GENDER and ARMED CONFLICT

Overview Report

Amani El Jack

BRIDGE (development - gender)
Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1273 606261
Fax: +44 (0) 1273 621202
Email: bridge@ids.ac.uk
Website: http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge/
Amani El Jack (author) is a PhD candidate in Women’s Studies at York University, Toronto, Canada. Her specialist areas include research on gender and small arms and light weapons (SALW). She has been active in the SALIGAD project, which is coordinated by the Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC) and monitors the availability and circulation of SALW in countries in the Horn of Africa that are a part of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). As part of this project, she conducted fieldwork with Sudanese women to determine how gender ideologies have affected the proliferation of SALW in the Sudan. El Jack’s other specialist areas include the gendered implications of development-induced displacement (DID) and human security.

Judy El-Bushra (external advisor) has worked in the field of community development in Africa for 20 years, specialising most recently in research on gender, conflict and development. Her interests include the role of culture, such as theatre, in development and conflict transformation. She was formerly director of the research and policy programme at the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD) and has written extensively on gender and conflict for ACORD, Oxfam and International Alert, among other organisations.

Lata Narayanaswamy (editor) is a researcher within the BRIDGE team. Her research interests include gender inequality and poverty, strategies of grass-roots organisations for tackling the root causes of inequality and poverty and the role of men within the gender and development paradigm.

Emma Bell (editor) is a research and communications officer at BRIDGE. She has authored and edited a number of publications, including reports on gender and globalisation; gender and participation; Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs); HIV/AIDS; and violence against women.

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© Photos by Jenny Matthews. Jenny Matthews is a documentary photographer working with Network Photographers. Since 1982, she has been working on a world wide project looking at Women and War. Many of these photos featured in her book *Women and War*, published by Pluto Press in 2003, and were also part of a photo exhibition in London, UK, co-sponsored by ActionAid on the same theme.

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BRIDGE was set up in 1992 as a specialised gender and development research and information service within the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK. BRIDGE supports gender mainstreaming efforts of policy-makers and practitioners by bridging the gaps between theory, policy and practice with accessible and diverse gender information.

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### Acronyms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ACORD</td>
<td>Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development</td>
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<td>AWAG</td>
<td>Abused Women and Girls</td>
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<td>AWCPD</td>
<td>African Women’s Committee on Peace and Development</td>
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<td>AWID</td>
<td>Association for Women’s Rights in Development</td>
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<td>BICC</td>
<td>Bonn International Center for Conversion</td>
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<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee</td>
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<td>DEVAW</td>
<td>Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women</td>
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<td>DID</td>
<td>Development-Induced Displacement</td>
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<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development, UK</td>
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<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Council</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>Gender-Based Violence</td>
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<td>GTZ</td>
<td>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammensarbeit/German Technical Co-operation</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced People</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>NAWOCOL</td>
<td>National Women’s Commission of Liberia</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NRA</td>
<td>National Resistance Army</td>
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<td>NURC</td>
<td>National Unity and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<td>RAWA</td>
<td>Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan</td>
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<td>SALW</td>
<td>Small Arms and Light Weapons</td>
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<td>SFOR</td>
<td>Stabilising Forces</td>
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<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually Transmitted Infection</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNTAET</td>
<td>United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor</td>
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<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armed conflict negatively affects women and men and results in gender-specific disadvantages, particularly for women, that are not always recognised or addressed by the mainstream, gender-blind understandings of conflict and reconstruction. Gender inequality reflects power imbalances in social structures that exist in pre-conflict periods and are exacerbated by armed conflict and its aftermath. The acceptance of gender stereotypes is one of the main reasons that such gender blindness persists.

Stereotypical perceptions of roles
Stereotypical interpretations shape and are shaped by social, political, economic, cultural and religious contexts. Armed conflict encourages expectations that men will fight and women will support them on the ‘home front’. The popular perception is that men are soldiers or aggressors and women are wives, mothers, nurses, social workers and sex-workers. It is true that it is primarily men who are conscripted and killed in battle, but women make up the majority of civilian casualties and suffer in their role as caregivers, due to a breakdown of social structures (Byrne 1996). However, women are also combatants, as evidenced in Sri Lanka and Liberia, and men are also victims. These realities have consequences for gender relations, which often go unnoticed and unresolved.

Gendered impacts of armed conflict
The impacts of armed conflict on gender relations are significant. Forced displacement and gender-based violence (GBV) are two examples of impacts that are not inevitable outcomes of armed conflict, but rather are deliberate strategies of war that destabilise families and communities. Physical and sexual violence, particularly towards women and children, occur with greater regularity during and after armed conflict. Women experience rape and forced pregnancy, forced sex work and sexual slavery, often at the hands of ‘peacekeepers’, police or occupying forces, as occurred in Bosnia. Although men are the primary perpetrators of violence towards women and children, it is important to note that men too are subject to victimisation and violence, including sexualised violence.

International laws and institutions
Gender differences are entrenched within public and private institutions that intervene to end armed conflict and build peace (El-Bushra 2000a, Kabeer 1994). International organisations such as the United Nations (UN), governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) vary from ignoring women or taking a gender-blind approach, to treating women stereotypically. Still others look at women without a consideration of women’s relative inequality in the context of gender relations.

Often where the term ‘gender’ is used, the focus still tends to be on women and girls without taking into account the ways in which gender inequality and power imbalances between women and men exacerbate their disadvantage. Impacts of armed conflict such as forced displacement and GBV are not understood as human rights violations, but rather as cultural or private issues that are best left alone. Furthermore, many governments have yet to ratify the international commitments designed to protect the human rights of women and girls during and after armed conflict. Lack of recognition or enforcement prevents any real progress towards gender equality.
Mainstreaming gender concerns into conflict resolution and interventions

Interventions, such as humanitarian assistance and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for ex-combatants, exacerbate gender inequality if they are administered in gender-blind ways. Mainstreaming gender awareness into the structures that govern armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction requires better cooperation between international institutions, states and NGOs. If we are to build more equal post-conflict societies, it is particularly important to involve women’s organisations at the decision-making level in the formation of political and legal structures.

Indeed, the all-encompassing upheaval caused by armed conflict creates the potential to redefine gender relations in the post-conflict period in more gender equitable ways. But without greater support for organisations and interventions that promote gender equality in all sectors, there is a high risk that long-standing patterns of oppression will be re-established.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations:

Take the lead from the local: Interventions need to be based on context-specific evidence about what women and men are doing, and not on stereotypical interpretations of gender roles and relations that presume to know what they should be doing. Interventions should involve local organisations – particularly women’s groups – in decision-making capacities. Outreach and support designed to assist families and communities adjust to shifting gender roles and relations should be assessed on the local level to ensure they are appropriate to the particular community or region. The programmes of states and international organisations must also reflect the concerns and priorities expressed by local populations.

Improve implementation of existing international laws by international institutions and states, particularly in terms of recognition of impacts of armed conflict such as forced displacement, impoverishment and GBV as violations of human rights and not as private, cultural concerns that are unavoidable outcomes of war. Implementation and enforcement of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 would represent a significant step forward.

Increase funding to specialised services that deal with the distinct needs of women and men who suffer violent impacts of armed conflict such as rape and torture. For women, specialised services must include counselling and outreach to manage gynaecological/reproductive health concerns related to rape, forced pregnancy and sex work. More health and counselling services should also be made available for men who move away from masculine, stereotypical gender roles or resist violence and combat and, as a result, become victims of physical and sexual violence.

Involve women and provide gender training: The involvement of women is necessary but does not in itself guarantee that gender concerns will be addressed or that women are automatically gender-aware. Training in identifying and addressing gendered concerns is important for everyone involved in post-conflict reconstruction. Peacekeepers in particular must receive tailored gender training in order to build
trust with communities, as well as to minimise the threat of sexual and physical violence from peacekeepers themselves.

Without a proper understanding of how gender roles and relations are shifting, we jeopardise the goal of a sustainable and peaceful post-conflict society. Greater cooperation is needed between all the actors involved in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction to address the power imbalances that lead to gender inequality. Without significant steps towards gender equality, there can be no real or meaningful peace.

Executive summary written by Lata Narayanaswamy.

‘To the railway station – the only hive of activity – in the midst of desolation, the surreal scene of 326 women rebuilding a station which has no trains … They are mostly widows, some of whose husbands have been taken to filtration camps. Ask why they are doing it. They reply, so that the city will exist again’.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why study gender and armed conflict?

Armed conflict exacerbates inequalities in gender relations that existed in the pre-conflict period. This study explores the impact of armed conflict on gender relations, analysing the distinct ways that both women and men are affected. It highlights the gender-specific disadvantages experienced by women and men that are denied by conventional interpretations of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Interventions must account for the diverse realities of women and men, who may simultaneously play the roles of activists and parents, soldiers and victims. Recognising and addressing this diversity is vital to establishing more sustainable, gender-equal societies in the aftermath of conflict. Women experience significant disadvantage in the course of armed conflict, but it does not necessarily follow that men are always the perpetrators and therefore the winners, and women the losers. This report shows that both women and men experience armed conflict in distinct ways that in turn may alter gender relations.

The inequality that women experience during and after armed conflict in all societies derives from dominant understandings of gender roles. ‘Gender’ refers to the perceptions of appropriate behaviour, appearance and attitude for women and men that arise from social and cultural expectations. In the context of armed conflict, the perception persists of women as wives, mothers and nurturers, whereas men are cast as aggressors and soldiers. Although women and men do often assume these traditional parts, there is a tendency in the mainstream literature to exaggerate the extent to which they play stereotypical gender roles in armed conflict. The reality is that women are also active as soldiers and aggressors, while men may be both victims as well as combatants.

Gender relations, then, refers to the ways women and men interact. A key focus of this report is to explore the impact of armed conflict on gender relations in terms of how power dynamics between women and men are affected by the distinct types of disadvantage that armed conflict imposes. Existing analyses of armed conflict and post-conflict resolution are weak in various ways – some ignore women while others take a gender-blind approach or define the role of women in stereotypical ways. Still others look at women without considering gender relations.

Where the term ‘gender’ appears, its usage often implies that women (and girls) are predominantly ‘victims’ who experience ‘special’ circumstances and have ‘special’ needs, while men are depicted as the ‘perpetrators’. But the term ‘gender’ should not be used in such a limited fashion. Rather, it should allow us to understand that women and men function in a variety of roles – stereotypical or otherwise – and to examine how changes in these roles affect gender relations.

The destabilisation of gender relations that frequently accompanies armed conflict and its aftermath also opens up potential opportunities. Following the upheaval of war, we have a clean slate to start again and ask some fundamental questions about what kind of society we want and how gender relations will
function within it. In other words, it is a time when ‘social upheaval might open a door to the changes we hope for’ (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002: 11). The reality is, however, that sometimes these changes are not forthcoming, as we will see later on in this report.

In order for social upheaval to lead to more equitable relationships between men and women, it is advisable to first perform a gender analysis. This allows us to identify the nature of existing power relations between men and women in a particular society and to understand how conflict and its aftermath affect these relations. It also highlights the fact that marginalised groups who do not readily conform to female and male stereotypes, such as male pacifists or women in the military, experience conflict in diverse ways.

A mother may be a breadwinner and an activist, and this engagement in both stereotypical and non-stereotypical roles has consequences for gender relations in her household. Interventions designed to assist her that are not gender-sensitive may assume, for instance, that her needs are limited to those of a mother. This type of interpretation denies that people, women in particular, take on multiple roles and responsibilities and experience a wide range of negative impacts in times of social upheaval.

A gender analysis allows a more nuanced understanding of how women fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously affects gender relations in the household and in society. The language of gender moves away from stereotypical interpretations of what women and men should do and what they should need, to accepting and supporting what women and men are doing and what they do need.

This report addresses the following concerns:

- **Intersections of gender and armed conflict.** Section two provides an overview of the types and stages of armed conflict. The analysis is continued in Section three, which covers the gendered dynamics of armed conflict. In Section four, we look at the gendered impacts of armed conflict, illustrated with the examples of gender-based violence (GBV) and forced displacement.

- **Tools to mainstream gender.** Section five presents and critiques the theoretical frameworks, international laws and other guidance currently used to implement more gender-sensitive approaches to armed conflict.

- **Making the case for gender-sensitive approaches.** Using the critiques from the previous chapters, Section six examines the consequences for gender relations of humanitarian assistance, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and peacekeeping/peace-building, rounding out the case for a more gender-sensitive approach to all aspects of conflict and post-conflict resolution/peace-building.

- **Strategies for improvement.** Section seven provides an overview of some of the practical tools available to mainstream gender into the institutions that govern armed conflict and its aftermath. Three examples of successful gender mainstreaming programmes provide insights into how mainstreaming may be achieved in practice. Finally, this section looks at how women’s organisations have responded to the lack of attention paid to the gendered dimensions of armed conflict. Section eight offers conclusions and recommendations for action.
2. Understanding armed conflict

2.1 Causes of armed conflict
The causes of armed conflict are often linked with attempts to control economic resources such as oil, metals, diamonds, drugs or contested territorial boundaries. In countries such as Colombia and the Sudan, for example, oilfield exploration has caused and intensified the impoverishment of women and men. Entire communities have been targeted and killed, displaced and/or marginalised in the name of oil development. The control of resources, like the exercise of power, is gendered. Those who do not have power or resources – groups that are disproportionately, though by no means exclusively, made up of women – do not usually start wars.

Unresolved struggles over resources, combined with the severe impact of displacement, impoverishment and increased militarisation in zones of conflict, serve to prolong existing armed conflicts. Moreover, conflict tends to cause and/or perpetuate inequalities between ethnic groups and discrimination against marginalised groups of women and men, thereby paving the way for the outbreak of future conflicts.

Armed conflict as the world moves into the 21st century is growing in its complexity. At the international level, inequality in the distribution of power and resources has become more pronounced. Coupled with structural inequalities between and within nation-states, this disparity has led to more regional conflict, as well as an escalation of international armed conflicts. Furthermore, the nature of warfare itself has dramatically changed due to the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons technology. Nations have placed greater emphasis on increasing and/or reinforcing military strength. This worsens existing constraints on women’s rights, which in turn exacerbates inequalities in gender relations.

At the same time as increased militarisation has further limited the rights of women within countries, gender equality has been co-opted at the international level to justify military intervention into sovereign nations. The liberation of women from the oppressive Taliban regime, for example, constituted one of the justifications for the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. But in the five years prior to the invasion, there was a consistent lack of regard for the plight of women, despite attempts by both local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to draw attention to the violation of Afghan women’s human rights.

In reality, military interventions are NEVER the answer to resolving gender inequalities. Armed conflict and its aftermath either cause gender inequality or exacerbate existing gender inequalities, which are further compounded by divisions on the basis of race, class, caste, sexuality, religion or age.

**War and justice for women … like oil and water**
War exacerbates women’s suffering. In their roles as mothers, nurturers and caregivers, women invariably account for a large proportion of civilian casualties. Women in Afghanistan, for example, have constituted the majority of civilians injured or killed as a result of the mis-targeted bombing of houses,
hospitals and other civilian structures (Malakunas 2001). The destruction of resources and the poisoning of farms have endangered all civilians' lives (Edwards 2001). Furthermore, even though women assume non-stereotypical roles as combatants, policy-makers and/or heads of households, attempts to have their voices heard in official processes are often dismissed. Few resources are made available to address and prevent gender-specific violations such as rape and forced marriage.

2.2 Types of armed conflict
Distinctions between international/inter-state and national/civil conflicts have been made by a number of scholars (Byrne 1996). Recent insights suggest, however, that contextualising these distinctions is critical to ensure gendered impacts are fully considered. It is important to recognise national/civil conflicts are not only internal but transnational in nature, insofar as they take place within a particular international context.

Regardless of the type of conflict, the concept of men going to war at the ‘front’ and women staying safely at home with children and the elderly does not reflect the reality of war. In fact, the distinction between ‘conflict’ and ‘safe’ zones, whereby the home and workplace are viewed as safe, is a long-held myth, and has been problematised by feminists for some time (Byrne 1996; Cockburn 1998; El Jack 2002; Giles and Hyndman forthcoming). In conflict zones, war comes to women as they work on their land. War targets their homes – abducting, displacing and/or killing them along with their children (El Jack 2002).

2.3 Stages of conflict
As Byrne (1996: 8) states, conflict may be said to have the following stages:
1. Run-up to conflict (pre-conflict)
2. The conflict itself
3. Peace process (or conflict resolution)
4. Reconstruction and reintegration (or post-conflict)

Types of gender inequality and appropriate responses to particular gender-specific needs differ depending on the stage of armed conflict. This breakdown allows us to hypothesise about the likely impacts at a given stage and design an intervention that takes account of the gendered dimension. The potential for designing detailed and tailored responses, however, is limited by the shifting boundaries of armed conflict itself. As Cockburn and Zarkov (2002: 10) tell us:

…war can surely never be said to start and end at a clearly defined moment. Rather, it seems part of a continuum of conflict, expressed now in armed force, now in economic sanctions or political pressure. A time of supposed peace may later come to be called ‘the pre-war period’. During the fighting of a war, unseen by the foot soldiers under fire, peace processes are often already at work. A time of postwar reconstruction, later, may be re-designated as an *inter bellum* – a mere pause between wars.
An additional concern in this breakdown is that the tendency to consider conflict and post-conflict reconstruction as real, identifiable and autonomous stages creates a conceptual divide. What constitutes peace from a feminist perspective may differ from mainstream views because for many, particularly women, peace does not simply mean the end of the armed conflict, but a time to address the structural power imbalances that caused the conflict in the first place. What is required, then, is a more nuanced interpretation of these stages, where interventions that address gender inequality in armed conflict reflect the fact that events occur simultaneously and stages overlap.
3. Gender dynamics of armed conflict

3.1 Gender relations and conflict
Gender relations are typically characterised by unequal access to, or distribution of, power. Given that gender discrimination is so prevalent, it influences other dynamics of armed conflict. More specifically, gender analysis in armed conflict highlights the differences between women and men in terms of their gendered activities, their needs, their acquisition and control of resources and their access to decision-making processes in post-conflict situations (UNDP 2002).

Men of combat age are most often the ones who are conscripted and therefore killed or injured during battle. Women, however, are the main victims of war. This is either directly as fatalities and casualties or indirectly through the breakdown of family and community structures (Byrne 1996).

3.2 Women and conflict
Women in war zones may face contradictory demands from government and society. On one hand, the nation calls upon women to participate in nationalist struggles in their capacity as members of the national collective. In various war zones, women have been mobilised in armed conflict because their support, labour and services have been needed. At the same time, the construction of women as ‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of the culture’ within nationalist liberation movements has often constrained their activism in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes (Stasiulis 1999).

The construction of the identities of women in their gendered roles as ‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of the culture’ implies they are ‘victims’, thus justifying the intensified use of power and violence to ‘protect’ them. Often there is a perception that this ‘protection’ has failed, as is the case where public acts of physical and sexual violence such as rape occur. Sexual crimes, which disproportionately affect women, may be carried out in full view of family and community, thereby rendering the victims as ‘tainted’ and unworthy of protection (Bennett et al. 1995).

