

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN UN PEACE OPERATIONS AND THE PREVENTION OF THE RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

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ABSTRACT

20 years after the adoption of the landmark Resolution 1325, it is important to assess the implementation of gender mainstreaming in UN peacekeeping operations and its impact on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers. How has Resolution 1325 influenced the role of men and women in the fight against recruitment and use of child soldiers? What are the challenges and the way forward? This paper will examine the effect of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations on the prevention of the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

KEYWORDS

Gender mainstreaming, peacekeeping, child soldiers.

INTRODUCTION

The increased proliferation of armed conflicts globally has resulted in the increasing numbers of children involved in the brutalities of war.¹ The recruitment and use of children as soldiers by armed groups, voluntarily or by force, is recorded in many countries. Post-conflict environments are characterized by extreme financial hardships, lack of employment and other opportunities for survival. This exposes young boys and girls to be recruited into armed groups as child soldiers. The role of children in armed groups may include full participation in combat, spies, sex slaves /bush wives, cooks, messengers, bodyguards, human shields, suicide bombers,² or other roles that might be based on circumstances during the period of conflict. Children are used as human shields and militants by both the government and opposition forces, tortured to gather intelligence on their parents and siblings, and schools transformed into “military staging grounds, temporary bases, detention centres, sniper posts and centres for torture and the interrogation of adults and children.”³ The participation of children in armed conflicts simply deprives them of their childhood and leaves a lasting impact on their lives.

The Geneva Convention IV of 1949 and its additional protocol I adopted in 1977 serve as the first international instrument that focuses on the protection of children in armed conflicts. The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the child in 1989 threw more light on the issue of child soldiers, after which several conventions and legal documents have been adopted to prohibit and criminalize the enlistment and recruitment of children into armed groups.⁴

Peacekeeping operations help to strengthen the foundations for the reconstruction of post-conflict states. They seek to stabilize political and socio-cultural tensions that still linger after armed conflicts in order to prevent the recurrence of other conflicts. The volatile nature of post-conflict environments requires a sensitive and strategized approach to maintain and sustain peace. Peacekeeping operations entail a series of activities that seek to reconstruct the

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- 1 Graham, George, Mariam Kirolos, Gunvor Knag Fylkesnes, Keyan Salarkia, and Nikki Wong. “Stop the War on Children: Protecting Children in 21st Century Conflict.” London: Save the Children, 2019, 9. <https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/REPORT-Stop-the-War-on-Children.pdf>.
 - 2 UNICEF. “The Paris Principles: Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups.” New York: United Nations, February 2007. https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/ParisPrinciples_EN.pdf.
 - 3 Jacob, Cecilia. “‘Children and Armed Conflict’ and the Field of Security Studies.” *Critical Studies on Security* 3, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 14–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21624887.2015.1014675>.
 - 4 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, “The Six Grave Violations Against Children During Armed Conflict: The Legal Foundation”, Children and justice, working paper No 1 (2009): 11, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/WorkingPaper-1_SixGraveViolationsLegalFoundation.pdf

socio-economic and political environment of post-conflict states. These operations also serve as grounds to monitor and report violations and irregularities that need to be controlled.

The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the agenda on Women, Peace, and Security reveals that they are intended to be strategic frameworks for conducting more effective and sustainable peace negotiations, peacekeeping missions, and conflict resolution interventions by the international community.⁵ They encompass a range of complex issues, including judicial and legal reform, security sector reform, formal and informal peace negotiations, peacekeeping, political participation, and protection from sexual violence in armed conflict.⁶ This was also in response to the bias and limited representation of women in global peace processes.

Gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations does not only improve upon the services and results of the mission, but also influences the political and socio-economic status of the host state and population.⁷ The impact of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations on the reduction of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) has been established by many studies⁸ but there is limited empirical evidence of the impact of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations on the prevention of child recruitment and use in armed conflicts.

