’s empowerment, or will it rather reinforce economic marginalization and increase women’s vulnerability?”</p> <p><i>In social reconstruction:</i> “will the social sector address women’s particular needs and concerns in an appropriate and adequate manner? Will women’s capacities and skills be recognised and incorporated into the provision of social services? Will social reconstruction generate socio-economic relationships that are advantageous to women?”</p> <p>Source: B. Sorensen (1998). <i>Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Sources</i>. The War-Torn Societies Project, Occasional Paper No. 3. UNRISD. Available at <http://www.unicef.org/unrisd/wsp/op3/toc.htm></p>

Additional Resources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Division for the Advancement of Women, United Nations (1998). “Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict: United Nations Response.” <i>Women 2000</i>. April. Available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/w2apr98.htm> ▪ Grenier, S. (1997). <i>Bibliography on the Rights of Women in Situations of Conflict</i>. International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development. Montreal. Available at: <http://www.ichrdd.ca/publicationsE/biblioWomen.html> ▪ Nordstrom, C. (1997). <i>Girls and Warzones: Troubling Questions</i>. Life & Peace Institute: Uppsala. ▪ UNESCO (1997). <i>Expert Group Meeting on Male Roles and Masculinities in the Perspective of a Culture of Peace</i>. Oslo, 24-28 September. Available at: <http://www.unesco.org/cpp/uk/projects/oslotoc.htm> ▪ Sida (1997). <i>Overview: Gender Equality and Emergency Assistance/Conflict Resolution</i>. Division for Humanitarian Assistance.
International Agreements and Guidelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beijing Platform for Action (1995) Critical Area of Concern E: Women and Armed Conflict. Available at <http://www.un.org.womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/armed.htm> ▪ The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993). Article 38: “Violations of the human rights of women in situations of armed conflict” Complete text available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu5/d/vienna.htm> ▪ Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974). Available at <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/24.htm> ▪ UNHCR (1995). Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response. Geneva. ▪ UNHCR (1991). Guidelines on the Protection of Refugee Women. Geneva.