No sex please, we’re fighting!
A notable exception to the exclusion of and discrimination against female combatants occurred in Tigray, a province of Ethiopia. The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was formed in 1975 to fight for a democratic Ethiopian state. They actively encouraged women to join the fighting. Education for women and child-care were provided to facilitate their participation. Sexual relations were banned with the aim of concentrating energies on the struggle. Exceptions were later made to allow for marriage and children. One woman recounts: ‘The no-marriage law had a positive role: between men and women there was talk, not sexual activity. A man would look at a woman in relation to her job, not in relation to whom she goes with’. (Adapted from Bennett et al. 1995: 9)

Examples of women’s initiatives to achieve peace are often cited as evidence that women are innately nurturing in contrast to men, who are characterised as innately aggressive and warlike. Yet research by
feminists in the North and the South has challenged the so-called peaceful nature of women by examining their involvement in national liberation struggles, their direct and/or indirect support of armed conflicts and their contributions to war and militarism generally (Babiker 1999; Byrne 1996; Cockburn 2002; El-Bushra 2000; Moser and Clark 2001; Kelly 2000).

**Women as aggressors**
The stereotype of women as innately nurturing does not always reflect experience on the ground. The abundant examples of women as active combatants or supporters of ‘oppressive’ states show assumptions about the behaviour of women or men can be very shortsighted and naive:

- Women became members of the Nazi party in large numbers and served in the extermination camps.
- Pinochet’s regime in Chile in the 1970s received support from middle-class women.
- Protestant and Catholic working-class women have been present in mobs in Northern Ireland.
- Women have served in, as well as rallied around, the US military.
- There are instances where women have condoned the use of rape against ‘enemies’ and those constructed as ‘not proper women’. (Adapted from Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank 2000: 12-13)

Whether in their traditional and perhaps stereotypical capacity as wives and mothers, or in their roles as aggressors and supporters of conflict, women continue to experience discrimination, due to the unequal power structures that govern their relationships with men.

**3.3 Men and conflict**
Women and men experience violence differently during and after conflict, in their capacities as both ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 7). Sexual violence is largely inflicted on women, but men and boys are also raped during armed conflicts in a form of violence designed to shatter male power. Yet even when there has been documentation of men’s experiences as victims of abuse on the battlefield, men continue to be described as ‘masculine heroes’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 3). Zarkov (2001) argues that in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the refusal to identify men as victims of sexual violence during armed conflict was rationalised in terms of power relations during war as well as in the subsequent nation-building process, which dictated who could be labelled victims of sexual abuse. In other words, a woman can be a victim but a man is never a victim, which is a denial of one of the gendered realities of armed conflict.

It is not only in terms of sexual violence that men suffer. Men also experience human rights abuses that are different from but equally unjust to those afflicting women, whether as prisoners of war, as soldiers or as people who diverge from gender norms (e.g. homosexuals, male pacifists). Men are also directly targeted in armed conflicts and they make up the majority of casualties caused by small arms and light weapons (SALW). The increasing number of households headed by women in conflict zones is an illustration of men’s specific vulnerability (El Jack 2002).

**Masculinity and armed conflict: Do the two go hand in hand?**
The connection between ‘masculinity’, militarisation and armed conflict is significant. Feminist analyses identify military structures as patriarchal, male institutions run by and for men, based not on 'biological
traits of men but … on cultural constructions of “manliness” (Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998: 5). In many cultural contexts, being a ‘proper man’ is also defined by the ability to use a weapon (Jacobs et al. 2000: 11).

Does this mean that men are inherently violent? NO – male violence directed at other men, women or children is a reflection of ‘masculine expectations’ imposed by societies and reinforced by states keen to manipulate these expectations for their own political ends (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Dolan 2002; Jacobs et al. 2000). Men who feel they are unable to fulfil their ‘masculine’ roles as protectors or aggressors may vent their frustrations on their families. This leads to further violence and a lack of understanding of personal and women’s needs, and how these change in the face of conflict.

The fact that war is usually perpetrated by men does not prove men are inherently violent. War is waged by those who have power, and men are usually in the most powerful positions. There have also been cases of female leaders in power, such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, engaging their countries in conflict.
4. Gendered impacts of armed conflict

Gender inequalities are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict and continue during post-conflict reconstruction. Both women and men suffer war abuses and traumas, disruptions and loss of resources. The impact of these losses is experienced in different ways and women are often disproportionately affected.

States and organisations persistently fail to enforce international laws and conventions designed to protect the human rights of women and promote gender equality. Assistance providers, be they governmental, non-governmental or multilateral, have been slow to tackle the escalation of women’s human rights abuses, particularly during and after armed conflict. Decision-makers sometimes discourage or even prevent the development of gender-sensitive initiatives.

One reason gendered initiatives lack support is the divide in thinking between technical and social support. Technical support refers to assistance with immediate needs such as re-establishing running water, sewage systems, health facilities or electricity supply. Social support, by contrast, refers to assistance with longer-term issues that are harder to tackle, with fewer quantifiable results, and are therefore considered to be lower priority, such as schooling, training and social service provision. Both types of support, however, bring into question social, cultural and religious practices. But during periods of conflict, it is considered inappropriate to address gender relations. The result is that the effect of technical interventions, such as large-scale sanitation projects, on the dynamics between men and women, is not raised (Williams 2002).

Regardless of the geographical, economic, political or social context, armed conflict makes it more difficult to access food, health, education and other basic goods and services. This section analyses two specific impacts of armed conflict – gender-based violence (GBV) and forced displacement. In exploring these issues, it also seeks to demonstrate how war exacerbates pre-conflict conditions characterised by inequality and lack of access to resources.

4.1 Forced displacement

‘Forced displacement is the clearest violation of human, economic, political and social rights and of the failure to comply with international humanitarian laws’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 32). People have often been uprooted from their homelands due to political, religious, cultural and/or ethnic persecution during conflict. Whatever the cause, displacement is a source of human rights violations and results in distinct types of disadvantage for both women and men.

**Internally displaced people (IDPs) are not protected by international law**

Displacement does not necessarily mean that people leave or are forcibly removed to destinations that are far from their homes during and after armed conflict. Armed conflict in the 1990s saw millions of people internally displaced, or still living within the borders of their country. The UN Refugee Convention of 1951 protects refugees outside of native borders, but does not cover IDPs. The international
Displacement is often viewed as a temporary or transitory phenomenon. However, experience in countries such as Peru, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Sudan shows it is actually a prolonged process. Globally, many generations have been displaced as a result of armed conflict, with a significant number of those affected having been displaced more than once and for significant periods of time (Indra 1999).

Displacement disproportionately disadvantages women, because it results in reduced access to resources to cope with household responsibility and increased physical and emotional violence (El Jack 2002). Displacement also implies social exclusion and poverty – conditions that are themselves likely to prolong conflict.

Forced displacement is frequently used as a strategy of war that targets gender relations through family breakdown and social destabilisation. Displacement often leads to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities for both women and men. Demographic change due to conflict has led to more women becoming heads of households. This has contributed to changes in the division of labour that have created new opportunities for women but in some respects further marginalised their place in society.

Displacement does not affect all women the same way. In Sudan, for example, ethnic groups such as the Dinka, Nuer, Nuba as well as other groups in the South and the Nuba Mountains, are marginalised due to their minority status. Women from these groups constitute an increasing number of war fatalities and casualties. Furthermore, the added responsibilities women have in productive, reproductive and community work are often transferred to younger girls and boys within the family. In particular, younger girls have to assume more responsibilities such as caring for children, the elderly and the sick, along with managing burdensome domestic work. This shift of responsibility impacts on the welfare and future of female household members (ibid).

Despite experiences of vulnerability and trauma during the process of displacement, some women benefit from displacement. They may be given priority for training and development programmes in health and education, as well as in income-generating activities. The skills women gain enable them to assume new roles within their households, becoming the main breadwinners when men have been killed or have problems finding employment after removal from their homes and communities. This shift in responsibilities represents a move away from stereotypically ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ roles. Men however may react to these changes with depression, alcoholism and an escalation of violence against women in public and private (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002).

**Greater autonomy does not necessarily translate to gender equality**

Case studies conducted by the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD) in Angola, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda show that although conflict has broadened women’s economic roles and given them greater autonomy, it has rarely led to increased political influence or greater gender
equality. Everyday relationships within the household were about the only place where change was observed, but it would be too soon to say whether this would last in the long-term (El-Bushra, El-Karib and Hadjipateras 2002: 5).

The relatively small gains women obtain during displacement do not necessarily translate to more equitable gender relationships. Advancement of ‘women’s interests at a superficial, women-focused level that fails to challenge overall paradigms of gender differences leaves women with new roles to fulfil but no institutional leverage to fulfil them effectively’ (El-Bushra 2000b: 6). Furthermore, there is concern that existing international laws and resolutions use the term gender but actually focus specifically on women. Although this is important, they simply do not provide the tools to understand gendered impacts, minimising the potential to foster more equitable gender relations.

4.2 Gender-based violence (GBV)

Physical and sexual violence, particularly against women, continues to be a well-documented feature of armed conflict. This report understands GBV to be violence, sexual or otherwise, which plays on gender norms and gender exclusions to break people down both physically and psychologically. Although it is most often women who are targets of GBV, both women and men may be victims and subject to rape; increased rate of HIV infection, as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs); damage to physical and psychological health; disruption of lives; and loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Violence against women

Conflict worsens existing patterns of sexual violence against women in two main ways. Firstly, incidences of ‘everyday’ violence, particularly domestic violence, increase as communities break down during and after conflicts (UN 2002). Secondly, ‘everyday’ violence escalates in the context of masculine and militarised conflict situations. The establishment of rape camps and the provision of sexual services to occupying armed forces in exchange for resources such as food and protection are two examples of GBV during and after conflict. Conflict breeds distinct types of power relations and imbalances. In the context of conflict, for instance, violence against women is more than the exercise of power over women. By raping women, who represent the purity and culture of the nation, invading armies are also symbolically raping the nation itself.

Some types of GBV are experienced almost entirely by women and girls during and after conflict, such as forced prostitution and sex work; increases in trafficking for sexual or other types of slavery; and forced pregnancy. Also, the impact of GBV has distinct consequences for women and girls including sexual mutilation; sterility; chronic reproductive/gynaecological health problems; and marginalisation from family and community due to stigma associated with sexual abuse (UN 2002).

In conflict zones, sexual violence has become a weapon of ‘ethnic cleansing’, as seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, where rape was used by Serbian police and paramilitary forces to punish women belonging to the Kosovo Liberation Army (Human Rights Watch 2000). Given that rape had been used in Bosnia, it became a causal factor in conflict-related displacement in Kosovo.
Rape as a weapon of war

‘Women recounted to Human Rights Watch their fear that they and their daughters would be raped. Rumors of rape circulated wildly as families attempted to flee their homes. Older women often dressed their daughters in loose clothing and headscarves in an attempt to disguise young girls as grandmothers. Other mothers smeared dirt and mud on their daughters’ faces to render them unattractive. As one mother told Human Rights Watch, ‘I was most afraid that my daughter[s] would be raped’. In the words of another woman, ‘The girls were afraid of the police and put on scarves. The police took off their scarves and pinched their cheeks and told them not to act like old women. The girls were screaming’. According to a doctor in Pristina, ‘Rape was our greatest fear. Our main goal was to get our daughters – aged twenty-five, twenty-one, fourteen, and ten – out of the country’ (Vandenberg 2000).

Through the lobbying efforts of women’s organisations, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) now recognises and prosecutes sexual and gender violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to the statute, these criminal offences include ‘rape, sexual slavery (including trafficking of women), enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, other forms of grave sexual violence, and persecution on account of gender’ (Human Rights Watch 2002).

After incidences of sexual violence, women are often rejected by family or community. Despite pity for the trauma the women have suffered, society marks the victims as ‘damaged goods’ (Bennett et al. 1995: 9). Women also have particular healthcare needs as a result of these violations. For example, they require additional nutritional and health support if they are pregnant or lactating. Food scarcity and inequalities in food distribution are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict, rendering women and girls more susceptible to malnutrition (UN 2002). The increase in the rate of HIV infection in conflict zones is also a worrying trend – women face an increased risk, and therefore need special psychological, health and social support.

HIV/AIDS: A growing epidemic in the midst of armed conflict

HIV infection is increasing in conflict and post-conflict areas. Many conflicts are raging in areas where HIV infection is already very high (Smith 2002: 1). Disruption and displacement caused by conflict may lead to changes in sexual behaviour, an increase in the rate of sexual abuse (e.g. by armed forces), and to decreased access to blood screening facilities (ibid). Studies conducted in Rwanda and Sierra Leone found sexual favours were often demanded in exchange for food, which led to an increase in the number of women’s sexual partners (Benjamin 2001).

HIV infection is often considered to be primarily a medical issue that is not a priority in conflict. Its pervasive links to unstable social, economic and political circumstances are overlooked (Smith 2002: 2). Given the degree of stigma that persists for those infected with HIV, both women and men are not likely to talk openly about their concerns. Consequently, there is an even greater need to reach out to those affected. This is particularly the case with women, who are typically unable to access medical services.
Men as direct and indirect targets
Although men are most often the perpetrators of rape and violence in armed conflict and women the victims, men themselves may also be subject to physical and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse, torture and mutilation may be directed at men either as detainees or prisoners of war (UN 2002). In Northern Uganda, research conducted in the early 1990s showed an increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among men, ‘allegedly due to indiscriminate rape of men’ by the National Resistance Army (NRA) (Dolan 2002: 74).

ACORD’s experience of running workshops on sexual violence confirms the difficulty of quantifying the extent of male rape because victims are reluctant to speak out (Dolan 2002). Dolan argues that ‘the level of stigma attached [to male rape] is even higher than that associated with female rape’, and ‘undermining men’s sense of masculinity becomes a key channel for men to exercise power over other men’ (2002: 75). In this sense, rape or violent sexual abuse as demonstrations of ‘masculinity’ or power are potentially weapons that can victimise both women and men in conflict zones.

Men are also the indirect targets of violence against women. The rape of women has long been considered a public act of aggression, where raping and ‘dishonouring’ women is a way of ‘violating and demoralising men’ (Bennett et al. 1995: 8). Women are perceived to be the preservers of family honour, and often symbolise a nation’s racial purity and culture. The ‘abuse and torture of female members of a man’s family in front of him is used to convey the message that he has failed in his role as protector’ (UN, 2002: 16). It represents an attack on the entire country at the same time it violates women’s human rights.

Although men are likely to be the aggressors, we cannot ‘make assumptions about the behaviour of men as a group … some men do not benefit, and may indirectly suffer, from acts of sexual violence carried out against female family members’ (Jacobson et al. 2000: 2-3). This is not, however, to minimise the greater suffering that women directly experience as a consequence of sexual abuse, but rather to illustrate that GBV disrupts and destabilises gender relations in often irrevocably damaging ways that negatively impact everyone.

A weapon of war shrouded in silence
‘[Women who were] raped during the war tell their close friends. You hardly hear of women coming out in public to talk about all those things that happened to them. They would rather suffer in silence until they can get over it. They try to live with it or live with the idea that it didn’t happen to them alone. If hundreds of other girls can live with it, you can also live with it and, gradually, it vanishes away … but most of the raping was done in the open. A particular rebel may like your daughter, and right in front of you – the mum, the dad, the other sisters and brothers – it will be done openly. So that was how many girls got to know that their friends were raped.’ (Extract from the narrative of Agnes from Liberia in Bennett et al. 1995: 39)

GBV and gender relations
How does GBV impact on gender relations? One impact is visible in the private or domestic sphere,
where women are likely to experience increased violence, not only at the hands of occupying or state forces, but also by men in the household in the post-conflict period. Women in war zones often experience physical and sexual abuse by male spouses who have been demeaned by the armed conflict and crippled by guilt and anger for having failed to assume their perceived responsibility of protecting their women (El Jack 2002). It is important to remember, however, that increased GBV during and after conflict often reflects patterns of violence that existed in the pre-conflict period.

Notions about ‘public’ versus ‘private’ domains present barriers to dealing with victims of physical and sexual violence. Violence is considered to be a private issue, both within and beyond armed conflict. The divide between public and private renders many of these problems ‘invisible’ – ‘either literally, since it happens behind closed doors, or effectively, since legal systems and cultural norms too often treat it not as a crime, but as a family matter, or a normal part of life’ (WHO 2003). This is further complicated during armed conflict because physical and sexual violence, particularly against women, often occur in public or in full view of family and/or community. For both women and men, however, recovery from the trauma is often hindered by an inability to discuss it because it is considered a private matter.

Sex work and sexual slavery during periods of conflict also have consequences for gender relations. Women in conflict zones are sometimes driven to provide sexual services to soldiers in order to survive. But as the box below demonstrates, men are unwilling to accept women’s changed roles, leading to long-term resentment and family disruption.

**No small sacrifice: Sex work and armed conflict**

‘Men feel the women are responsible for what happened, that we did it wilfully. They consider us prostitutes. During that period, they were helpless. They were like babies. They were not able to look after their families any more. A wife had to sacrifice herself, the marital contract, everything, to save the family, yet the men are not grateful … We sacrificed ourselves, our image in society, our integrity, everything, to save their lives and the children. So, my reaction to Liberian men is equal. Just as they think of me as trash, a prostitute, I think of them as animals … They have forgotten all the suffering we went through for them.’ (Excerpt from the narrative of Agnes from Liberia in Bennett et al. 1995)

The process of armed conflict itself can lead to particular types of GBV due to the shifts in gender relations, particularly when women are active as combatants or dissenters in a conflict. Women who do not fulfil stereotypical roles are seen as deserving of violent torture or abuse.

**Tortured for ‘betraying her womanhood’**

Nora Miselem is a women’s rights activist and one of only four survivors of nearly 200 people in Honduras who were kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured as part of state-imposed terror in the 1970s and 1980s. Backed by successive American governments, dictatorships in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador prevented popular socialist movements from taking root, resulting in the migration of scores of refugees fearful of persecution. Many ended up in refugee camps on the border of Honduras and El Salvador. Nora’s account of her experience follows:
‘They said they were going to sterilize me, because I didn’t deserve to have children – that idea they have of a woman as some sublime being whose sacred role is bearing children. According to them, I was breaking with the tradition of what a woman was supposed to be. And they were going to punish me, from their point of view, so I wouldn’t be able to have children. A woman like me didn’t deserve to be a mother … I had given birth to a little boy, my first, but he had died at the age of two … so the psychological torture was well aimed, … they said: You know why your son died, don’t you? Because you got involved in all this stuff. Implying that I hadn’t been a good enough mother.