How has Resolution 1325 influenced the role of men and women in peacekeeping operations? How does the inclusion of women in peacekeeping contribute to the fight against the recruitment and use of child soldiers? What are the challenges and the way forward?

This paper seeks to contribute to the advocacy for the inclusion of more women in peacekeeping operations by outlining their role in the prevention of recruitment and use of child soldiers, a role that has been undermined for many years.

5 Françoise Nduwimana, "United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security Understanding the Implications, Fulfilling the Obligations", UN Women, September 9, 2005, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/cdrom/documents/Background_Paper_Africa.pdf

6 Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam, *Women and Gender perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison*, 1st ed. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019, 10.

7 *Women in Peacekeeping: The Power to Empower*. New York: United Nations, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAuFQj9xBYc>.

8 Vasu Gounden, "Gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping", *ACCORD: Conflict Trends 2* (2013): 20. <https://media.africaportal.org/documents/ACCORD-Conflict-Trends-2013-2.pdf>; Kreft, Anne-Kathrin. "The Gender Mainstreaming Gap: Security Council Resolution 1325 and UN Peacekeeping Mandates." *International Peacekeeping 24*, no. 1 (January 2017): 132–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2016.1195267>.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING: ANALYSIS AND FRAMEWORK

A gender mainstreaming approach in peacekeeping is an approach to policy-making that takes into account both women's and men's interests and concerns. Although gender mainstreaming is considered as a tool for achieving gender equality, it plays an important role in responding to the situations of both men and women in different cultural, religious and ethnic settings. Gender mainstreaming, therefore, enables both men and women to play their individual and specific roles within the cultural, religious and ethnic values in the peacekeeping environment. It considers the focus on creating a working environment in which female peacekeepers will be integrated.⁹ Gender mainstreaming must also seek to address specific needs of both men and women, which include providing uniforms and body armours in the right sizes.¹⁰

Authors like Dorota Gierycz¹¹ use biological explanations to claim that women are more peaceful than men by nature and therefore more equal gender relations will result in a higher degree of peace. Additionally, Heland and Kristensen argue¹² that women's contribution in peacekeeping operations can be analysed at the internal level where women can positively influence social relations within the operation, and the external dimension which relates to their contact with the local population. The progressive recognition of the role of women in the peacekeeping process must be consolidated with a review of policies to ensure a gender-sensitive approach in all levels of peacekeeping. This policy review framework must be supported by the adoption of structures to promote gender equalities.

The Council of Europe considers gender mainstreaming as a multi-stage cycle, which includes defining, planning, implementing and checking (monitoring and evaluating).¹³ This cycle requires constant policy evaluation and updating to respond to the evolving challenges and needs of both men and women. Gender mainstreaming analyses therefore requires the provision of the necessary data and information to integrate a gender perspective into peacekeeping policies and programmes.¹⁴ This will precede an effective gender mainstreaming

9 Wilén, Nina. "What's the 'Added Value' of Male Peacekeepers? (Or – Why We Should Stop Instrumentalising Female Peacekeepers' Participation)." Brussels: Egmont: Royal Institute for International Relations, February 13, 2020. <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/whats-the-added-value-of-male-peacekeepers/>.

10 Wilén, "What's the added value of male peacekeepers?"

11 Gierycz, Dorota. "Women, Peace and the United Nations: Beyond Beijing." In *Gender, Peace and Conflict*, edited by Inger Skjelsbæk and Dan Smith, 14–31. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220290.n2>.

12 Anita Helland and Anita Kristensen, *Women in peace operations, Women and armed conflicts- A study for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 1999, p83.

13 European Institute for Gender Equality. "What Is Gender Mainstreaming." Gender mainstreaming, n.d. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>.

14 *DPKO/DFS Guidelines: Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military*

process in identifying the differences and specific roles of men and women in a given position and society.