‘It was there in that torture chamber that I learned about the special treatment they reserve for women. That whole double morality thing. Because on the one hand they said I didn’t deserve to have children, that I was a bitch and they were going to sterilize me. But at the same time, individually, whenever one of them had me alone, he’d try to rape me. He’d come in, put the hood on me and a rubber bag – like a tire that chokes you – and those electric shocks in my vagina …

‘They’d tell us we were traitors to our womanhood, as they conceived of that. How can a woman be involved in this sort of thing, they’d ask, along with men, no? [They told] us that war is a man’s business, or fighting against war is something for men alone to be involved in …

‘They can’t stand it when they see a woman who thinks for herself, who wants to change the course of history, who wants to change her country’s future. That was the tone when they were all torturing me together. But when each of them would come in by himself, he would tell me he wanted me to have his child. I want to have a child with you, he’d say, mocking me with that. I had to struggle, so they wouldn’t be able to penetrate me. And morally speaking, they were never able to … I was physically overpowered by them, but not morally or emotionally or ideologically overpowered. The only recourse I had was to attack their morale, because they wanted to rape a woman who was afraid. But my words were not the words of a woman afraid.’ (Extract from the narrative of Nora Miselem in Randall 2003: 28-29)
5. Protecting human rights and promoting gender equality

The ongoing violation of human rights, and especially women’s human rights, in conflict zones continues to occur despite the existence of international laws and conventions designed to prevent such violations. We need then to understand:

1. What frameworks underpin international laws, rights and conventions related to armed conflict? How gendered are these?
2. What do international laws, conventions and rights actually protect?
3. Why are these international laws and commitments weak in practice?

The first section of this chapter looks at human rights and human security approaches, which form the basis of many international laws and commitments.

5.1 Human rights versus human security

**Human rights**

Historically, mainstream definitions of human rights, while seemingly gender neutral, have been predominantly based on men’s experiences. Article two of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises human rights as a universal ideal of respect for humanity that all people are entitled to, but does not make any specific mention of women. Indeed, few governments and NGOs are committed in domestic or foreign policies to women’s equality as a basic human right (Peters and Wolper 1995). In zones of conflict, the denial of women’s human rights has reinforced oppression and discrimination. When combined with other forms of power imbalance, this denial has more devastating consequences.

An emphasis on human rights is important but insufficient in dealing with issues related to gender equality. Violations that occur during all stages of armed conflict are often considered simply to be the consequences of war and not necessarily human rights violations, and are frequently overlooked:

- Although armed conflicts violate the basic right to life and security, women experience specific vulnerabilities and violence including forced pregnancy, sexual mutilation and sexual slavery at the hands of soldiers (Anderlini 2001). Similarly, men may be physically or sexually abused or experience trauma after witnessing this type of abuse against family members. These types of violations are seen as ‘private’ issues or unavoidable outcomes of conflict as opposed to human rights violations.
- Human rights are also violated in conflict through imprisonment, torture, disappearances and forced conscription but, again, these acts are considered to be inevitable outcomes of war rather than violations. Women and men experience violations of human rights in distinct ways. Men of combat age constitute the majority of those killed during fighting, endure imprisonment and are forcibly conscripted. Meanwhile, women and children in conflict zones constitute the majority of civilian casualties as well as the majority of those displaced and impoverished (Byrne 1996).
• Political representation and participation are basic human rights. But whether in conflict or not, political institutions frequently exclude women. Women are under-represented in national and international organisations in both conflict and post-conflict arenas (UNDP 2002). This violation of human rights is not defined as such, but rather, is seen as a reflection of ‘normal’, patriarchal structures of power in play. Therefore, it is rarely questioned, particularly during armed conflict.

In short, human rights approaches will continue to overlook serious violations unless they recognise the gendered effects of armed conflict as basic rights violations and not as private, normal or inevitable consequences of armed conflict.

**Women’s rights in Afghanistan**

In post-conflict, post-Taliban Afghanistan, the effort to redefine women’s rights as human rights and not as ‘private’ or ‘cultural’ matters is an ongoing struggle. The new Karzai government claims to have overturned Talibain laws and says it now upholds international human rights laws. However, the opportunity for significant post-conflict changes to gender relations seems diminished. As was the case under the Taliban regime, many women continue to be imprisoned for travelling without male accompaniment or marrying without male permission.

Whilst a government-endorsed poster campaign encourages parents to put girls in schools, female teachers are being threatened with death and schools are being firebombed. Despite a shortage of doctors, Najiba Asseed, a woman who returned to Kabul University Medical School, faced severe opposition from her husband and death threats from her brother. She applied for a divorce to the new Women’s Ministry, but was encouraged to ‘quit medical school, go back to her husband and have children’ (Garapedian 2002).

**Human security**

Human security relates to the safety of people (particularly disadvantaged people) from ‘such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression . . . [and] from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities’ (UNDP 1994: 23).

The human security approach is based on the assumption that all people ‘have basic human rights and should enjoy these rights regardless of who and where they are’ (ibid). In the context of gender, the term implies that all women and men are entitled to security, including economic security, food security, and health and environmental security (ibid). Feminist perspectives on human security draw a further link between sustainable development, social justice and the protection of human rights and capabilities as central aspects of any discussion of human security (AWID 2002).

A human security focus for studying gender and conflict is significant because it establishes a link between gender equality and human security. Unlike a focus on rights, the human security approach implies that *anything* that threatens security is a violation of human rights, including gender-specific violations long considered to be normal, private or inevitable outcomes of war. However, even with the security framework, in practice there will still be resistance to recognition of these violations.
A human security approach is also problematic, insofar as it can be appropriated by states and multilateral organisations for their own agendas (Enloe 1993). The attacks on the World Trade Center in the US on 11 September 2001, for example, have become a pretext for the racist depiction of Muslims and people from the Middle East in the name of ‘homeland security’. Current developments within US foreign policy strongly suggest that human security will continue to be used to justify wars such as those against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

5.2 International laws, resolutions and conventions

The human rights of women (and girls) are embodied in a number of international human rights instruments and international humanitarian laws. These instruments collectively condemn all forms of violence against women. Many of them also contain specific references to the inclusion of a ‘gender component’ in ‘peace and security’, most notably UNSC Resolution 1325, the Windhoek Declaration: Namibia Plan (UN 2000). These laws and resolutions stress that those negotiating and implementing peace agreements should adopt a gender-sensitive perspective and address the protection and rights of women and girls during conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction.

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<th>International laws and conventions that protect women’s human rights</th>
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<td>Significant international human rights instruments and international humanitarian laws relating to the human rights of women include the following:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Charter of the United Nations (1945)</td>
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<td>• United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)</td>
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<td>• OHCHR Declaration on the Protection of Women in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974)</td>
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<td>• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)</td>
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<td>• The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985)</td>
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<td>• The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Policy on Refugee Women (1990)</td>
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<td>• UN Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993)</td>
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<td>• UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)</td>
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<td>• Optional Protocol to CEDAW (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• European Parliament Resolution on Gender Aspects of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding (2000)</td>
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What is UN Security Council Resolution 1325?
In October of 2000, the UN Security Council held a debate on Women, Peace and Security, which led to the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000. Among other things, the Resolution recognises that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process, can significantly contribute to international peace and security. The UN calls on all parties involved in conflict and peace processes to adopt a gender perspective. This will include supporting local women’s peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is working to ensure the implementation and raise the visibility of UNSC Resolution 1325 and incorporate more women in peace and security issues. The complete resolution is available in the Supporting Resources Collection that accompanies this report or online at www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf.

5.3 Why are there difficulties in implementation and enforcement?
Although the importance of these laws, resolutions, conventions and commitments must not be understated, they are limited in their application. International commitments are difficult to enforce in practice because of the limited interpretations of human rights that deny various forms of gender-specific violations, as discussed in the previous section. Also, a range of cultural, historical and patriarchal justifications exist for the exclusion of gendered concerns in both human rights and human security approaches. This oversight is reflected in the use of language in international laws, in that emphasis is placed on women and girls in isolation as opposed to gender and gender relations. Furthermore, many states have yet to ratify these international commitments. Finally, despite the availability of this information, communication and information sharing with respect to these laws and commitments within organisations and between policymakers and grassroots organisations has been poor.

The language of ‘gender’ in Resolution 1325
UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security is undeniably a breakthrough for establishing broader human rights guidelines, particularly for women’s human rights, at the international level. Unfortunately, the resolution does not provide much guidance on what a ‘gender perspective’ consists of, and where the term ‘gender’ is used, it is used interchangeably with ‘women and girls’. It denies many of the gendered concerns that arise in armed conflict. These concerns require an understanding of how existing power imbalances between women and men are experienced during and after armed conflict and how these inequalities might be removed to improve gender relations.

Even where equal rights and security are recognised in theory, the practice remains unequal because women and men do not have equal opportunities to claim these rights, due to differential access to economic, political and legal resources. At all levels, there is a need for laws, resolutions, strategies and interventions that specifically target the differential access to resources and opportunities.

Implementing and institutionalising gendered human security and human rights approaches into policies requires the commitment of resources and the development of strategies that effectively overcome
gender bias. Civil society, particularly women’s organisations, can play a role in raising awareness and ensuring governments and NGOs are held accountable.

**Improving enforcement: The Gender Audit**

One way women have mobilised to improve enforcement is through ‘audits’ of states and multi/bilateral organisations engaged in post-conflict reconstruction processes. International Alert, for example, has been bringing together women’s NGOs and civil society organisations for the Gender Peace Audit Project. It consists of an ongoing process of systematically documenting women’s experiences of war and peace-building through national and regional consultations, thereby creating tools for awareness-raising and advocacy. The Project uses UNSC Resolution 1325 as a framework for promoting women’s human rights and recognising the role of women in post-conflict resolution and reconstruction.

*Woman teaching on the psychological effects of conflict, Uganda © Jenny Matthews (no date)*
6. Gender in conflict interventions

Gender power imbalances are entrenched within public and private institutions, including governmental and non-governmental development organisations that intervene to end armed conflict and build peace (El-Bushra 2000a; Kabeer 1994). El-Bushra (2000b: 4) argues that these institutions ‘must be challenged if gender injustice is to be transformed into equality of treatment, opportunity and rights’.

Gender approaches should be incorporated into institutional planning, management, execution and evaluation (UNDP 2002). In some cases, organisations such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC), have tried to mainstream gender. However, bureaucratic problems such as lack of communication between policy-makers and management, as well as a lack of funding and training, have hindered these efforts (El-Bushra 2000a).

A gender analysis must extend beyond addressing women’s immediate needs, such as food, water and health services toward women’s longer-term needs, including equal representation in decision-making processes and leadership roles. It should also recognise how shifts into non-traditional roles affect power balances and gender relations.

In practice, a gender analysis of conflict interventions reveals a persistent lack of attention to gender concerns. Regardless of the stage of the conflict, mainstream interventions appear short-term in their scope, and designed to deal mostly with stereotypical needs and concerns. The subsequent sections of this report will deal with interventions that address one or more aspects of the phases of conflict and reconstruction: humanitarian assistance; disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR); and peacekeeping/peace-building.

6.1 Humanitarian assistance

Humanitarian aid consists of a wide range of emergency goods and services provided during conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction including emergency loans; medical services; community organisation; protection; training; shelter; clothing; household equipment; seeds and tools; and food. This assistance may also extend into the longer-term, where states, bi/multilateral organisations and NGOs provide technical, educational and professional expertise to rebuild communities.

According to the European Community (EC), humanitarian assistance aims:

... to prevent or relieve suffering, [and] is accorded to victims without discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic group, religion, sex, age, nationality or political affiliation and must not be guided by, or subject to, political considerations ... humanitarian aid decisions must be taken
impartially and solely according to the victims’ needs and interests …’ (EC Council Regulation 1257/1996, as cited in Stevenson and Macrae 2002).

The ‘impartial’ assessments of victims’ needs and interests as outlined in the definition, however, risk being gender-blind in their delivery. Given that gender discrimination is often characterised by uneven resource distribution, the manner in which resources are allocated, either directly as aid or indirectly as assistance, may greatly affect gender relations. Unfortunately, the interventions of humanitarian groups often demonstrate a lack of sensitivity to gender. Groups that are marginalised – whether by sex, race, class, ethnicity, religion, culture, nationality, sexuality or political affiliation – may be further disadvantaged by humanitarian aid and assistance programmes that assume a stance of supposed ‘neutrality’ (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002: 28).

Although gender relations have the potential to be greatly improved through long-term interventions aimed at the social and economic integration of women, long-term development assistance has decreased while funding for complex humanitarian emergencies has increased proportionately. In fact, in the 1990s, international aid for regions in conflict grew five-fold to US$5 billion a year while long-term development aid significantly dropped (Boutwell and Klare 2000). Donor governments have shown a preference for funding international organisations that manage emergency, short-term humanitarian crises, with proportionately less concern for the post-conflict reconstruction period. In other words, there is even less money available for long-term assistance and where it is available, gender equality becomes a considerably lower priority on the post-conflict agenda.

Providing immediate necessities such as food, shelter and income-generating activities is critically important to conflict-torn societies, particularly for women who often are left with the responsibility of providing for their families. But initiatives that place a disproportionate emphasis on immediate or short-term needs rather than long-term development are not enough to transform gender relations and improve women’s lives.

The International Labour Organisation’s (ILO) decision to provide short-term income-generating opportunities for women in post-conflict situations recognised that equipping women with resources does not in itself result in economic success or social acceptance (Bouta and Frerks 2002). Given that power imbalances between women and men are exacerbated in conflict and post-conflict periods, gender equality will only be advanced if support is given to women, men and communities adjusting to post-conflict circumstances. However, given its short-term nature, humanitarian aid is often unable to deliver this level of support.

Humanitarian aid delivered by organisations or states also tends to shy away from challenging GBV. In principle, the acceptance of rape as a war crime, coupled with the extensive media coverage of rape as a weapon of war in Bosnia and Rwanda, brought GBV into the public domain and made it an acceptable focus for humanitarian intervention. In reality, however, reporting and recognising these crimes can be a challenge, especially when one considers that in the majority of cases, the victim knows her (or his) attacker or the violent event occurs in the domestic setting. International organisations continue to
demonstrate a reluctance to address these issues, deeming them ‘too difficult, too complicated and too private’ (Williams 2002: 99). Likewise, humanitarian agencies are unwilling or unable to manage soaring rates of HIV infection in conflict situations, particularly among women (Smith 2002).

Even when NGOs are geared to longer-term development and openly committed to ‘gender mainstreaming’ and ‘gender sensitivity’, their approach may be flawed. Some deal with gender issues superficially by hosting ad hoc staff workshops or merely by adding women’s points of view to a larger strategy, which as a whole remains conventional in its gender insensitivity (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002).

In Sri Lanka, NGOs providing emergency relief focused on income-generating activities directed to women such as poultry rearing, home gardening, and sewing, thereby reinforcing stereotypical gender roles for women and earning them lower returns. Unlike their male counterparts, women were ‘encouraged to be nurses and typists (supportive roles) rather than doctors or office administrators’ (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002: 12). Training women in non-traditional roles, however, will not result in greater gender equality unless women, men and communities are supported through outreach or training to come to terms with the changes in post-conflict society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender inequality in humanitarian aid in Kosovo</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oxfam was involved in the emergency humanitarian efforts in Kosovo in 1999. Oxfam has made considerable efforts to mainstream gender and integrate ‘hard’ (technical) and ‘soft’ (social) elements of humanitarian assistance. This resolve, however, crumbled in the face of high media interest as large sums of money were diverted to Oxfam to spend fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Kosovo, this initially resulted in gender inequalities in the recruitment and pay of staff: young educated male Kosovar refugees working with the water engineers were paid, while young educated female Kosovar refugees were not, an oversight that was later rectified. The stereotypical gender divide in the division of work, however, remained unchanged, with ‘hard’ programmes such as water engineering being staffed almost exclusively by men, while ‘soft’ programmes including gender, disability, social development and hygiene promotion, employed almost exclusively women. The water programme teams each had access to their own new vehicles – highly desirable resources during the crisis period – whereas social development, gender, hygiene promotion and disability teams had to share one old, broken-down vehicle (Adapted from Williams 2002: 96).¹</td>
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Where priority has been given to women in assistance programmes this has, at least on a superficial, short-term level, lessened their disadvantaged status and increased women’s means to support households and communities. However, where such prioritisation is not accompanied by an examination of gender power structures, programmes may fail to challenge women’s inequality (El-Bushra 2000b).

6.2 Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegratio (DDR)

DDR is a programme designed to re-integrate ex-combatants back into post-conflict society. The

¹ Please see the Case Study on ‘Oxfam, gender, and the aftermath of war – Kosovo’ in the Supporting Resources Collection of this pack for a more detailed look at Oxfam’s work in this region.
The integration of gender-aware frameworks into DDR is necessary in post-conflict reconstruction because it enhances the equal participation of women and men in negotiating conflict resolution and peace-building processes, either as ex-combatants, or as family and community members receiving ex-combatants. One of DDR’s most important functions is arguably the provision of training and support for ex-combatants to help them understand the way their society has changed as a result of conflict and how they might re-integrate into post-conflict social structures.

The UN has recognised that ensuring ex-combatants, their families and receiving communities and those assigned to re-integrate them have an understanding of the gendered dimensions of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, is essential to lasting peace and development. This is illustrated in Point 13 of UNSC Resolution 1325, which calls for ‘all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants’ (UN 2000).

**Female ex-combatants**

Women combatants are often more marginalised than other groups of women in conflict and post-conflict societies due to their involvement in direct military combat, which is stereotypically understood to be a male domain. Unlike male ex-combatants, female ex-combatants are often excluded from participating in new political structures and overlooked by veterans’ organisations (Farr 2002).

**Female combatants challenge gender roles**

‘Before the struggle started our society was very conservative and rigid. Women had no place among men. They would not talk with their head[s] up. Who thought that they would take up arms? But in the last 10 years there has been a tremendous change. We see young women in the battlefield fighting equally with the men … Now women all over the world participate in armed struggles. Why not our women? Instead of dying screaming, being raped by an aggressor army, it is a relief to face the army with [your own] weapon.’

‘Our women have proved that they can do anything … Our women are going to police work. This was not there before … I appreciate their heroic acts, self-confidence and the sacrifices they have made for the land of their own. They protect not only the land, but also the entire women of this land’. (Excerpt from narrative of Kokila from Sri Lanka, in Bennett et al. 1995: 146)

Although some women cite positive experiences as combatants and/or perceive the work of female combatants as a step forward, these changes are not often sustainable due to the gender-blind administration of DDR. In the absence of gender-sensitive approaches, reintegration services may be set up for men but not for women.

**Reintegration and rehabilitation: Only for men?**

‘I know some [organisations] that deal with former combatant boys. They help to rehabilitate them, send them to school, help them to be engineers, teachers, whatever [they] want to be. They provide food, clothing, [and] medical facilities. But I don’t know of any kind of rehabilitation centres for women. Most of
the women only tell their friends [that they were combatants]. You hardly find women combatants saying that the government should try to help them.’ (Excerpt from the narrative of Agnes from Liberia, in Bennett et al. 1995: 37)

In the few cases where women have received equal demobilisation grants, such as in Eritrea, little attention has been paid to the complexity of gender roles, priorities and responsibilities.

**Demobilisation grants in Eritrea**

Female and male ex-combatants have been given demobilisation grants without consideration of their post-conflict gendered roles and obligations. Single mothers, for example, spent demobilisation grants on immediate family needs such as food and medication. After their money was used up, these women became impoverished and vulnerable. Their male counterparts in contrast, invested the money in farming and trade, or they put it in the bank. Given an overall lack of resources, coupled with ongoing political marginalisation, women’s organisations such as those in Eritrea were unable to offer appropriate support or guidance for these women involved in DDR (Roche 1999), nor could they mobilise to challenge this gender-insensitive approach to DDR.

*Changing gender relations in post-conflict society*

It is not only ex-combatants who require support and assistance. Many women in receiving communities become heads of households in the absence of male breadwinners. Male ex-combatants, expecting to return to their role as breadwinner, are confronted with the reality that women are managing on their own and this shift away from stereotypical female and male roles is not easily reversed. Meanwhile, women, having performed in a non-stereotypical role as combatants, may expect to maintain the leadership or independence they gained during conflict, whereas men expect them to come home and continue to fulfil the stereotypical role of wife/nurturer/mother.

There is a lack of counselling or other services that take account of these gendered consequences of war on ex-combatants and receiving communities. There is clearly a need for gender-sensitiveDDR that accounts for the shifts away from stereotypical roles caused by armed conflict. Without training and support to understand the impact of armed conflict on gender roles, gender relations amongst ex-combatants and their receiving families and communities will undoubtedly worsen.

**Gender equality in DDR – Rwanda**

The post-conflict administration of Rwanda is often cited as an example of successful gender mainstreaming. As with many other aspects of reconstruction in Rwanda, DDR had a significant gender component. DDR took place in demobilisation camps, where, for instance, 90 men between the ages of 19 and 30 would be resident for three months of re-integration training. As part of this, they received gender training to inform them of changes in Rwandan society, such as the passage of new laws that gave women inheritance and property rights (UNIFEM 2002).

Although excluded from senior positions of power, women’s involvement in DDR is substantial. Women have been involved, for example, in DDR programmes for former child soldiers in various conflict zones.
UN peacekeeping troops in Bosnia also worked with local women in acquiring SALW and other illegal weapons from ex-combatants.

Inclusion of previously marginalised women and men is fundamental to the successful implementation of DDR. However, such inclusion has not been prioritised in post-conflict policies, legislation or institutions at both national and international levels. The lack of enforcement of Point 13 of UNSC Resolution 1325 is due to many factors including a lack of capacity, funding and staff training.

6.3 Peacekeeping and peace-building

Generally, women are thought to be lacking in expertise to function in the public arena and are excluded from those processes and institutions considered to be political. This under-representation extends into peacekeeping and those peace-building activities that are widely considered to be political, such as formal peace negotiations, mediation and diplomacy.

Peacekeeping refers to a UN military and civilian presence that, with the consent of the parties involved, controls conflicts and their resolutions, while ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian aid (UN 1995). Peace-building includes building legal and human rights institutions as well as fair and effective governance and dispute-resolution processes and systems (Morris 2000).

Peace-building is generally perceived to be the ‘softer’ or feminised side of post-conflict reconstruction. If women are associated with anything at all in post-conflict reconstruction, then it tends to be in peace-building activities such as primary health care delivery, counselling and education services, or assistance with the provision of basic needs or income generation. Conversely, peacekeeping is highly masculinised and militarised. Male involvement in peacekeeping involves patrolling streets and borders, maintaining control and protecting people, primarily women and children.

This interpretation of peacekeeping and peace-building as distinct and separate elements, where women are protected and men are protectors, misrepresents the reality. Women are also active as peacekeepers in the military and men are part of peace-building activities. Moreover, these elements are not separate but intersect in ways that result in distinct injustices that reflect unequal power in gender relations. The most notable example occurs in the case of ‘peacekeepers’ who abuse their power by physically or sexually violating local populations, particularly women (Bennett et al. 1995: 8).

The belief that peacekeeping and politicised elements of peace-building are mutually exclusive male/female domains diminishes peace-building efforts and exacerbates inequalities in gender relations. Women’s organisations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, were keen to work with the Stabilising Forces (SFOR), or peacekeepers. They wanted to deal with a variety of issues related to post-conflict reconstruction including the following: sex work (where SFOR personnel were often involved as clients); female trafficking and sexual health; and assisting displaced refugees (Cockburn and Hubic 2002).

The head of one women’s organisation argued there was a persistent ‘masculine undervaluing of women and the feminine’, while politics, reconstruction and ‘soldiering’ were seen as ‘men’s work’ (ibid: 110). This lack of cooperation between the predominantly male peacekeepers and the female peace-builders
rendered gender-specific concerns an even lower priority and diminished the chances for more equal post-conflict outcomes. As the following box demonstrates, cooperation between governing elements and women’s organisations can help promote gender equality as part of a sustainable peace.

**Cooperation gets the job done**

In post-conflict Rwanda, cooperation and collaboration between the government’s Ministry of Gender and Women in Development (MIGEPROFE) and women’s NGOs has created unique opportunities for lobbying and advocacy work on gender issues. The achievements of these constructive partnerships include greater attention to gender in policies and programmes generally; changes to property laws in order to recognise women’s rights; the incorporation of gender into decentralisation processes; and an increase in the number of women in public policy positions. It proves that working in cooperation establishes the basis for a more sustainable, gender-equal reconstruction process in the aftermath of conflict (UNIFEM 2002).
7. Mainstreaming gender and women’s organising

7.1 What is gender mainstreaming?
The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 1997 defined gender mainstreaming as follows:

In any area and at all levels, a gender mainstreaming perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men in any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes.

It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as men an integral part of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (UNDP 2002: 8).

Gendered rights and security approaches should form the basis for broadening existing definitions of human rights. Mainstreaming gender into these approaches would allow us to go beyond passive ‘vulnerable group’ and ‘victim’ characterisations that deny the reality that men are also victims and women are also aggressors during and after armed conflict. As we will see later on in this section, women’s organisations have begun this process by lobbying national and international governments and bodies to recognise the contributions of women as active peace-builders.

7.2 How do you mainstream gender in conflict and post-conflict interventions?
The ECOSOC definition of gender mainstreaming is supported by a number of guides, manuals and tipsheets commissioned by various international NGOs and multilateral organisations, such as the UN, on all aspects of armed conflict, including humanitarian interventions, DDR and peacekeeping.

These publications offer checklists, charts and forms to guide practitioners on how to establish gender-sensitive conflict and post-conflict interventions. The guidance and the questions posed are often quite general, but nonetheless provide a valuable starting point in trying to institutionalise gender sensitivity from the ground up.

Interventions must account for the political, social, cultural and economic contexts of a particular operation. They should focus on issues such as power and resource allocation in the household; religious/cultural roles of women and men; women’s participation in public and private institutions; boys’ and girls’ access to education; and differences in the ways women and men access economic opportunities.

The identification of local resources/infrastructure/organisations that can contribute to the intervention, either through direct involvement, or through the contribution of expertise, is also considered vital to the
success of the intervention. Specific reference is often made to the gender balance of any groups involved and how power appears to be allocated within them. Emphasis is placed on the importance of nurturing, supporting and consulting local gender expertise in the form of women’s organisations, such as all-women news conferences, roundtables and meetings.

Gender training for staff and awareness in programme setup are also essential to ensure international and local staff are sensitive to the gender-specific issues in post-conflict reconstruction – from access to health, food, water and other resources to economic opportunities and female leadership at the policy/decision-making level. Programmes must provide support for non-stereotypical areas of peace-building, such as, for instance, training in non-traditional skills for women and physical and sexual violence counselling for men.

This summary is by no means exhaustive, but provides a starting point in thinking about the ways in which specific aspects of interventions in armed conflict can incorporate more gender-sensitive approaches.

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**History repeats itself**

A vast amount of information is available on the importance of including women in all stages of peace-building and problems that have occurred due to the exclusion of women, such as in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, of 250 delegates attending meetings on the constitutional future of post-war Iraq in April 2003, only six were women.

Dr. Shatha Beserani, an Iraqi doctor living in London and the founder of the Iraqi Women for Peace and Democracy Campaign, told BBC News Online that the participation of women was not prioritised: ‘At meetings in London, we have tried to raise it but the men say they want to go concentrate on the essential issues. It is just seen as secondary. But if we don’t push it now it will be difficult to do it later’.

Elisabeth Rehn, a consultant who authored an extensive report on women, war and peace for the UN, expressed shock at the disregard for UN resolutions that protect and encourage the role of women in conflict reconstruction (Adapted from Westcott 2003).

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However, an exclusive focus on women, either as facilitators or as recipients, should not be mistaken for ‘mainstreaming’ gender. The involvement of women is not in itself enough to ensure gender sensitivity.

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**Mainstreaming gender does not mean simply the inclusion of women!**

De Alwis and Hyndman (2002: 13) point out that in Sri Lanka, many humanitarian organisations raised concerns about the lack of sensitivity on issues related to women’s welfare. Their efforts to raise awareness led to the appointment of women as gender coordinators. However, contrary to expectations, this resulted in greater gender insensitivity, due to a lack of training for the coordinators on gender-specific issues. Training was deemed unnecessary because it was assumed that female gender coordinators were naturally more sensitive to gender issues. For this same reason, gender coordinators solely worked with women’s groups or on women’s projects. Their dealings with men were infrequent and
they were given little opportunity to challenge men to be more aware of the need to reform gender inequity.

### 7.3 Examples of mainstreaming gender in post-conflict structures

There are instances where existing conceptual approaches, in conjunction with enforceable guidelines, resolutions, declarations and institutional practices, have met with some success in post-conflict reconstruction situations, most notably in the work of the Gender Affairs Unit set up by the UN in the reconstruction of East Timor. The relative success of this office in mainstreaming gender throughout the peace-building process demonstrates a gendered response is possible in practice.

#### The Gender Affairs Unit in post-conflict East Timor

The Gender Affairs Unit was established by the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). The unit focused on capacity-building and raising awareness of the link between gender equality and sustainable development, as well as the need to take positive action towards gender equality as a goal. The office conducted workshops and training sessions, as well as establishing networks for gender mainstreaming within UNTAET as well as in East Timorese society more broadly. The objectives for gender mainstreaming and strategies for implementation were based on the experiences and priorities raised in consultation with local women and women's groups (UN 2002: 81).

The administration of post-conflict Rwanda has also emerged as a good practice example of gender mainstreaming. Continuous efforts have been made to ensure gender cuts across all policies and priority areas. Moreover, all government departments must report on how gender equality is being addressed in programmes and how budgets are being developed in gender-sensitive ways.

#### Gender and justice in post-genocide Rwanda

The *gacaca* is a traditional, communal judicial system that was re-introduced to relieve the burden on the national courts. It nominates 19 'judges’ or respected people at the village level to hear cases. In 2002, over 115,000 defendants accused of genocide-related crimes were shifted to the *gacaca*.

Gender equality issues have featured prominently in the re-establishment of these village courts, which have traditionally been male-dominated. Although women were initially prevented from testifying in the traditional *gacaca*, they are now allowed as full participants. They are also being encouraged to join as judges, with 27 per cent of *gacaca* posts reserved for women. With assistance from the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) and support from UNIFEM, training has been provided to these women judges. Bilateral donors such as Belgium and Canada are also supporting increased efforts to involve women in the *gacaca* judicial process (UNIFEM 2002).

The partnership between women's NGOs and government has created high expectations for what women's organisations can collectively achieve, but this recognition is not being matched by a growth in funding or other resources. Consequently, it is increasingly difficult for these organisations to work at the same pace (UN 2002). The Rwandan experience is proof that more funding and resources should be
devoted to promoting partnership with women’s organisations, which contribute not only to the basic needs of post-conflict society, but are also instrumental to the development of gender-sensitive legal and political structures.

Independent organisations such as Oxfam have also had some success in mainstreaming gender into institutional practice at the grassroots level.

**Mainstreaming success: Lessons from Oxfam’s field office in Sierra Leone**

Recent feedback from Oxfam’s long-term humanitarian interventions in post-conflict Sierra Leone suggests mainstreaming gender is a slow but steady process that requires commitment from every individual in the organisation.

After piloting a very ambitious gender programme, field-level staff realised that, in fact, it was time to ‘go back to basics’ and provide gender training for all staff. Basic gender training encouraged a shared understanding of why participation of both women and men is important. It also highlighted the harmful effects of stereotypes and the value of work sharing.

Although understanding and acceptance of these principles is still variable, the field staff have generally noted a positive change in the attitudes, beliefs and practices of community members. For instance, it is now taken for granted that women will be involved in community assessments and consultations, both with men and also separately. There is also growing enthusiasm for achieving gender equality among field staff.

The Sierra Leone programme identified four key ways of addressing gender equality in a humanitarian programme: gender training; commitment of management/leadership to gender equality; implementation of gender-equal recruitment techniques, including training for women in non-traditional roles; and development of the capacity of external partner agencies to implement and enforce gender equality agendas (Adapted from Williams 2003).

### 7.4 Women’s organising

UNSC Resolution 1325 is clear on the need to protect women’s rights and support the work of women’s organisations in peace-building efforts. Despite these commitments, the gendered ways that women and men, but particularly women, actively engage with, and are victimised by, armed conflict and reconstruction, remain unrecognised by gender-blind interpretations of war and its aftermath. Women’s organisations continue to protest these injustices at the local, national and international levels. These ongoing efforts have laid the groundwork to have gender mainstreamed more effectively into institutions that govern during periods of armed conflict and reconstruction. Recognising the relative inequality faced by women during and after armed conflict is an important step to mainstreaming gender. Only then will the impacts on women and gender relations be put into context.
The importance of supporting women’s organising efforts has been recognised by Point 15 of UNSC Resolution 1325, which officially endorses the need to promote gender equality through consultation with local and international women’s NGOs in the processes of post-conflict reconstruction (UN 2000).

Poetry as a rallying force

In periods of conflict, poetry has been used not only as a means of expressing grief but as a force for mobilising women to actively resist conflict and oppression. Through contributions from poets and activists in Afghanistan and around the world, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) uses the medium to raise awareness of life in an oppressive state. The poetry collected by RAWA recognises and inspires women’s active roles as objectors opposing these violations. An extract from a poem by Meena, the founder of RAWA who was assassinated by Afghan Intelligence in 1987, follows:

I’ll never return
I’m the woman who has awoken
I’ve arisen and become a tempest through the ashes of my burnt children
I’ve arisen from the rivulets of my brother’s blood
My nation’s wrath has empowered me
My ruined and burnt villages fill me with hatred against the enemy,
…
I’ve learned the song of freedom in the last breaths, in the waves of blood and in victory
Oh compatriot, Oh brother, no longer regard me as weak and incapable
With all my strength I’m with you on the path of my land’s liberation.
My voice has mingled with thousands of arisen women
My fists are clenched with the fists of thousands compatriots
Along with you I’ve stepped up to the path of my nation,
To break all these sufferings all these fetters of slavery,
Oh compatriot, Oh brother, I’m not what I was
I’m the woman who has awoken
I’ve found my path and will never return.

(The full text of the poem is available at rawa.fancymarketing.net/ill.htm.)

There is a distinction between women’s actual engagement in peace-building and the integration of women’s rights in the peace process. It is, after all, possible to enforce the international laws and conventions that protect women from GBV and recognise the disadvantages experienced by women during and after armed conflict, without actively involving them in the political process. Although recognition on its own is important, it would still deny women the opportunity to work alongside men in shaping conflict resolution processes in more equitable ways. Long-term peace that is gender equal must go beyond protecting but still excluding women, to actively engaging women in the decision-making structures that govern peace itself.

Women’s work in peace-building mostly capitalises on stereotypical interpretations of gender roles because, typically, it is only in their capacity as wives and mothers that women gain the attention of soldiers and politicians. Women’s presence in the official peace process remains marginal and the process of negotiating gendered relations of power in the context of armed conflict is an ongoing challenge.
A message to the women of Iraq from the women of Kosovo

Just after the ‘end’ of the conflict in Iraq, the Kosovo Women’s Network in April 2003 circulated an open letter via email entitled *A cautionary tale from Kosovar women to women in post-war Iraq*. Excerpts are reprinted below.

‘We have a briefly recounted but very complex story to tell to the women of Iraq …

‘We greeted joyfully the decision that put Kosova under a UN administration. [The] UN was to us the revered international organization that developed and passed key documents that stipulated women’s rights and promoted their integration in all levels of decision-making. But, when we returned home we were, unfortunately, disappointed by the UN Mission in Kosova (UNMIK). We were eager to work with the international agencies in developing effective strategies for responding to the pressing needs of Kosovar women, but most of those agencies did not recognize that we existed and often refused to hear what we had to say on decisions that affected our lives and our future.

‘Some of the international staff came to Kosova thinking and assuming that this is an extremely patriarchal society where no women’s movement can flourish. And there were those who wanted us to do all the groundwork for them [like] find staff and offices, set up meetings and provide translations, but were not interested in listening to us… They had their own fixed ideas and plans and their ready-made programs that they had tried in other countries and did not want to change their plans to respond to the reality of our lives.

‘Instead of dedicating all our energy to helping women and their families put together lives shattered by war, we had to spend efforts in fighting to be heard and in proving to UNMIK that we knew what was best for us, that women in Kosova were not just victims waiting to be helped – they could help themselves, as they did in the past, and they could be key and effective actors in building their own future.

‘We did not give up. We met with UN officials, wrote letters, went to meetings to present our ideas, knowledge and expertise. We talked to donors and built alliances with those international organizations in Kosova and abroad that genuinely saw and related to us as partners in the common efforts to advance [the] women’s cause in our country. This is part of an on-going multi-layered struggle that women’s groups in Kosova have been engaged in during the last four years, a struggle to be part of the decision-making process from day one, a struggle to get better organized and become more effective, a struggle to take the place we deserve in shaping our life and the future of our society.

‘We urge and encourage women in Iraq to organize … and be part of the rebuilding of their country.’

The fact that women support conflict along religious, ethnic and nationalist divides raises the question of whether it is possible for women to unite around gender-specific concerns to fight patriarchy and oppression. There are many examples, however, of groups of women that have managed to prioritise gender-specific concerns over political allegiances in order to address women’s human rights issues in a unified fashion.
Palestinian and Israeli women work together
Jerusalem Link, a partnership between the Israeli organisation Bat Shalom and the Palestinian Jerusalem Centre for Women, is one example of women successfully bridging the divides between politics, armed conflict and gender equality. Whilst the two organisations work principally to address the concerns of women in their own societies, Jerusalem Link is able to prioritise women’s human rights more generally as an important element of any lasting peace settlement.

Established in 1994, the partnership project marks the first time that a Palestinian and an Israeli organisation have worked so closely together for the advancement of women’s and human rights in the region, as well as for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The two organisations jointly run programmes promoting peace, democracy, human rights and women's leadership. Their work includes campaigning on International Women’s Day; raising awareness through Palestinian/Israeli Women's Public Media Dialogue; facilitating an International Women’s Peace Commission; and lobbying of international organisations and national governments to promote the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. See www.batshalom.org/english/jlink/index.html for more information.