THE RHETORIC AND REALITIES OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN UN PEACEKEEPING

Evolution in efforts to include women in peacebuilding processes has been remarkable since the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1325.¹⁵ The shift in focus on women as victims of conflicts to participants in peacebuilding was emphasised in The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, adopted in 2000. This resolution focuses on the protection, inclusion and representation of women in decision-making processes at all levels in both national and international institutions. This resolution highlights the indisputable roles of women in conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict resolution, and in the global efforts for sustainable peace. This resolution exposes the contribution of both men and women in the peacebuilding process instead of the one-sided discourse that focuses on men.

Intentionally or otherwise, women in leadership positions in field missions are seen as role models for women within peace operations-both within the mission and to the host country. Many women managers in field missions hire other women, purposefully recruiting them, supporting those in junior positions, and demonstrating a commitment to mentor their careers.¹⁶ Furthermore, when women are visible in the mission, particularly in senior positions, an example is set for women's post-war participation in the host country in political, economic, and even military roles.¹⁷

After the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, there have been remarkable changes in the gender context of both the mandates for UN peacekeeping operations and the implementation of the mandates. Previous research has identified that the gender content in UNPKO mandates has increased after the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, although its implementation seems selective.¹⁸ These changes influence the gender dimensions in mission mandates, staffing and policy processes. Progressive improvements have been made by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPO) regarding gender mainstreaming in

in Peacekeeping Operations. New York: United Nations, 2010, https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dpko_dfs_gender_military_perspective.pdf

- 15 United Nations. "Resolution 1325 (2000)." New York: United Nations Security Council, 2000. [http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000))
- 16 Pampell Conaway and Jolynn Shoemaker, "Women in United Nations Peace Operations: Increasing the Leadership Opportunities," *Women In International Security*, July 2008. <https://www.resdal.org/ultimos-documentos/women-peaceoperations.pdf>
- 17 Conaway and Shoemaker, "Women in UN peace operations".
- 18 Kreft, "The gender mainstreaming gap."

peace support operations. Gender considerations now influence the process of deployment for missions, pre-deployment and in-mission trainings as well as the adoption of mission policies. For instance, “Previously, if a Member State chose to rotate members out after six months, the cost incurred had to be borne by the Member State as the UN policy caters for one rotation every 12 months at the cost of the United Nations. However, according to a recently-introduced policy, women peacekeepers with children under the age of seven are able to deploy for a period of six months instead of the usual 12 months and be repatriated at the expense of the UN.”¹⁹ Despite the practical changes that have been brought in UN peacekeeping after the adoption of Resolution 1325, the overall impact of the resolution has been considered as modest and unsystematic by authors like Bell and O’Rourke.²⁰

Women constituted about 1% of the total deployed personnel in UN peacekeeping missions before the adoption of the landmark Resolution 1325. This increased to 3% of military personnel and 10% of police personnel by 2014.²¹ In 2020, out of approximately 95,000 peacekeepers, women constitute 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units in UN Peacekeeping missions.²² Women now hold leadership positions in the UN and UN peacekeeping now deploys women as military observers, troops and staff officers who engage in patrols, operations planning, clearing minefields, offering medical assistance and the protection of civilians in general. In the UN police, women serve as individual officers and members of formed police units who contribute to promoting rule of law, justice administration and reinforcing governmental institutions in peacekeeping theatres.²³ The emergence of all-female police units has also been recorded.²⁴

2014 recorded the appointment of the first female to serve as a force commander in a UN peacekeeping operation. Major General Lund of Norway was appointed as the force commander in the UN peacekeeping force in Cyprus on 12th May 2014. These kinds of

19 Bintou Keita, “Women in peacekeeping: an operational imperative,” UN Peacekeeping, October 14, 2018, <https://medium.com/@UNPeacekeeping/women-in-peacekeeping-an-operational-imperative-24d4e9a86250>

20 Bell, Christine, and Catherine O’Rourke. “Peace Agreements or Pieces of Paper? The Impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on Peace Processes and Their Agreements.” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (October 2010): 941–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002058931000062X>.

21 Keita, “Women in peacekeeping.”

22 United Nations. “Women in Peacekeeping.” United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d. <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>.