The importance of recognising, encouraging, supporting and strengthening the capacity of women in conflict and post-conflict situations cannot be overstated. As the box below illustrates, women mobilise and take the initiative in periods of armed conflict in order to survive and/or to fight for their rights. As they move into non-stereotypical roles with support from family and community, the basis for the protection of women’s human rights and the groundwork for a longer-term shift towards more equal gender relations are made possible.

Addressing the multi-faceted needs of women: The Liberian experience
The National Women’s Commission in Liberia (NAWOCOL), an NGO made up of 78 women's groups, developed in the post-war period to address the myriad needs of women. It encouraged grassroots working groups to come together around income-generating activities - from garden projects to peer counselling. Progress has been made in educating women about their rights, providing training for income-generating activities and enabling women to take control and move away from stereotypical roles. Although there is cause for optimism, women require government support and some men remain sceptical. Generally, it is clear that this work has paved the way to rebuild Liberian society in a more gender-equitable fashion.

Below we reprint an extract from the testimony of Rose, a former Secretary-General of the Commission in Monrovia, discussing the multiple programmes in place to assist women in the post-conflict period (extracted from Bennett et al. 1995: 41-5):

‘The idea for the Abused Women and Girls (AWAG) programme came right after the ceasefire in 1990. A group of women including myself attended a workshop run by Save the Children, UK … We talked about the Ugandan experience where women were raped and molested … We were moved because we knew that these things had happened [in Liberia] … We decided to form an association called the Association
for Women in Crisis. Its aim is the rehabilitation of victimised women, abused women and girls, through trauma counselling... [and] group therapy ...’

‘We have health education, talks about family planning, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation and general things. Besides that, we have preventive education and counselling about HIV/AIDS ... We have increased awareness about HIV/AIDS, but we are short of films and [other] educational materials.

‘The HIV counsellors have meetings with women’s groups, in the schools, in the churches. In one month they see about 2,000 or 3,000 people, distribute [information] materials as well as condoms. We also talk about [taking] care of a victim, and about the psychological effects on a victim’s family. All the myths about AIDS are cleared away.

‘Women took up arms and they’ve disappeared ... We are trying to develop a programme to identify these girls, [help them find] their productive capacity [and] rehabilitate them through counselling and training ...

‘Women are becoming independent of men. We love the men, we need them – they are our husbands, brothers, fathers, uncles – but we are not waiting for them like before to be the only providers. Men have come to appreciate this role and they talk about it with admiration. They [also] fear it, but they are willing to go an extra mile with the women. It is now common to hear a man say, “We wish to have a woman president”. That’s how far the women have gone. In Liberia, women have proved themselves. But somehow, the suppression is there. It’s camouflaged. You don’t see it but it’s there.

‘In the refugee camps outside of Liberia, the women are learning masonry and carpentry and about building their own homes ...You could not find that before ...

‘All is not rosy, because our government has to back us, and we have to have a unified country. The government has been sensitised now to plan for gender issues.’

Women are active not only at the local or community level, but at the national and international levels as well. In Africa, for instance, women’s groups have formed the African Women’s Committee on Peace and Development (AWCPD), now a part of the African Union (formerly Organisation of African Unity). Its mandate is to broaden the peace agenda to include issues such as land reforms, economic and social justice and equal participation for women in political processes generally. The inclusion of rape and GBV as war crimes and crimes against humanity in rules and statutes governing the ICC is due to the contribution of international women’s groups led by the New York-based Women’s Caucus for Gender Justice.

From the local to the international sphere, women’s activism is laying the groundwork for mainstreaming gender in all aspects of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction.
8. Conclusions and recommendations

The primary objective of broadening our understanding of the intersection of gender and armed conflict is to recognise and address forms of gender-specific disadvantage that are overlooked by conventional, gender-blind representations of armed conflict and its aftermath.

As this report has demonstrated, the diverse experiences and needs of women, who invariably function in both traditional and non-traditional roles, have generally not been recognised. Similarly, the distinct disadvantages faced by men have been misunderstood. In the case of gender-based violence (GBV), for instance, female victims are shunned by family and community while male victims are unable to access counselling or other services. The denial of these and other traumas impedes our understanding of gender relations, blinding us to the ways in which we may promote gender equality and thereby contribute to the establishment of sustainable, peaceful post-conflict societies.

Real peace does not only mean the end of armed conflict, but rather the establishment of durable and inclusive social institutions. Conventions designed to protect the human rights of marginalised groups, particularly women, during and after conflict do exist. However, the negative impacts of war, such as forced displacement and GBV, continue to destroy families and communities. Interventions such as humanitarian aid, DDR and peacekeeping, are meant to alleviate suffering and assist in the reconstruction process, but where administered without regard to gender, they may actually exacerbate inequality.

The social upheaval caused by conflict creates the potential to redefine gender relations. Without appropriate funding, support and resources dedicated to promoting gender equality in all aspects of reconstruction, however, there is a risk that old, oppressive and discriminatory patriarchal institutions and practices will be re-established, as opposed to transformed, in the aftermath of conflict.

8.1 Recommendations

The issues raised in this report may be addressed by the detailed recommendations below:

More context-specific evidence is required to understand the diverse roles and needs of women and men during and after armed conflict. Such evidence must be based on what they are doing and not on stereotypical interpretations of gender roles and relations that presume to know what they should be doing:

- The notion of what constitutes traditional and non-traditional gender roles may vary slightly between cultural, economic, political, social and religious contexts. Researchers and practitioners engaged in conflict studies and/or programmes must consider how stereotypical interpretations of gender in these various contexts reinforce as well as challenge our understanding of the diverse roles and needs of women and men during conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction.
• International institutions, states and NGOs need to move beyond perceptions of women solely as victims and men solely as perpetrators of violence. The focus should instead be on the power imbalances reflected in the gendered roles of women and men during conflict and post-conflict periods. The effects of these imbalances on gender relations may then be assessed.

• Research should focus on the ways in which armed conflict and its impacts, such as forced displacement, alter gender relations within the family and community. Improved outreach and counselling services must be made available to address the distinct needs of women and men who experience negative impacts of armed conflict. This is particularly important if we are to address the often unrecognised gendered needs of women and men who have suffered traumas such as GBV.

• Researchers and practitioners must pay more attention to how the notion of masculinity limits our understanding of the diverse roles and needs of men and also how it affects women and gender relations. Heightened awareness of this male diversity will contribute to the development of gender-sensitive post-conflict interventions.

The escalation of all types of physical and sexual GBV during and after armed conflict must be addressed:

• More funding should be made available to research and document the impact of all forms of GBV – including imprisonment, torture, rape, sexual slavery and forced sex work – on women, men and gender relations.

• Increased funding and other necessary resources should be dedicated to finding and promoting effective outreach services that respond to the needs of victims of GBV, including specialised and localised access to healthcare, ongoing counselling, outreach and support. This is particularly important for women, since women’s unique gynaecological and reproductive health concerns related to forced pregnancy and sex work are invariably overlooked. Funding should be geared towards organisations that are able to provide training in the consequences of GBV and other types of violence.

• Increased funding and resources must also be dedicated to addressing the needs of men who diverge from stereotypical masculine gender roles, particularly those who are victims of, or who resist, violence. This may be done by tying outreach for men into existing health and support centres, or through the creation of new services that address GBV against men.

The institutions governing armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction will be in a better position to address gendered needs through better implementation and enforcement of existing international laws and commitments:

• International institutions and governments must recognise impacts of armed conflict such as forced displacement, impoverishment and GBV as violations of human rights and not as private or cultural concerns, or merely inevitable outcomes of war.

• International institutions and governments must also recognise, implement and enforce laws and commitments that recognise gender issues as important, legitimate concerns and provide greater protection for women and girls, who frequently experience significant disadvantage. The recognition, ratification and enforcement of UNSC Resolution 1325 would be a significant step forward.
• All types of GBV should be criminalised and all states must ratify the new ICC statute, which stresses that GBV and rape are war crimes and crimes against humanity.

• Implementation and enforcement of international commitments such as Resolution 1325 would also ensure the presence of gender-aware female activists at the peace table. Mechanisms such as all-women short lists of candidates or reserved seats for female participants at peace negotiations would represent significant steps forward in promoting gender equality.

**All interventions designed to alleviate suffering and ‘normalise’ life in a post-conflict society must take account of gendered concerns:**

• Agencies should try to provide humanitarian assistance that is long-term and includes training for women in non-traditional roles. Training must be provided in conjunction with outreach and support to help families and communities adjust to shifting gender roles and relations. Without such measures, the potential for gains in gender equality to be sustainable in the long-term is limited.

• Gender-sensitive DDR should be encouraged through increased funding for local organisations that provide gender-specific training and support for ex-combatants and their families to re-integrate into post-conflict society. These services should recognise the changes in gender relations that take place during periods of conflict as both women and men assume new roles.

• Researchers are needed to catalogue the experiences and attitudes of male and female ex-combatants and the families/communities receiving them. This will help to determine the best means of addressing the different needs of ex-combatants and their families, and the effect of the return of combatants on gender relations.

• Peacekeepers must receive tailored gender training in order to promote healthier relationships and establish trust with local communities. There must also be better reporting and policing mechanisms to address both the threat and the occurrence of sexual and physical violence associated with peacekeepers and those charged with protecting post-conflict areas.

• All staff and volunteers deployed in conflict and post-conflict interventions must be trained to understand and manage the gendered implications of post-conflict reconstruction in the social, political, economic, religious and cultural contexts in which they are operating.

**More emphasis should be placed on the concerns and priorities expressed by local populations, particularly women:**

• Mainstreaming gendered concerns requires the involvement of local organisations and the use of local infrastructure to ensure solutions are appropriate to the post-conflict society. States and organisations such as the UN must encourage the role of women’s organising and the importance of including local women’s voices in the formation of post-conflict political and legal structures in practice.

• Civil society organisations, particularly women’s organisations, need increased funding and resources. Women’s organisations in conflict zones around the world engage in a wide range of activities, from meeting basic needs for local communities to lobbying for changes to political and legal structures that are not gender equal. International institutions and states engaged in post-
conflict reconstruction can support, promote and enhance the role that women’s organisations play through invitations to peace conferences, as well as greater funding and resources.

- Women’s organisations also need resources for capacity-building to train and prepare women to participate at the decision-making level of official peace negotiations. It is important to recognise local women’s organisations have knowledge related to the specific economic, political, cultural, social and religious contexts that underpin gender inequality in a particular community or region. Therefore, they should also be involved in a decision-making capacity in the design, planning and implementation and evaluation of post-conflict reconstruction. Delegations and international donors must ensure the participation of women’s organisations in peace processes.

- Systematic and context-specific gender-sensitivity training must be provided to peacekeepers and NGO staff who are interested in engaging local populations, particularly women and girls, more effectively in reconstruction processes.

- When women are recruited, there needs to be an awareness that participation of females will not in itself guarantee that gender concerns will be addressed or that equality will definitely result. Women are not automatically gender-aware and therefore, every recruit, regardless of sex, must receive training in how to identify and address gender concerns.

Through the mobilisation of and cooperation between all actors concerned with armed conflict and reconstruction, we have a better chance of addressing the power imbalances that lead to unequal gender relations and establishing a long-lasting, sustainable peace.
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GENDER APPROACHES IN CONFLICT AND POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS

UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
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12 Emma Robson/UNDP
The purpose of this manual is to support and strengthen the capacity of UNDP staff working on recovery and rehabilitation activities in crisis and post-conflict situations to mainstream gender equality objectives. While the traditional perception of women in crisis and post-conflict situations is that of victims of war, the active role women in fact play in such situations is being increasingly recognized. Crises can break down social barriers and traditional patriarchal patterns, thus providing windows of opportunity for the reconstruction of a more just and equitable society where women's human rights will be protected and gender equality will become the norm in institutional and social frameworks.

Arising opportunities must be seized not only to promote the social rehabilitation of a country, but to encourage and support new institutional structures, legislation and its enforcement for the protection of women's political, economic, social and cultural rights. The transitional recovery phase can thus prove to be a particularly critical period for positive transformation of gender relations, providing opportunities to increase women's skills and income-earning opportunities and their overall empowerment.

UNDP's mandate in crisis and post-conflict situations offers the organization a unique opportunity to contribute to this positive change. In countries undergoing a transition phase, UNDP can foster the nascent dynamism for social change, engage national stakeholders in the planning and execution of institutional reforms to empower women and promote gender equality. This is best done by mainstreaming gender into all phases of UNDP interventions — from vulnerability assessments, mission planning, programme implementation and policy advice to monitoring and evaluation of impact on gender relations.

It is hoped that these guidelines manual will serve as an important tool to assist staff in ensuring the incorporation of an effective gender perspective in the planning and implementation process of recovery programmes. The manual was made possible through substantial support from the Emergency Office of the Directorate General for Development Cooperation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and benefitted from the valuable input of Augusta Angelucci, Gender and Vulnerable Groups Specialist, UNDP Rome Liaison Office and the UNDP Bureau of Development Policy's Gender in Development Advisors.

Julia Taft
Assistant Administrator and Director
Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery
United Nations Development Programme

"Peace is inextricably linked to equality between women and men in development. Armed and other types of conflicts, wars of aggression, foreign occupation, colonial or other alien domination, as well as terrorism, continue to cause serious obstacles to the advancement of women."

– Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly
INTRODUCTION

This manual was compiled during a seminar entitled “Approccio di genere in situazioni di emergenza, conflitto e post-conflitto” (Gender approach in emergency, conflict, and post-conflict situations), which was held in Rome on 2-6 April 2001. The seminar was organized by the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in Rome and the Emergency division of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included participants from various Italian non government organizations (NGOs) and UN agencies directly involved in emergency, crisis response and recovery operations.

During the seminar, a needs assessment session was held and participants expressed their interest in having a “how to” manual that could help them better integrate a gender approach during humanitarian, recovery and development activities. The manual is divided into three chapters:

First chapter
The first chapter contains information on the approaches to women and gender issues over the last 20 years. It provides the basic concepts necessary to understand how to address gender issues and improve the impact of humanitarian assistance.

Second chapter
In the second chapter, the relevant international instruments protecting the rights of people affected by war and other emergency situations are presented. Relevant passages are quoted and explained. The full text of these instruments can be found in the annexed CD-ROM.

Third chapter
The third chapter contains information that can be used as reference in programming and organizing humanitarian interventions with a gender perspective.

CD-ROM
The annexed CD-ROM contains case studies, exercises, legal instruments, a bibliography and a list of Web sites to help expand your knowledge of the integration of a gender approach in emergency situations.

“In war-torn societies, women often keep societies going. They maintain the social fabric. They replace destroyed social services and tend to the sick and wounded. As a result, women are the prime advocates of peace”

— UN Secretary General Kofi Annan
The purpose of the manual is to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian and recovery interventions through the integration of a gender perspective.

We believe that this manual will help readers to:

■ appreciate the concept and scope of gender;
■ appreciate the evolution of approaches to gender equality issues over the years;
■ recognize that interventions can be more effective if they integrate a gender perspective;
■ identify the underlying principles and corresponding international instruments which establish the human rights of people involved in emergency, conflict and post-conflict situations, and give particular attention to those issues that directly address women’s rights;
■ ensure that the legal rights of women are understood and that adequate measures are taken to respond;
■ identify the particular elements that characterize a gender approach at all levels of humanitarian and recovery assistance;
■ use specific tools and frameworks to conduct a gender analysis and data collection in order to have a more accurate representation of the context in which women are operating;
■ develop mechanisms to ensure that the resources and needs of both women and men are addressed in all stages of programme (protection and assistance) planning, management and evaluation systems;
■ develop strategies to protect and assist women, recognizing that most of them are facing new situations (single household, single motherhood, widow);
■ incorporate a gender perspective in all programming phases;
■ improve the efficiency and effectiveness of protection and assistance programmes by ensuring that adequate attention is given to the needs and resources of all members of the target population;
■ encourage each staff member of each team to ensure that the integration of a gender dimension takes place in their area of competence.
The traditional perception of women in conflict and post-conflict situations is as victims of war. However, the active role women play in such situations is slowly starting to be recognized.¹

Before outlining the strategies to integrate a gender perspective in emergency and transition situations, it is necessary to review some basic concepts related to gender and conflict.

When discussing gender, we generally refer to the social differences and relations between men and women, which are learned and transformed. The term gender does not replace the term sex, which refers exclusively to biological differences between men and women.²

**Gender**
- Socially constructed
- Difference between and within cultures
- Includes variables identifying differences in roles, responsibilities, opportunities, needs and constraints

**Sex**
- Biologically defined
- Determined by birth
- Universal
- Unchanging

### Changes in gender relations due to crisis situation
- Demographic profile changes: in armed conflict situations, more women than men survive
- Changes in division of labour between men and women that can be long term or even permanent
- Increased political participation and organization: women in particular learn to gain greater confidence and see benefits of working with other women³

**Gender roles:**
- Define what is considered appropriate for men and women within the society, social roles and division of labour;
- Involve the relation to power (how it is used, by whom and how it is shared);
- Vary greatly from one culture to another and change over time;
- Vary from one social group to another within the same culture;
- Race, class, religion, ethnicity, economic circumstances and age influence gender roles;
- Sudden crisis, like war or famine, can radically and rapidly change gender roles.

For example, understanding gender differentiation and gender discrimination helps us to understand gender on various grounds. After a crisis, women ex-combatants who have engaged in liberation struggles have discovered old attitudes may return and the changes that occurred during the crisis, such as loss of property or death of a spouse, may also have a permanent impact.⁴

**Gender and Culture**
Culture is part of the fabric of every society. It shapes the way things are done and our understanding of why this should be.⁵ Gender identities and gender relations are essential facets of culture as they determine the way daily life is lived not only within the family, but also in society as a whole. Gender influences economics, politics, social interactions and individual needs. It undergoes variations over time and across culture. It is an active force in the formation of the family, the community and the nation.

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³ Morrison PT., in *Weaving Gender in Disaster and Refuge Assistance*, InterAction, USA, 1998.
⁵ www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/equality
The following table highlights ways in which gender differences and inequalities may be relevant in conflict situations. It is not a complete list, but it provides suggestions for further reflection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements of conflict situations and possible gender dimensions</th>
<th>Pre-conflict situations</th>
<th>Possible gender dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increased mobilization of soldiers</strong></td>
<td>Increased commercial sex trade (including child prostitution) around military bases and army camps.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Nationalist propaganda used to increase support for military action</strong></td>
<td>Gender stereotypes and specific definitions of masculinity and femininity are often promoted. There may be increased pressure on men to ‘defend the nation.’</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilization of pro-peace activists and organizations</strong></td>
<td>Women have been active in peace movements – both generally and in women-specific organizations. Women have often drawn moral authority from their role as mothers, but they have also been able to step outside traditional roles during conflict situations, taking up public roles in relief and political organizations.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Increasing human rights violations</strong></td>
<td>Women’s rights are not always recognized as human rights. Gender-based violence may increase.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological trauma, physical violence, casualties and death</strong></td>
<td>Men tend to be the primary soldiers/combatants. Yet, in various conflicts, women have made up significant numbers of combatants. Women and girls are often victims of sexual violence (including rape, sexual mutilation, sexual humiliation, forced prostitution and forced pregnancy) during armed conflict.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Social networks disrupted and destroyed – changes in family structures and composition</strong></td>
<td>Gender relations can be subject to stress and change. The traditional division of labour within a family may be under pressure. Survival strategies often necessitate changes in the gender division of labour. Women may become responsible for an increased number of dependents.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilization of people for conflict. Every day life and work disrupted.</strong></td>
<td>The gender division of labour in workplaces can change. With men's mobilization for combat, women have often taken over traditionally male occupations and responsibilities. Women have challenged traditional gender stereotypes and roles by becoming combatants and taking on other non-traditional roles.</td>
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<td><strong>Material shortages (shortages of food, health care, water, fuel, etc)</strong></td>
<td>Women’s role as provider of the everyday needs of the family may mean increased stress and work as basic goods are more difficult to locate. Girls may also face an increased workload. Non-combatant men may also experience stress related to their domestic gender roles if they are expected, but unable, to provide for their families.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Creation of refugees and displaced people</strong></td>
<td>People’s ability to respond to an emergency situation is influenced by whether they are male or female. Women and men refugees (as well as boys and girls) often have different needs and priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogue and peace negotiations</strong></td>
<td>Women are often excluded from formal discussions given their lack of participation and access in pre-conflict decision-making organizations and institutions.</td>
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<table>
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<th>Elements of conflict situations and possible gender dimensions (cont.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements of conflict situations</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Political negotiations and planning to implement peace accords</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media used to communicate messages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of outside investigators, peacekeepers, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holding of elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal investments in employment creation, health care, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demobilization of combatants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures to increase the capacity of and confidence in civil society</td>
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**Gender Analysis**

Through gender analysis we can identify the differences between women and men regarding their specific activities, conditions, needs, access and control over resources, and access to development benefits and decision-making. Three key elements have been highlighted in identifying gender analysis:

**Division of labour**
- Men: productive tasks
- Women: reproductive tasks

**Division of resources**
- Women often are not allowed to own capital assets and have no access and control over resources

**Needs**
- Practical and strategic needs differ greatly between men and women

It is important to have a clear understanding of “who does what” within the society. Often women are relegated to reproductive tasks, but in conflict and emergency situations, they may also play an important role in productive activities. Moreover, a better understanding of women’s needs is crucial in deciding how benefits and resources are distributed and accessed by men and women during a crisis. Finally, it is fundamental to support not only women’s practical concerns, such as the need for fuel, wood, water, food and sustainable health, including reproductive health needs. It is also critical to support women’s strategic needs, including leadership, decision-making and empowerment. By supporting these qualities and focusing on women’s strengths rather than their weaknesses the entire community will be afforded better protection.
Gender policies

Gender analysis seeks to identify and address the impact of a policy, programme, action and initiative by men and women.

This entails collecting sexually desegregated data and gender-sensitive information about the population concerned. Gender analysis is the first step in gender sensitive planning and for promoting gender equality. The following gender policies have been classified by Naila Kabeer7:

Gender-blind policies
Recognize no distinction between the sexes. Assumptions incorporate biases in favour of existing gender relations and so tend to exclude women.

Gender-aware policies
Recognize that within a society, actors are women as well as men, that they are constrained in different, and often unequal ways, and they may consequently have differing and sometimes conflicting needs, interests and priorities.

Gender neutral policy approaches
Use the knowledge of gender differences in a given context to overcome biases in delivery, to ensure that they target and benefit both genders effectively in terms of their practical gender needs, and that they work within the existing gender division of resources and responsibilities.

Gender specific policies
Use the knowledge of gender differences in a given context to respond to the practical gender needs of a specific gender, working with the existing division of resources and responsibilities.

Gender redistribution policies
Are interventions that intend to transform existing distributions to create a more balanced relationship of gender. These policies may target both genders, or one gender specifically; touch on strategic gender interests; and may work with women’s practical gender needs, but do so in ways which have transformatory potential to help build up the supportive conditions for women to empower themselves.

These different approaches are not mutually exclusive. For instance, in situations where gender-blind planning has been the norm, moving towards gender-neutral policies would be a significant step forward. In some situations, it may be counterproductive to start with gender-redistribution policies, and a better approach could focus more on needs specific to women.

Evolution of policy approaches toward women and development

There has been a gradual shift in the way women are perceived within development thinking from that of victims and passive objects to independent actors.

Welfare approach
During the 1950s and 60s, the emphasis on women was on their reproductive roles as mothers and homemakers. This approach was based on Western stereotypes of the nuclear family in which women are economically dependent on the male breadwinners.8

Women in Development (WID)
In the early 1970s, researchers began to focus on the division of labour based on sex, and the impact of development and modernization strategies on women. The WID concept came into use in this period.9 The philosophy underlying this approach is that women are lagging behind in society and the gap between men and women can be bridged by remedial measures within the existing structures.10 The WID approach started to recognize women as direct actors of social,

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political, cultural and working life. Criticism to the WID approach emerged later, underlining that women's issues tended to be increasingly relegated to marginalized programmes and isolated projects. The WID approach did not implicitly have a direct impact on development. The problem of WID was that it provided women with additional resources but no power to manage these resources. The WID concept led to increased workloads and heavy schedules for women and prevented their empowerment.

Gender and Development
In the 1980s, the GAD approach emerged as a result of WID and its shortcomings, concentrating on the unequal relations between men and women due to "uneven playing fields". The term gender arose as an analytical tool from an increasing awareness of inequalities due to institutional structures. It focused not only on women as an isolated and homogeneous group, but on the roles and needs of both men and women. Given that women are usually in disadvantaged positions as compared to men, promotion of gender equality implies an explicit attention to women's needs, interests and perspectives. The objective then is the advancement of the status of women in society, with gender equality as the ultimate goal.  

Gender Mainstreaming
The concept of bringing gender issues into the mainstream of society was clearly established as a global strategy for promoting gender equality in the Platform for Action adopted at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The conference highlighted the necessity to ensure that gender equality is a primary goal in all areas of societal development. In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows:

In any area and at all levels, a gender mainstreaming perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men in any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes.

It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality.

Mainstreaming is not about adding a "woman's component" or even a "gender equality component" into an existing activity. It goes beyond increasing women's participation; it means bringing the experience, knowledge, and interest of women and men to bear on the development agenda. It may require changes in goals, strategies and actions so that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes. Thus, the goal of mainstreaming gender equality is the transformation of unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both women and men.

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Despite years of discussion, there are still misconceptions about exactly what “gender mainstreaming” entails. In the following table, some common myths and realities on gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance are presented.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myth</th>
<th>Reality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inserting one session on women fulfills the mandate to mainstreaming a gender perspective</td>
<td>Mainstreaming a gender perspective involves changing how situations are analyzed. A brief profile of how and why women’s needs are different from those of men’s should be the starting point of the analysis. These basic insights should influence the understanding of the contents and raise issues to be explored in each project component.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We have a women’s project and therefore we have mainstreamed gender”</td>
<td>A gender mainstreaming strategy involves bringing a gender analysis into all initiatives, not just developing an isolated subcomponent or project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We have mainstreamed gender therefore we can’t have specific initiatives targeting women”</td>
<td>A mainstreaming strategy does not preclude specific initiatives that are either targeted at women or at narrowing gender inequalities. In fact, concrete investments are generally required to protect women’s rights, provide capacity building to women’s NGOs and work with men on gender issues. Many of these initiatives can be more successful through a separate initiative rather than as a subcomponent in a larger project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We are here to save lives, not to ask whether or not someone is a woman or a man before we provide assistance or to give priority to women over men”</td>
<td>Using a gender perspective involves incorporating an understanding of how being male or female in a specific situation contributes to vulnerability and defines capacities. It is not a screening process to exclude those who need assistance from receiving support. There may be times when given their different priorities and needs, women and men will best be served through the provision of different resources. Furthermore, it may be necessary to make additional investments to ensure that women’s voices are heard. However, a gender mainstreaming strategy does not necessarily call for mechanistic “favouring” of women over men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“All this talk of gender, but what they really mean is women”</td>
<td>It is true that a lot of the work on gender in humanitarian assistance focuses on women. This is primarily because it is women’s needs and interests that tend to be neglected. However, it is important that the analysis and discussion look at both sides of the gender equation. More attention is needed to understand how men’s roles, strategies, responsibilities and options are shaped by gender expectations during conflicts and emergencies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The first part of this chapter is based on the presentation made by Dasa Silovic, Senior Adviser on Gender in Development, UNDP New York, during a seminar on Gender and Emergency held in Rome in April 2001. The second part presents the most relevant legal instruments on the protection of women and children in conflict and post-conflict situations. The full text of the instruments presented in this session is available in the annexed CD-ROM under “Legal Instruments.”

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AS A BASIC HUMAN RIGHT

Today, the participation of women in political and public decision-making is generally recognized both in political and in legislative terms. Despite these gains, gender discrimination remains a formidable barrier to women’s participation in formal decision-making processes. Political institutions tend to perpetuate an exclusionary attitude and culture of politics towards women. As a result, many women around the world have chosen to work outside formal politics within various civil society organizations and political parties that advocate for social and political change.

An issue often ignored in addressing women’s human rights is the rights of women national minorities and ethnic groups. International documents clearly stipulate the recognition of the rights of ethnic groups and minorities. As compared to other women, women belonging to ethnic groups and national minorities experience three times the discrimination within the overall society and as members of their own ethnic group or national minority.
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

Women all over the world perform multiple roles in productive labour (paid and unpaid) which is not reflected in their official measures of economic activity. Their access to equal pay for comparable work, family benefits, financial credit and the right to own and inherit property are either non-existent or are limited by law and traditional patriarchal constraints that continue to undermine female economic life.

The traditional gender division of labour treats domestic work as a voluntary contribution by women and perpetuates inequity at every income level. Issues to be addressed should include the greater vulnerability of women due to loss of employment, interrupted employment due to conflict and a gender differentiated assessment of the discrimination faced by women in social welfare systems.

In situations of armed conflict or impoverishment after conflict, women in developing countries tend to maintain their livelihood and that of their families by working in the informal sector. Thus, their labour is not recognized and socially protected and they are completely dislocated from the traditional community in the holding of lands and resources. Resettlement is conducted under patriarchal processes and gives control of rehabilitation packages to men. Even if the situation eventually permits return to the original habitat, women's lives have been drastically altered by the conflict.

Gender-based violence also encompasses life-threatening deprivation of resources like rampant malnutrition and inadequate health care. Freedom from poverty and well-being is the right of every individual. Reproductive rights and the right to family planning are internationally recognized human rights and should be protected in conflict situations.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE FROM WAR TO PEACE

The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Women
Men, women, boys and girls experience conflicts in different ways. Women often take over non-traditional roles brought on by the changes and transformations during the conflicts that render them both victims and actors. On the one hand, war is a burden for women and girls including gender-based and sexual violence (rape as a weapon of war), the spread of HIV/AIDS, increased vulnerability, lack of mobility and the use of women as sexual slaves by soldiers. On the other hand, women also get involved in the conflict as combatants, by taking care of extended families in extremely adverse circumstances and by developing coping mechanisms to take over non-traditional occupations which enables them to gain exposure outside the private sphere.

Women in the Peace Process
Women often organize themselves at the grassroots level in order to promote activities for peace, but they do not get access to the negotiation table in the formal peace process. It is important to stress that the exclusion of women from the peace process jeopardizes a sustainable peace. It is therefore, also the responsibility of the international community to support women's activities in the peace process, in line with Resolution 1325 (for example, UNIFEM in Burundi worked on capacity building with local groups of women to enable them to participate in the peace talks). The idea is to better utilize the time between the end of a conflict and the beginning of the reconstruction process in order to promote the participation of women in peace efforts.

Women in Post-Conflict situations
Once we understand the political, economic and social impact of wars on men, women, girls and boys, we are in a better position to define the needs of a post-conflict society. This is a very important phase that gives an opportunity to promote reconstruction efforts with a gender perspective and enable women to participate actively in this process (as they may not want to return to the status quo ante bellum). This wide range of activities requires a gender perspective, such as the reconstruction of civil society, reorganization of police and armed forces, promotion of human rights, organization of elections, access to and control over resources (land issues for female head of households) and the setting-up of truth and reconciliation commissions.
Women live daily with the risk of physical, emotional, economic and social harm in ways that have no direct parallels for their male counterparts. In virtually every nation, violence or the threat of violence, particularly at home, constricts the range of choices open to women and girls in almost every area of life, public and private. It limits their choices directly by destroying their health, disrupting their lives, narrowing the scope of their activity and indirectly eroding self confidence and self-esteem. Universally, violence against women is epitomized by several characteristics which include,

- The reluctance to criminalize, the casual treatment and/or indifference to the issue of violence by existing laws, law enforcement agents, judicial authorities and society at large;

- The taboo nature of the issue of violence, thus creating what has been described as the “private realm” synonymous with domestic violence;

- Existing customs, traditional practices and norms that further reinforce and perpetuate inherent discrimination and inequalities;

- Forced marriages, forced prostitution, trafficking, commercialization of women's bodies, which are consequences of failed states, lack of prudent socio-economic policies and absence of good governance;

- Sexual violations, including rape, and their use as weapons of war, and other human rights violations by soldiers, international aid workers and peacekeepers, a direct function of intra/inter conflicts and wars;

- Sexual assault against female civilians during armed conflict as part of a strategy to suppress or punish the civilian population.

While restating the universality of this phenomenon, common characteristics have been recorded – albeit with regional typologies – and varied patterns appear prevalent in specific cultural and geographical contexts. Along these geographical contexts, certain forms of violence against women are intrinsically entrenched in cultural and existing patriarchal ideologies. Such culturally embedded violence includes “female genital mutilation (FGM)” widespread in Africa, “Rapto” prevalent in Mexico, and “honour-kilings” practiced in Western Asia, India, Brazil, and Pakistan, among others.

Most recently, however, violence against women has taken new and despicable dimensions. The resultant effect of such repugnant traditional customs, violent intra/inter state conflicts, economic hardships, failure of development policies and globalization is the extreme and continued violation of women's rights and women's inability to participate and make informed choices and decisions about their welfare. Subsequently, women's lives in the public sphere is significantly endangered and marginalized, while violence in the hitherto ‘private realm’ is intensified. The harmful effect of violence against more than half the population of the world, women, cannot be overemphasized. One of the gruesome effects of such violence against women is the scouring epidemic ‘acquired immune deficiency syndrome’ (AIDS).

Statistics have indicated that the resultant effect of extreme poverty and gender inequality, especially in post-conflict environment and countries in transition, is women's increased vulnerability to the epidemic HIV/AIDS, which leaves households and communities with unimaginable burdens. Often these women are victims of forced sexual assault and rape by soldiers and aid workers. The overall cost to human society and the anguish experienced by the victim is inestimable.

Furthermore, there is growing evidence that war and civil unrest not only endanger women in the public sphere, they also intensify violence against women in the home.

It was in apparent recognition of the incalculable cost of this crosscutting issue of violence to society that the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session on 20 December 1993 adopted resolution 48/104, which proclaimed the “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.” Earlier conventions and resolutions such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Resolu-
tion 1990/15 of 24th May, Nairobi Looking Forward Strategies (NLFS) 1985 had made sparse mention of the issue of violence. However, in 1993, the General Assembly resolution 48/104 became the first international human rights instrument to deal “exclusively” with violence against women. It reaffirmed that violence is a violation of women’s fundamental human rights. In its article 1, it clearly defined violence as:

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” Such violence whether it occurs on the streets or in homes, affects women of every nation, belief, class, race and ethnic group. It is perpetrated by men, silenced by custom, institutionalized in laws and state systems, and passed from one generation to the next.”

Similarly, international and regional declarations and campaigns on violence against women have unanimously condemned the act of violence, and reiterated that “human rights of women are inalienable, integral and indivisible parts of universal human rights.”

Consequently, women should be treated as subjects of rights. Societies were therefore urged to:

- Raise awareness on the issue of violence against women;
- Criminalize all forms of gender-based violence;
- Reform pre-existing discriminatory laws, policies, including traditional practices and, in some instances, criminalize such repugnant practices;
- Create new synergies geared towards eradicating violence against women;
- Advocate, build capacities and empower women to speak out about experiences of violence;
- Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, a necessary tool in the fight against gender-based violence;
- Build indicators and collect data to showcase the prevalence of violence against women;
- Identify “lessons learned and adopt best practices.”

In spite of the global campaign to eliminate violence against women championed by the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and other partners including civil society organizations, violence against women has not been eradicated, though several success stories have been recorded. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court now recognizes rape and other forms of sexual violence by combatants as a war crime and considers sexual slavery a crime against humanity. Throughout the world, the campaign has catalyzed a number of legislative reviews and passage of new bills such as:

- Laws prohibiting FGM in several countries including Senegal;
- Laws against domestic violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, Venezuela, Bolivia, Antigua;
- In Brazil, Congress allocated $10 million for the creation of women’s shelters;
- In India, the government made gender sensitization training mandatory for police officers;
- In Croatia, Trade Unions adopted sexual harassment policies and the first criminal charges for sexual harassment were filed in a law suit;
- In Jordan, the government built shelters for women victims of honour killings.¹⁷

Through the campaigns, partners and stakeholders were mobilized in order to reinforce coordination and networking among women and men involved in eradicating gender-based violence against women. Despite these success stories, much work needs to be done.