23 United Nations Police Division, Office of Rule of Law and Security Institutions, and Department of Peacekeeping Operations. “On Duty for Peace: 2008-2012.” New York: United Nations, 2013. https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/12_53015_unpol_booklet.pdf.

24 Pruitt, Lesley J. “All-Female Police Contingents: Feminism and the Discourse of Armed Protection.” *International Peacekeeping* 20, no. 1 (February 2013): 67–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2012.761836>.

examples demonstrate how more attention is now being accorded to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and the awareness creation on the role of women in the reconstruction of post-conflict countries.²⁵

Despite these remarkable improvements in the quest for gender equality in UN peacekeeping missions, there are some gaps and challenges that slow down efforts to bridge the existing gender inequalities. The limited number of women in the troop/police contributing countries is a fundamental challenge to increasing the representation of women for mission deployment by the UN. The implementation of UN policies in member states depends largely on the capacity and willingness of individual states.²⁶ There exist many discrepancies between the political commitments of states and the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies. These include the lack of political will in some states, the absence of accurate accountability mechanisms and a general stereotyped attitude towards the inclusion of women.²⁷ Patriarchal norms also impede the empowerment of women in many countries. Girls have limited access to education and job opportunities, which in turn reduces the number of qualified candidates to be presented for representation.

Unfavourable living conditions in missions constitute obstacles for women deployed in peacekeeping.²⁸ The urgency in the process of deployment usually requires the establishment of makeshift facilities which may not meet the physiological needs of women. Such arrangements may increase the vulnerability of female peacekeepers and expose them to contracting infections to the detriment of their health. This is confirmed by Tidbeed-Lundholm²⁹ who argues that women are less likely to be deployed in the early stages of missions because new missions are associated with high levels of operational uncertainty, which is ultimately a type of risk.³⁰

25 Keita, "Women in peacekeeping."

26 Renata Giannini and Lotte Vermeij, "Women, Peace and Security Gender Challenges within UN Peacekeeping Missions," Policy Brief, Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, May 2014, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183155/PB-5-Vermeij-Giannini.pdf>

27 Rounaq Jahan, *Strengthening national mechanisms for gender equality and the empowerment of women: A Global Synthesis Study*, New York: United Nations, 2010, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/TechnicalCooperation/GLOBAL_SYNTHESIS_REPORT_Dec%202010.pdf

28 Vermeij, Lotte. "Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations." New York: International Peace Institute, October 2020. <https://www.ipinst.org/2020/10/taboo-and-stigmas-facing-military-women-in-un-peace-operations>.

29 Tidblad-Lundholm, Kajsa. "When Are Women Deployed? Operational Uncertainty and Deployment of Female Personnel to UN Peacekeeping." *International Peacekeeping* 27, no. 4 (2020): 673–702. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2020.1760717>.

30 Vermeij, "Woman First, Soldier Second."

Physical fitness and some other minimum requirement tests for deployment will continue to hinder the participation of women in peacekeeping operations. These requirements include driving skills experience in the recruitment process for peacekeeping missions. Due to patriarchal norms preventing women in many contexts from having vehicles, women can face additional barriers when attempting to pass the driving tests and therefore they are dropped off the recruitment phase.³¹ Some of these limitations justify the increase in female civilian participation in UN peacekeeping over the uniformed female personnel. Gender mainstreaming efforts must capitalize on the specific abilities of both men and women in order to play an effective role in the protection of children from recruitment and use by armed groups.

THE ROLE OF PEACEKEEPING IN THE PREVENTION OF CHILD RECRUITMENT AND USE IN ARMED CONFLICTS.