¹⁵ Female Genital Mutilation, is the practice of cutting or slashing the clitoris of a woman, often erroneously linked to sexual libido, chastity, and fidelity. This practice is prevalent in Africa, Arab States, Western Asia, etc
¹⁶ Rapto, has been defined by local laws in Mexico as “the kidnapping of a woman by a man for the sole purpose of satisfying his erotic sexual desire, or with intent of marrying the woman.
¹⁷ UNIFEM, “Picturing a Life Free of Violence: Media and Communications Strategies to End Violence Against Women.”
Security Council 1325 Resolution (October 2000)
A very important step to promote gender in peace building operations was the adoption by the UN Security Council in October 2000 of a comprehensive Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. Resolution 1325 stresses the need to address gender issues in all peacebuilding and peacekeeping efforts and to include women in the key institutions and decision-making bodies committed to the building and maintenance of peace. The Security Council reaffirmed the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in peacebuilding. It highlights the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts geared towards the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, as well as the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. For further information, consult the full text of the resolution in the annexed CD-ROM.

www.un.org

The Geneva Conventions (1949) and Additional Protocols (1977)
During a war, certain humanitarian rules must be observed, even with regard to the enemy. These rules are set out mainly in the four Geneva Conventions of 12 August, 1949, and their Additional Protocols of 8 June 1977. The Geneva Conventions are founded on the idea of respect for individuals and their dignity. Persons not directly taking part in hostilities and those put out of action through sickness, injury, captivity or any other causes must be respected and protected against the effects of war; those who suffer must be aided without discrimination. The Additional Protocols extend this protection to any person affected by an armed conflict. Furthermore, they stipulate that the parties to the conflict and the combatants shall not attack the civilian population and civilian objects and shall conduct their military operations in conformity with the recognized rules of humanity.

www.unhchr.ch

Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others (1951)
Parties that sign this Convention “agree to punish any person who, to gratify the passions of another: (1) Procurers, entices or leads away, for purposes of prostitution, another person, even with the consent of that person; (2) Exploits the prostitution of another person, even with the consent of that person”. In addition, the states parties promise to punish any person who keeps or manages, or knowingly finances or takes part in the financing of a brothel; and anyone who knowingly lets or rents a building or other place for the purpose of the prostitution of others.

www.unhchr.ch

Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergencies and Armed Conflicts (1974)
Prohibits attacks and bombing on the civilian population, inflicting suffering especially on women and children, who are recognized as the most vulnerable members of the population (Art. 1). Moreover, it recognizes all forms of repression as criminal acts, including cruel and inhuman treatment of women and children, imprisonment, torture, shootings, mass arrests, collective punishment, destruction of dwellings and forcible eviction (Art. 5).

www.unhchr.ch

This Convention (entry in force 1981) guarantees women equal rights with men in many spheres of life, including education, employment, health care, political participation, nationality and marriage. The Convention also affords women protection from abuses from which men are largely already protected. However, it does not specifically protect women against rape, spousal abuse or other abuses suffered mainly by women.

www.unhchr.ch  www.unifem.org

Optional Protocol to CEDAW (1999)
Enables individuals to raise complaints with the UN Committee for CEDAW and the Committee to probe into violation of human rights in member states. By ratifying the Optional Protocol, a State would recognize the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women – the body that monitors States parties’ compliance with the Convention – to receive and consider complaints from individuals or groups within its jurisdiction. The Committee would then be authorized to request the State Party where the alleged violation occurred to take “interim measures … to avoid possible irreparable damage to the victim or victims…”.

www.unhchr.ch  www.unifem.org

The Convention (entry in force 1990) on the rights of the Child explicitly extends to children the protection afforded to adults through the various legal instruments. For example, States Parties agree to safeguard due judicial process for children and protect children
affected by armed conflict. Four general principles are enshrined in the convention: 1. Non-Discrimination (Article 2): states party must ensure that all children within their jurisdiction enjoy their rights. The essential message is equality of opportunities: girls should be given the same opportunities as boys. 2. Best interests of the child (Article 3): the best interests of children must be a primary consideration in all State decisions which affect children. 3. The right to life, survival and development (Article 6): the right-to-life article includes formulations about the right to survival and to development. 4. The views of the child (Article 12): states that children should be free to have options in all matters affecting them, and those views should be given due weight “in accordance to the age and maturity of the child”.

www.unicef.org  www.unhchr.ch

**The Vienna Declaration (1993)**
The declaration recognizes that the human rights of women and of girl-children are an inalienable part of universal human rights, and calls for the elimination of gender-based violence. It recognizes the importance of joint efforts to eliminate violence against women in public and private life, and confirms that the violation of women's human rights in armed conflict situations is a violation of the fundamental principles of international human rights and humanitarian law.

www.unhchr.ch

**Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)**
Asserts that violence against women is pervasive in all societies, across lines of income, class and culture, and recognizes that violence against women by private actors is a human rights violation. The Declaration reaffirmed that violence against women is the manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women and that it is one of the critical mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate status.

www.un.org  www.unhchr.ch

**Beijing Platform for Action (1995)**
The Platform identifies violence against women as an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It includes a focus on combating violence against women as one of its strategic objectives and on promoting the status of women in war affected countries.

www.un.org  www.unifem.org

During post-conflict and reconstruction an additional set of legal instrument must be taken into account. These instruments include:

**ILO Convention 100: Equal Remuneration (1951)**
States which have ratified C.100 agree to promote the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. They must ensure its application to all workers in a manner consistent with the national methods used to determine rates of pay. The Convention defines equal pay for work of equal value as a rate of pay fixed without discrimination based on sex.18

www.iolo.org

**Convention on Political Rights of Women (1952)**
The main objective of the Convention is to implement the principle of equality of rights for men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights. The Convention formulates important principles providing that women, without any discrimination, shall be (a) entitled to vote in all elections; (b) eligible for elections to all publicly elected bodies established by national law; (c) entitled to hold public office and exercise all public functions established by national law.

www.unhchr.ch

**ILO Convention 111: Discrimination (1958)**
Each ratifying state must adhere to the basic goal of promoting equality of opportunity and treatment by means of a national policy that aims to end all forms of discrimination in employment and occupation. Discrimination is defined as any distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, religion, political opinion, national extraction or social origin that nullifies or impairs equality of opportunity or treatment in employment or occupation.

www.iolo.org

**Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960)**
Adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO, this convention paves the way for equal educational opportunities for girls and women. The convention is not only directed at the elimination of discrimination in education but also concerns the adoption of measures aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in this field.

www.unesco.org

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The first part of this chapter presents essential tools that can help to conduct gender analysis in emergency, conflict and post-conflict situations. In the second part, a series of key suggestions for engendering project formulation are presented.

Gender Analysis

During humanitarian crises, it is essential that the different needs of the entire community are taken into account. This includes the delivery of services, and according the rights of men and women equal priority in order to guarantee a more successful intervention.

Objectives of the humanitarian and recovery interventions are:
- To protect civilians from harm;
- To save lives;
- To enhance response to and management of crisis;
- To support early initiatives that facilitate the transition to recovery.

Gender analysis contributes to meeting objectives of humanitarian and recovery interventions. It tells us:
- Who (women, men, boys, girls, elderly women and men) suffers and how;
- Who (women, men, boys, girls, elderly women and men) needs protection and why;
- How they (women, men, boys, girls, elderly women and men) cope;
- How they (women, men, boys, girls, elderly women and men) are or are not able to recover.

Gender analysis helps us to:
- Identify areas for action;
- Design interventions;
- Understand implications of interventions;
- Identify processes and structures that perpetuate disadvantages (e.g. legislative, political, socio-cultural, economic);
- Identify potential processes.

Elements emphasizing the need for gender analysis in transition situations:
- Disruption and destruction of social networks;
- Population balance between women and men can change in war time;
- The gender division of labour is often in flux (including new skills for women);
- Gender relations are often contested;
- Women are often excluded from political and diplomatic efforts and negotiations to end the conflict;
- Demobilization of military forces often focuses donor attention to men;
- Abundance of weapons may create urban and rural violence;
- Gender equality may be considered a secondary issue;
- Demographic pressures on women (to increase nationality)\(^\text{19}\);
- Reintegration of former combatants and their dependents into local communities (female combatants, war widows, handicapped men and women, girls sexual slaves, child soldiers etc.);
- Impact of mine accidents on men and women and rehabilitation problems;
- Post-conflict violence (domestic violence);
- Return of refugees and internally displaced persons (with special concern for female heads of household);
- Post-traumatic stress disorders (how to assist victims and survivors of gender-based violence);
- Reconciliation issues.

\(^{19}\) IASC Gender Analysis in consolidate Appeal Processes (CAP).
The Capacities and Vulnerabilities Framework was designed specifically for use in the humanitarian and recovery context. It can be utilized within the scope of planning and predicting the outcome of interventions, as well as assessing needs by mapping out the strengths and weaknesses of peoples in emergency and transition situations.

In this particular context, Capacities refer to the existing strengths in individuals and social groups that are related to people’s material, social and physical resources, and their beliefs and attitudes which are built over time and determine people’s ability to cope with a crisis.

Vulnerabilities are long-term factors that weaken the ability of people to cope with a sudden crisis or a drawn-out emergency and often make people more susceptible to disaster.20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacities and Vulnerabilities analysis matrix</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crisis</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical/material</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social/organizational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivational/attitudinal</td>
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</tbody>
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During the seminar, a checklist for assessing needs in conflict situations was developed by participants to outline their different experiences of conflict, post-conflict and emergency situations. This checklist can be utilized as a powerful instrument in the service of those persons directly seeking a practical day-by-day evaluation of gender awareness in their intervention and humanitarian assistance strategies. Going through this list should render the intervention more comprehensive and complete, and assist in avoidance of pitfalls such as gender blindness. Nonetheless, the elements described in the checklist are not always readily available in every circumstance. However, a complete gender approach cannot be implemented without a set of minimum level practices.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Set of essential practices</th>
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<tr>
<td>Completed/Date</td>
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Checklist

1. Make a brief analysis of the social and cultural context in which you are going to operate, taking into account:

☐ Existing gender roles (who does what)

☐ Who has the power to decide within the family, the community, the institutions

☐ Who receives the supplies in the distribution lines

☐ Structure of local households

☐ How resources are allocated within the household

☐ Roles of men and women in spiritual/religious life

☐ Traditional/cultural practices that hinder women’s rights
2. Make a brief analysis of the political context in which you are going to operate, taking into account:

☐ Level of women's participation in political movements, local authorities, decision-making at the community level

☐ How women register for voting and how they participate in the vote (if relevant)

☐ Whether or not boys and girls have the same access to education

☐ Whether girls drop out and if so, at what level

3. Make a brief analysis of the economic context in which you are going to operate, taking into account:

☐ Kind of activities/tasks/work that are forbidden to women by local customs

☐ Who the breadwinner is in the family

☐ Whether or not both women and men are engaged in the informal sector, and what do they do
4. Identify local resources that can contribute to the intervention:

- Local human resources on which you can rely
- Existing economic resources (who is managing them? what is the amount?)
- Existing local infrastructure (location, condition, who is responsible for them)
- Existing networks of support (family, religious groups, committees…)
- Men and women who can collaborate in the protection of the most vulnerable groups
- Local human resources that would be available after training/capacity building/skills development (identification of potential)
- Are women already overwhelmed with work (domestic tasks)?
- Time factor/ allocation of time for the use of local human resources (especially for women who may be engaged in several activities)
5. Remember that people's needs are different:

☐ Identify and prioritize the primary needs of both men and women. (Conflict may keep women inside their homes more than at normal times. Special efforts need to be made in order to contact them and ascertain their needs.)

☐ Organize sanitation according to the population

☐ Organize income-generating activities targeting the more vulnerable groups

☐ Adapt first aid kits to the context and needs of the target population

☐ Organize psychological support activities accessible to the entire population

☐ Use (in these activities) different approaches according to sex and age of the end-users

☐ Create medical infrastructures accessible to the entire population
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Checklist (cont.)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Involve both men and women in the organization and management of the camp</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Organize some activities to satisfy social, psychological and cultural needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Protect both women and men from violence (e.g. women: sexual violence; men: forced recruitment in the armed forces)</td>
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<td>☐ Help the local population to return, as far as possible, to “normal” everyday life</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Camp settings – organize the camps according to security priorities for women and girls (separate location of latrines and showers for men and women, improve security within the perimeter of the camp etc.)</td>
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</table>
Projects may have different impacts on men, women and children according to the way in which they are designed and implemented. Developing gender-sensitive projects means integrating a gender dimension into all phases of project formulation. The following table analyzes the project cycle and makes suggestions for engendering particular programmes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Project Cycle</th>
<th>Elements for engendering project formulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phase 1. Problem identification and analysis</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Components</td>
<td>Elements for engendering project formulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the problem</td>
<td>Making a socio-economic analysis through interviews with leaders (both men and women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the problem</td>
<td>Engendering the project cycle: Integrating a gender dimension into all phases of project formulation; involving local women in all phases of the project, including design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generate solutions</td>
<td>Meetings with representatives of the community (young, adults, elders both men and women) in order to find out:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select solutions</td>
<td>– Existing gender roles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Apprise solutions</td>
<td>– Gender division of labour (who does what within the home and the community)</td>
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<td>– Access to and control over resources</td>
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<td>– Decision making mechanisms</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Opportunities to access services</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– Education level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreed problem and preferred solution</td>
<td>Health situation within the community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify immediate needs of both men and women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Analyze existing projects to find out differences and similarities in gender analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Identify and select the most relevant strategic needs to be addressed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Phase 2. Project formulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Components</th>
<th>Elements for engendering project formulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ State the problem</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Prepare proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Objectives</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>– Outputs</td>
<td></td>
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<td>– Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Inputs</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Plan monitoring</td>
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<td>– Plan evaluation</td>
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<td>– Plan implementation</td>
<td></td>
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<td>– Plan budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Challenge assumptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Adjust proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Agreed proposal to secure funding</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Formulate objectives that are concrete and measurable</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Identify clearly the beneficiary of the project (only women, only men, both, local association and institutions, specific groups)</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Choose the best approach to reach the identified objectives (WID, gender, both)</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Design a strategy that takes care of both contributions that men and women can give as well as the specific need they have to satisfy</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Design the activities on the basis of the selected beneficiaries and of their needs (material help, social activities, psychological support, training activities, information activities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Remember to use gender sensitive language in writing the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Prepare a budget explaining clearly which resource will be devoted to women and men</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Select adequate staff that can respond to different gender needs: choosing the right human resources will facilitate a correct gender perception (e.g. foresee women doctors where cultural norms are required)</td>
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### Phase 3. Project appraisal

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<tr>
<th>General Components</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Review document</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Challenge major project components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Make recommendation for adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Adjust proposal</td>
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<td>■ Revised document</td>
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### Phase 4. Secure Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Components</th>
<th>Elements for engendering project formulation</th>
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<tr>
<td>■ Identify donor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Apply required format</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Negotiate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Funding secured</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Try, when possible, to select gender sensitized donors</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Verify that the donors are interested in financing the whole project (including the gender activities)</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Promote the importance of gender sensitized projects when contacting the donor</td>
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### Phase 5. Project Implementation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Components</th>
<th>Elements for engendering project formulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare workplan</td>
<td>Readjust the parts of the project that are not reflecting the target population needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implement</td>
<td>Select gender sensitized collaborator within the local population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor implementation</td>
<td>Train the staff of the importance of the gender approach stressing the accent of those parts of the project which have a gender component</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess progress made</td>
<td>Include both men and women of the staff according to the selected beneficiaries of the project and to the cultural and social norms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify needs</td>
<td>Directly and pro-actively involve the beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update workplan</td>
<td>Use means of promotion of the project that are accessible to the entire population</td>
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### Phase 6. Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Components</th>
<th>Elements for engendering project formulation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>See how the objectives have been met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Are we having an impact on the problem?)</td>
<td>Measure the improvement and/or decline of both male and female condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency</td>
<td>Verify the effectiveness through interviews to both women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Are we using resources efficiently?)</td>
<td>Verify the efficiency (both economic and in terms of human resources)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy</td>
<td>Analyze the unexpected results (positive and negative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Is the project still a relevant solution to the problem? Have better alternatives emerged?)</td>
<td>Verify the sustainability of the project: measure at the end of the project, which and how many activities will have continuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unforeseen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What unexpected events have affected project performance, and how?)</td>
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BACKGROUND PAPER

MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO EMERGENCIES

One of the purposes of the UN is “promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for the fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion.” UN Charter

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GENDER GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS TRAINING IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

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Annex


(a) Key products:


ILO: Gender guidelines for employment and skills training in conflict-affected countries (Geneva, ILO 1998).

(b) Working papers, reports and other materials

Baden, S.: Post-conflict Mozambique: Women’s special situation, population issues and gender perspectives to be integrated into skills training and employment promotion (Geneva, ILO, 1997).


Other outputs


Under preparation

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Date-Bah, E.; Walsh, M: Conflict, gender and jobs: Challenges for reintegration, reconstruction and peace-building (Geneva, ILO).

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ABOUT UNDP

UNDP is the UN’s global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges.

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**Aster Zaoude**, Senior Gender Advisor, Socio-economic Development Group, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

**Dasa Silovic**, Gender Advisor, Socio-economic Development Group, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

**Nadine Puchguirbal**, Department of Peace Keeping Operations (DPKO)

**Felicity Hill**, Consultant-Programme Specialist, Governance, Peace and Security Unit, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

**Mariko Saito**, Socio-economic Development Group, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

**Elena Gastaldo**, consultant ILO-International Training Center, Turin

**Rajeswary Iruthayanthan**, Chief of Publications, UNDP Communications Office of the Administrator

**Elsie Onubogu**, consultant, Socio-economic Development Group, UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

**Turin Staff College**
Risky Business: What Happens to Gender Equality and Women’s Rights in Post-Conflict Societies? Insights from NGO’s in El Salvador

Rae Lesser Blumberg

Using the case of El Salvador, this paper explores how women’s organizational skills developed in civil war translate into work in NGOs in the post-conflict struggle for rights. The paper briefly describes the gender stratification methodology used in the analysis and then presents the situation in El Salvador before, during, and after the war. After discussing how Salvadoran women, despite quite limited economic power, became a well-organized force that was strategically indispensable to the rebels during the war, the paper examines factors that contributed to the success of Las Madres Demandantes (LMD), an NGO focused on the single issue of getting child support payments to women. The experience of other NGOs in El Salvador is reviewed with respect to the factors that contributed to the success of LMD. In conclusion, a few lessons from the issues faced by the post-conflict women’s NGOs in El Salvador are presented.

KEY WORDS: gender stratification; El Salvador; post-conflict societies; women’s NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

Stories of women rising to the occasion in war and emergency go back to ancient history and forward to today’s headlines. Social science studies frequently find that traditional gender constraints are loosened for the duration of the crisis; women are accepted even in combat roles if the situation is sufficiently desperate. In many recent conflicts, the outcome often depended to a significant extent on women’s efforts and this might even be recognized

1William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Sociology, University of Virginia, 539 Cabell Hall, Charlottesville, VA 22903; e-mail: rblumber@virginia.edu and Professor Emerita, Sociology, University of California, San Diego; e-mail: rblumber@weber.ucsd.edu.
and applauded in the first throes of victory. But when the dust has settled, women’s gains, more often than not, have proven ephemeral. In Zimbabwe, for example, Robert Mugabe credited women, who comprised 30 percent of combatants at the moment of liberation in 1980 (Lueker 1998), with assuring his victory. He promised them equality and his government promoted both female education and gains in legal status. But eighteen years later, under fire for increasingly authoritarian rule and economic mismanagement, he stood aside when a Supreme Court decision undermined most of those gains in women’s legal rights (Lueker 2000). Is this typical?

This article will explore the question: To what extent does women’s assumption of risk lead to lasting gains in rights? The paper focuses on El Salvador. After presenting the methodology used, the paper describes the situation in El Salvador before, during and after the war. It discusses how Salvadoran women, despite quite limited economic power, first became a well-organized force that was strategically indispensable to the rebels during the war and then became a well-organized force fighting politically—often victoriously—on their own behalf once the shooting stopped. The paper then examines factors that contributed to the success of Las Madres Demandantes, an NGO focused on the single issue of getting child support payments to women; this NGO could never have existed without the organizational power and expertise women developed during the war. The experience of other NGOs in El Salvador is reviewed with respect to the factors that contributed to the success of LMD. In conclusion, a few lessons from the issues faced by the post-conflict women’s NGOs in El Salvador are presented.