Peacekeeping operations contribute to draining the recruitment pool for armed organizations. They serve as grounds to professionally handle child soldiers to be freed and reinserted into their communities. They equally contribute to the promotion of children's rights. The Security Council has requested that UN missions increasingly play a role in certain aspects of child protection, especially in monitoring and reporting and in dialogue with parties to conflict for commitments to protect children.³² The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is committed to the protection of children affected by armed conflicts. The department prioritizes efforts to mainstream the issues of children in armed conflicts within UN peacekeeping operations. Within peacekeeping operations, all personnel receive training on child rights and child protection to make them aware of the concerns that affect children in conflict. Through that training, all of them become credible advocates for children.³³

The Secretary-General's Action Plan for the implementation of the monitoring, reporting and compliance mechanism under Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005)³⁴ stipulates that where there is a peacekeeping mission, the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) Task Force is coordinated and co-chaired by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General

31 UNDPD, Standard Operating Procedure (Revised) Assessment for Mission Service of Individual Police Officers, New York: United Nations, 2019, 19, https://police.un.org/sites/default/files/sop_2019.pdf

32 UNICEF, *Guidelines for Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave violations against children in situations of armed conflicts*, New York: United Nations, 2014, https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MRM_Guidelines_-_5_June_20141.pdf

33 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Department of Peacekeeping Operations. "Child Protection in United Nations Peacekeeping." New York: United Nations, Spring 2011. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/peacekeeping/en/child_protection%20in%20un_peacekeeping2011.pdf.

34 UNICEF, *Guidelines for Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism*

and a UNICEF representative, with the former serving as the reporting conduit to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG).

Peacekeeping missions also make significant contributions to the collection and verification of information on violations.³⁵ These tasks are assured by the Child Protection Advisers (CPAs) in missions, in collaboration with other mission components, notably, human rights, UN police and military observers, to ensure the mission's effective contribution to the implementation of the mechanism. CPAs conduct systematic monitoring and reporting as well as advocacy on the prevention of grave violations against children.³⁶ They also act as the secretariat for the preparation of specific reports required by the Security Council under the mechanism established under Security Council Resolution 1612. Within the mission, CPAs serve as the technical level representatives of SRSGs and as the primary interlocutors with child protection partners. They negotiate agreements for the release of children, conduct trainings on child protection, coordinate with UNICEF and other relevant actors and also advocate for child protection needs.³⁷

The Military Child Protection Officer also advises the Battalion Commander on all issues related to the protection of children, liaise between child protection actors and the battalion, establishes an alert system to transmit information received on any of the six grave violations through command channel and also to the child protection unit/section, coordinates with Military Child Protection Focal Point at Force/Mission HQ for the prevention of all forms of exploitation of children including child labour and sexual exploitation.³⁸

Another important role of peacekeeping missions that contributes to the protection of children is the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR). These processes are crucial for conflict-affected countries to overcome the consequences of war and to facilitate "humanitarian assistance, restoration of civil authority and promotion of economic growth and development."³⁹

35 Department of Peacekeeping Operations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and UNICEF. "Leader, Roles and Responsibilities." MRM Guidelines, 2014. https://www.mrmtools.org/mrm/mrmtk_1113.htm.

36 Office of the SRSG, et al., "Child protection."

37 Office of the SRSG, et al., "Child protection," 17-18.

38 Department of Peacekeeping Operations. "UN Military Specialised Training Materials on Child Protection Module 4: Roles and Responsibilities of Peacekeeping Mission Components and External Partners." New York: United Nations, 2018. <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/10878/pdf/Module-4-Presentation.pdf>.

39 United Nations Mission In Liberia, Office of the Gender Advisor, "Gender Mainstreaming In Peacekeeping Operations Liberia 2003 – 2009: Best Practices Report." United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), September 2010, https://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/wps-pk_gender-mainstreamingpkoliberiabestpracticesreport_unmil_sept2010_0.pdf

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN UN PEACEKEEPING ON THE PREVENTION OF RECRUITMENT AND USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The importance of gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations has been widely recognized by the UNSCR 1325 and other subsequent resolutions. Gender mainstreaming creates awareness of the distinct roles of both men and women during peacekeeping operations. Although both men and women can play the same roles in peacekeeping to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers, there are some roles that are specifically better attributed to the nature of women.⁴⁰ This includes the role of female peacekeepers in intelligence gathering and sensitizing communities against child enrollment into armed groups.⁴¹

Female peacekeepers are easy to be approached by community members and play an important role in gathering information for early warning indicators on the recruitment and use of child soldiers.⁴² Access women have in the communities also enables them to create awareness and sensitize women on the role they have to play to prevent the recruitment and use of their children as soldiers. Major General Lund, the first appointed female force commander for a UN mission pointed this out as one important advantage that female peacekeepers have: “Being a female, from my recent deployment in Afghanistan, I had access to 100 percent of the population, not only 50 percent.”⁴³ Access to the local population becomes particularly relevant when considering the current nature of conflicts in which UN peacekeepers find themselves.⁴⁴

Access to the local population is vital in the prevention of child recruitment and use by armed groups. This enables the mission to ensure comprehensive intelligence gathering. According to Major General Lund, “Accurate intelligence is vital for peacekeeping operations. Mission leaders and Force Commanders need to be able to map threats and identify armed groups and their leaders for effective planning. They need to analyse their types, motivations, behaviours and goals, and understand the context in which these armed groups evolve and operate.”⁴⁵

In an interview, Brigadier General Zewdu Kiros Gebrekidan, who was the Deputy Force Commander of the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) in 2016, indicated that:

40 Bradley, Harriet. *Gender*. Second edition. Key Concepts Series. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2013, 254.

41 Alexandra Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations needs more female peacekeepers,” United Nations University, 2014, <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/why-the-united-nations-needs-more-female-peace-keepers>

42 Yolande Bouka and Romi Sigsworth, “Women in the military in Africa: Kenya case study,” *Institute for Security Studies Issue Brief*, 7 (2016): 2, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ear7.pdf>

43 Ivanovic, “Why the United Nations.”

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

*Women in peacekeeping are very important, because in field missions and conflict areas, the most vulnerable people are women and children. Female soldiers are close to women and children, so in many missions the female soldiers protect these groups because they easily understand the female victims' problems, and children's challenges too. After understanding their problems easily, they communicate with women and help them. In some areas, especially Islamic areas, or in Islamic communities, women cannot communicate directly with men. They communicate and interact with female soldiers with whom they have a close relationship, and so they can communicate about their problems. So, female soldiers in missions have a great role: to help the victims, especially women and children.*⁴⁶

Alexandra Ivanovic argues that female soldiers do not face the same cultural restrictions as their male counterparts, and are able to gain information from women and children in their operations through a study in Cambodia, Kosovo, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, Liberia and the DRC.⁴⁷

Another specific role of women in peacekeeping to prevent the recruitment and use of child soldiers is through the protection of children in refugee camps and shelters for displaced persons. These are places where children are vulnerable to be recruited by armed groups.⁴⁸ The protection of children in these camps and shelters through monitoring and reporting mechanisms does not only prevent the abuse of vulnerable children, but also secures them from recruitment into armed groups. As recounted by Jacqueline O'Neill, when researchers in Sierra Leone asked predominantly male ex-combatants to identify those who played a significant role in helping them reintegrate, 55% named women in the community. Only 20% cited community or traditional leaders, while 32% cited international aid workers.⁴⁹ Respondents then said, "community women—including some working through civil society organizations—provided guidance, shared meager resources, and, perhaps most important, facilitated their skills training and education by providing childcare, clothes, and food."⁵⁰

46 UN News, "INTERVIEW: Female peacekeepers connect better with women and children – UNISFA Deputy Force Commander," Peace and Security, October 31, 2016, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/10/544212-interview-female-peacekeepers-connect-better-women-and-children-unisfa-deputy#.WCHwFmsrKM9>

47 Ivanovic, "Why the United Nations."

48 Lischer, Sarah Kenyon. "War, Displacement, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers." Pittsburgh: Ford Institute for Human Security, 2006. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/28058/2006_4_War_Displacement.pdf.

49 Jacqueline O'Neill, "Engaging women in Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR): Insights for Columbia," Inclusive Security, March 31, 2015, <https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/publication/engaging-women-in-disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration-ddr-insights-for-columbia/>

50 Ibid.

THE WAY FORWARD: DEVELOPING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS THROUGH GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS.

Gender mainstreaming plays an integral role in the success of peace support operations. The distinct roles of men and women in the reconstruction of post-conflict states must be prioritized to ensure sustainable peace. The sensitive nature of post-conflict environments and the risk of conflict recurrence requires a strategic and inclusive peacekeeping operation to protect the vulnerable victims of war. Focus on gender mainstreaming will improve upon the protection of children and facilitate the identification of early warning indicators of child recruitment and use by armed groups, as well as prevent the relapse of conflict. The integration of a gender perspective in all phases of peacekeeping is key to the prevention of child recruitment and use as soldiers.

The protection of women and children in armed conflicts also involves the prosecution of perpetrators of violence against women and children. This process is vital in preventing the recruitment and use of child soldiers because it unveils those involved in the violation of children's rights, the organizations or freelancers involved, the strategies and processes linked to their activities. Gender mainstreaming in Judicial, legal and correctional systems and processes will improve upon the gathering of evidence and the conviction of children to witness against members of armed forces or groups accused of enlisting and using child soldiers. The role of women in both judicial and non-judicial mechanisms will help manage the expectations of children through their witnesses.⁵¹ This will contribute to ending impunity and deterring the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

Integrating a gender perspective in the negotiation process for child release from armed groups and in all phases of the DDR process will also project signals that can be capitalized on to prevent the recruitment and use of other children as soldiers. DDR programmes are important steps in the reintegration of ex-child soldiers back into society. The success or failure of this process can contribute to the prevention or re-emergence of conflicts.⁵² The needs of both boys and girls must be addressed throughout the process to ensure ex-child soldiers do not consider returning to armed groups. Gender mainstreaming will therefore enable both men and women to play their specific roles to manage the anxiety, physical, and psychological needs of all ex-child soldiers to be reintegrated into their communities.

51 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. "Children and Justice During and in the Aftermath of Armed Conflict." New York: United Nations, September 2011. https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/WorkingPaper-3_Children-and-Justice.pdf.

52 United Nations. "Preventative Role of DDR/CVR." New York: United Nations, n.d. https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/pb_review_thematic_paper_orolsi_ddrs_-_preventative_role_of_ddr_and_cvr-final.pdf.

Ensuring safety in camps and shelters for displaced children is vital, and the role of women in attending to the needs of both girls and boys in these places can reduce their state of vulnerability for recruitment or voluntary enlistment into armed groups.

Emphasis must be put on training more women to facilitate the deployment of female peacekeepers. Specific trainings on child protection and early warning indicators must be mainstreamed in all pre-deployment and in-mission courses.

Finally, individual states must reconsider policies that limit the access of girls to education and the recruitment of women into certain categories of work like the army. The implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and the advocacies for better inclusion and participation of women will be of no effect if women remain unqualified and limited in their capacity to participate.

CONCLUSION

Peace operations serve as a fertile ground to ignite early warning mechanisms against the recruitment and use of child soldiers in armed conflicts. Gender mainstreaming in peace operations facilitates and improves the mechanisms in detecting the indicators of child recruitment and use in regular or irregular armies. The UNSCR 1325 remains an important weapon of peace after two decades in promoting the inclusion, protection, and participation of women in peace processes. Women who face unique vulnerabilities in armed conflicts have specific roles to play in the protection of children and in breaking the cycle of recruitment and use of child soldiers.

A better representation of women can only be attained if the challenges and obstacles that deprive women of education, recognition and acceptance in socio-economic and political spheres are addressed. The implementation of UNSCR 1325 for the past 20 years has revealed that gender inequalities in peace processes can be surmounted only if deliberate efforts are made by individual states and the International community. Ending the vicious cycle of child recruitment and use by armed groups requires a holistic approach that must be gender-sensitive in all phases.

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