METHODOLOGY

The paper uses the lens of my gender stratification theory (Blumberg 1978, 1984, 1991, 1998a) to view the “risky business” of Salvadoran women’s journey—from pre-war subordination through twelve years of war to the hard-won but far from universal victories of the post-war period. Relative economic power of women and men and women’s organizational power are explored as the main factors affecting the extent to which Salvadoran women have been able to convert risk into lasting rights. Other influences considered are ideology, social stratification, international women’s and human rights movements, and international media.

The study draws on my field research in El Salvador in 1996 and 1998, supplemented by my field experience in over thirty countries around the world, especially my work in several other post-conflict societies. In 1996, I worked briefly on microfinance and then extensively on USAID-funded
gender research in ten of the country’s fourteen departments (provinces). Although my research focused on an environmental project, gender and post-conflict issues frequently emerged in the interviews and focus groups. I returned in fall 1998 to carry out a case study for a larger USAID Women in Politics project. Using rapid appraisal methodology, I interviewed 116 people (104 women, twelve men), including fifty-five key informant interviews (forty-five women, ten men) and twelve focus groups (fifty-nine women, two men). I worked in the city of San Salvador as well as in six departments around the country. These varied in their degree of involvement in the war: least affected were Sonsonate and Santa Ana in the west and the department of San Salvador in the center. Chalatenango in the north and Cuscutlan and San Vicente in the east were much more involved in the war.

**WOMEN OF EL SALVADOR: FROM PRE-WAR PATRIARCHY TO WARTIME PARTNERSHIP TO POST-WAR PARTIAL EMPOWERMENT**

In brief overview, El Salvador underwent a twelve-year war (1980–92) between a right wing government and left wing insurgents (FMLN). Some sixty years of authoritarian rule preceded the armed conflict, which began to escalate into lethal force in the 1970s, replete with Death Squads. When the peace accords were signed in 1992, women represented over 30 percent of the FMLN. The Peace Accords were followed by a period of a few years of fairly substantial aid from the UN, European Union, United States, and other donors.

**Pre-war Patriarchy**

Women had limited economic power and were hampered by conservative gender ideologies—both secular and religious—as well as the overwhelmingly unequal nature of the larger stratification system. Although women had and have inheritance rights, they had very little property before the war. Rural women in most parts of El Salvador had little opportunity to generate cash income and there is no tradition of women selling in local markets as in the Andean and Caribbean countries. Nor is there a rich tradition of handicrafts, as in the countries with large indigenous populations that formed part of the Mayan and Incan empires. For most rural women, especially in the war zones, the only other source of very occasional income came from selling commodities such as eggs or a chicken or other small animals, or services such as dressmaking, to their neighbors. The statistics on female labor force participation reflect mainly paid employment by urban...
women (where even in the burgeoning manufacturing sector, women made a good deal less than men). By war’s end, 30 percent of women were counted as economically active (Sivard, 1995).

Pre-war El Salvador strongly espoused a very conservative gender role ideology. A woman and her family lost face if she worked outside the home. As a result, she didn’t get a full measure of economic power from any income she earned because the ideology devalued it: after all, its tenets decreed that she shouldn’t have been out earning it in the first place (Blumberg 1984, 1991). This secular ideology was reinforced by a religious ideology of conservative Catholicism (except on the left) that further constricted women’s options at both macro and micro levels. Class differences and mutual distrust reinforced unequal gender stratification (Blumberg 1984).

War

Women, working almost exclusively with the FMLN, gained organizational experience during the war. Numerous women’s NGOs arose to support the FMLN fighters, and women became increasingly involved in the war effort. Many became leaders, some became noted—and tough—military commanders. Their support was indispensable to the FMLN and publicly acknowledged by the insurgent leadership. Grass-roots women organized also, out of necessity. In the war zones, about a million people fled, most leaving the country for refugee camps in neighboring countries or for the United States. The women who stayed behind and those in the refugee camps lived in a world with little day-to-day contact with the fighting age men; they had to organize to survive. In many of my focus groups in 1998, women in the Oriente told me stories of having been catapulted from simple farm wives to leaders who made sure people got fed and cared for.4

Peace and Its Gendered Aftermath

The women activists of the FMLN expected that their sacrifices and contributions would be recognized in the Peace Accords and that they would gain new rights for all the risks they had undertaken. To their dismay, their agenda was almost completely ignored by both left and right in the forging of the Accords. In response, many national-level women’s NGOs loosened or cut their ties to the FMLN and began emphasizing women’s rights and gender awareness. Donors endorsed their new program by providing considerable support for projects lasting as long as seven years.

Part of what the activist women were unable to obtain from the Peace Accords they have managed to extract from the national political system
Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Post-Conflict Societies

through an unexpected coalition of left- and right-wing women members of Congress (Salguero 1998). Together, boosted by lobbying and advocacy efforts from the war-born women’s movement and women’s NGOs, they succeeded in pushing through significant legislation aiding women. Violence against women (VAW) became the issue that broke through all the years of hostility and war and united women members of the Legislative Assembly from both ARENA, the right-wing governing party, and FMLN, converted into a political party as part of the peace process. To everyone’s surprise, they formed a caucus, and with the help of the activist, organizationally sophisticated NGO women, they got the following measures passed by a Legislative Assembly in which they were only around one-tenth of deputies: a law against intra-familial violence, a reformed Family Code, and a series of regulations toughening and broadening the application of the country’s child support (cuota alimenticia) laws.

The legislative successes contrast with the early disarray of the women’s NGOs. Going into the first Peace Accords election in 1994, the level of disunity and infighting that emerged in a highly participatory attempt at platform writing meant that they were unable to agree on a common agenda until six days before the election. As a result, there was no time to get the main parties on board vis-à-vis their belated platform. But the caucus of the women politicians focused on the issues that united the women’s groups and permitted them to turn the risks they had taken into a significant gain in rights.

Women’s NGOs in El Salvador have had mixed results in pursuing their goals. The following two cases examine how economic, organizational, and other factors influenced their results.

LAS MADRES DEMANDANTES: CASE STUDY OF A SUCCESSFUL NGO

Organizational and Economic Factors

One of the NGOs that separated from the FMLN in order to pursue strategic and practical gender interests is the well-known and highly regarded Las Dignas. In 1994, they undertook a diagnostic study of the problem of women not being able to get child support (cuota alimenticia) because of the Byzantine inefficiencies of the bureaucracy in the Attorney General’s Office (Procuraduria General de la Republica) that administered the existing law (Murcia 1998). While most women with that problem were poor, the child support problem encompasses all levels of society. Las Dignas not only began to promote direct action on its own, it also helped create a spin-off NGO, Las Madres Demandantes (LMD; Polanco 1998). This association
of “Demanding Mother’s” actually plays on the Spanish word for a person making a demand in a legal case (demandante), as well as the fact that all these women are demanding child support through both legal and organizational means (Vasquez 1998). LMD evolved very rapidly to become the premier single-issue women’s NGO in the country (Lopez 1998). It elected its own board from within the ranks of child support supplicants. It began to run weekly meetings and support groups for women members involved in seeking child support awards or modifications. It also began to offer help to women who were not active members but needed help in negotiating the bureaucracy.

In the focus groups discussions with rank-and-file members and board members, I was impressed by the level of expertise developed by these women concerning their issue. They were highly competent in a narrow sphere of the law despite lacking much formal education. Moreover, these women attempted to share their knowledge with others in the same situation (Villalobos 1998). In addition to helping poor women with child support problems, LMD has run an effective campaign to focus national attention on the issue. First, they successfully demanded that candidates for political office not be in arrears on support payments or guilty of domestic battering. Their campaign “outed” the head of the youth wing of ARENA, who turned out to be over 30,000 colones (over $3,500) in arrears in child support—over three years of missed payments. Outraged women and youth activists from his own party insisted that he pay up. He apologized, saying it was an “oversight” and that he loved his child. This became a cautionary tale to other politicians.

Second, they successfully demanded that the state telephone monopoly, ANTEL, which was in the process of structural adjustment-dictated downsizing and privatizing, give 30 percent of laid off employees’ severance payments (indemnificaciones) to their children if a legal demand for child support had been made—regardless if the employee was in arrears of not. This was extended to other public and private sector enterprises that subsequently followed the same downsizing regimen. Third, they successfully lobbied for three years running to obtain 30 percent of the annual Christmas bonus (aguinaldo) for the children of those with a legal obligation to pay child support, and now the Legislative Assembly has made this permanent. Fourth, when a scandal broke in the Attorney General’s Office—employees were discovered to be pocketing money paid in by fathers and destined for child support—they took the lead in publicizing the issue to the media. They took out full-page ads in the main newspapers demanding restitution of the funds and punishment for the perpetrators.

Organizational experience has played a strong role in the success of LMD. It is the only NGO I found that had organizational links from the top to the bottom of the society: members lobby at the national level, appeal
to middle-class and even wealthy women with child support problems, and provide essential help to enable many poor uneducated women to successfully obtain their child support despite the remaining post-reform bureaucratic procedures they must negotiate (Gonzalez 1998). Although LMD has organized around an economic issue, child support payments, it has not stressed economic power for women.

Other Factors

NGOs do not operate in a vacuum, and other factors influence the success or failure of a group even though they may not directly focus on the group’s activities. Thus, despite the organizational effectiveness of LMD, its gains—as well as those of other ex-FMLM women’s organizations in post-war El Salvador—have been constrained by elements of the conservative ideological and political systems. Ideologically, Catholicism still plays a big role in resisting changes in areas such as family planning policy. Political rifts continue between ARENA and FMLN; ARENA controls the national government and FMLN controls the mayor’s office and city government in a number of places including the capital. FMLN has gone farther than ARENA in increasing women’s participation. The Legislative Assembly has eighty-four members. In the 1994 elections, the FMLN elected five women and sixteen men (women comprise 23.8 percent). In the 1997 elections, women won nine of the twenty-seven seats gained by the party (33.3 percent). Interestingly, the right wing ARENA party also increased its proportion of women in Congress from three out of thirty-nine party seats (7.7 percent) in 1994 to four out of twenty-eight party seats (14.3 percent) in 1997. This was due to the fact that the party lost twelve male seats from 1994–1997 while electing an additional woman. FMLN’s 1997 gains in female representation were due more to deliberate policy (Valladares 1998).

The growing presence of the international women’s movements and, to a lesser extent, human rights movements is starting to make a difference vis-à-vis the position of women in many countries, including El Salvador, and this contributes to the success of groups like LMD. The Peace Accords in 1992 coincided with the explosion of activity among Latin American feminists preparing for the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Regional preparatory conferences and interaction during and after the Beijing conference put the El Salvadoran feminist NGOs in touch with NGOs in other countries; the process was an exciting cross-fertilization, with a battle-tested (literally), well-organized plethora of Salvadoran women’s NGOs learning from and contributing to their same-language counterparts from all around Latin America.
The attention of the world human rights movement was focused on El Salvador through the period of worsening atrocities leading up to the civil war and during the twelve years of conflict. This strengthened the Salvadoran human rights movement and also exposed it to the evolution of that movement, which in recent years has begun to include gender as a human rights issue (Blumberg 1998a; Velado 1998). The Salvadoran movement is beginning to follow suit (Zamora 1998).

In El Salvador, globalization arrived long ago with respect to media, concerning both media coverage of the war and the proliferation of U.S. media programming. American-origin TV ranges from dubbed prime time series on local channels to CNN and MTV on cable. The U.S.-based media stress sex and violence but also portray more women in non-traditional and autonomous roles—and are increasingly pervasive (Friedman 1998). Also, a million Salvadorans left the country during the war; most went to the U.S., mainly Los Angeles. There, women were more likely to work for pay and thereby enhance their household power. At the same time, almost all of them were exposed to the U.S. media’s daily depiction of a relatively more egalitarian gender system. After the war, those that returned took these norms home again—as did their daughters. The media mobs left with the peace, returning only for earthquakes, elections and hurricanes but U.S. programs and world-view are there for the duration.

EXPERIENCES OF OTHER NGOs WORKING FOR SALVADORAN WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Two broad groupings of NGOs are now examined in light of the success of LMD. The ex-FMLN training and advocacy groups ignore women’s economic empowerment, while the Entrepreneurial Women’s Organization deals with it before going on to more gender- and women’s rights-focused concerns. Both models have the same goal of empowering Salvadoran women and spurring them to activism and leadership.

Ex-FMLN training and advocacy women’s NGOs have been promoting women’s local level empowerment by offering them training in advocacy, women’s legal rights (including the new rights vis-à-vis domestic violence and child support), gender awareness and self-esteem. A few NGOs also try to promote savings and credit schemes for the recently trained women but with little impact, since they are not using the new and viable microfinance/“best practices” model (Otero and Rhyne 1994; Blumberg 2001). In focus groups with newly trained women in six departments (provinces), two themes emerged: (1) gratitude for the training (women particularly lauded learning that they had equal rights and worth and that wife beating was now
against the law), and (2) frustration that the training had not addressed their number one problem: lack of income/difficulty making a living.

The Entrepreneurial Women’s Organization (Organizacion Empresarial Feminina/OEF) has evolved from a welfare-oriented organization offering a wide range of services to one that focuses increasingly on microcredit. In complete contrast to the ex-FMLN women’s NGOs, the apolitical OEF (Tesak 1998) begins with microfinance assistance. Although they are not yet hewing to all the “best practices” standards of the microfinance movement, they have a fairly successful program offering escalating loans to savings and credit clients. Some women have developed thriving businesses with their OEF loans. All the OEF women clients who participated in the focus groups advocated this “economics first” strategy. OEF also provides training in legal rights and gender awareness that is quite similar to that offered by the ex-FMLN women’s NGOs. Again, in the focus groups with OEF clients I found that this type of training was well-received—but all of them stated that they preferred the credit and its benefits to the training, if they had to make a choice (Blumberg 1998b, 1998c). In any event, they want the credit first.

Organizational and Economic Factors

The ex-FMLN NGO leaders I interviewed hoped that their training would lead more and more women to activism and political involvement, thus further strengthening the base of the women’s movement in El Salvador and assuring that the hard-won gains of the war would not evaporate. Politically neutral OEF’s leadership did not talk about political activism as one of their goals although they, too, wanted to develop women leaders and see the women’s movement and female status raised in a sustainable manner.

As part of my 1998 Women in Politics research (see endnote 1), I asked some staff and clients of both the ex-FMLN NGOs and OEF about post-training political activism. After all, both had similar training in advocacy, gender, and legal rights. Although I did not have time to thoroughly to cross-validate their claims, the interviews provide some insights into the changes over time. The director of OEF estimated that roughly half of the veterans, women who had received several successive loans as well as the gender and rights training, had become activists at the local level (Mendez 1998). This included getting elected to the community councils (juntas directivas) and/or water boards. About half of the OEF clients who participated in the focus groups indeed were currently holding—or had held—such posts. One woman, who had developed a series of successful businesses despite years of opposition from her husband (who finally had become supportive), was
serving on her community council but stated that she had her heart set on one day becoming mayor of her city.

In contrast, focus groups with women who had received the ex-FMLN NGOs’ training in gender awareness and rights and interviews with several NGO field staff who worked with these women indicated a much lower level of political activism following training. The field staff (promotoras) estimated that no more than one-fifth of the trainees had gone on to run for a local political post—unless they were one of the war-created grass roots leaders. In fact, regardless of which training they had received, women’s grass roots political activism proved more common in the zones most affected by the war. Even in the absence of economic power, the exigencies of the long struggle transformed previously timid rural wives into heads of households in large numbers (an estimated 57 percent of household heads in the most fought-over areas are women) and into organizers and leaders in a surprising number of cases, given the high level of gender inequality in the rural milieu (Blumberg 1998b, 1998c).

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

Drawing on variables from my general theory of gender stratification, this paper examines NGOs working on women’s issues in post-conflict El Salvador following a war effort in which women made significant contributions. The influence of economic and organizational factors were discussed for several different NGOs. In addition, I examined several variables that had indirect influence on the groups: ideology, political conflict, international women’s and human rights movements, and media.  

Salvadoran women didn't have enough of an economic power base to support a substantial level of gender equality, but this didn’t deter many of them from actively supporting the FMLN in the long years of conflict. As time went on in the protracted struggle, both poor Salvadoran women living in the combat zones and the middle class women who formed pro-FMLN organizations developed organizational and leadership skills out of urgent necessity. I was told many stories about ordinary women turning into “Mother’s Courage.”

To a certain extent they gained some of the fruits that normally flow from economic power as the result of their organizational accomplishments, including increased self-confidence. Although I didn’t explore the other dependent variables in my theory thoroughly, what the grass roots women told me in focus groups did not indicate that they had achieved much more “voice and vote” in household decision-making. Lacking economic means of support, they couldn’t easily leave a battering spouse, and their economic
situation also limited their ability to control other aspects of their destiny or life options.8

Although the data require further cross-checking, preliminary evidence suggests greater economic power contributes to some degree to women’s influence and activism in community and political spheres. Programs focused on getting child support payments and microcredit led to more post-training political activism than other women’s NGO programs that offered legal and gender awareness training without attempting to improve women’s economic situation. In conclusion, the strongest combination for greater women’s rights and political activism is proposed to be increased economic power plus greater organization and relevant training.

ENDNOTES

1. Thanks are due to Gale Summerfield for her reading of an earlier draft of this essay.
2. This article also draws on my other relevant experience. I did studies in Nepal and Ecuador for the USAID and two missions in Kosovo in spring 2000 as part of a World Bank-FAO project on emergency farm relief. I worked in the capital city, Pristina, and in urban and rural areas of three of the municipalities worst hit by the conflict, Glogovc, Skenderaj and Decan. I’ve also worked in post-conflict situations in Guatemala in 1985 (in Cakchiquel-speaking areas of the western highlands) and 1998 (in Alta Verapaz and Baja Verapaz provinces), as well as in a variety of other countries whose conflicts were either long-ended or in various stages of intensity.
3. Rapid appraisal methodologies (RAMs) include Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP) and similar variations. All share a single technique of cross-validation that makes them superior to most forms of fast qualitative research: “triangulation.” Triangulation involves obtaining at least two sources of data—preferably by two different methodological techniques—about each of a tightly honed list of variables and issues. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques may be used, including key informant interviews, focus groups, observation, analysis of existing documents, reanalysis of extant data sets, and even small surveys. Rapid appraisal techniques are particularly well suited where random samples are not feasible. They are even more appropriate for exploratory research where not enough is known about the phenomenon to construct valid closed-end items for a sample survey, and may well have higher validity than (even random sample) survey research under those circumstances.
4. And, although I never interviewed them, women who spent the war years in Los Angeles not only were exposed to a more gender-egalitarian society, but also were thrust into a fair number of organizational and leadership roles in a community with a female majority.
5. Specifically, the party set up a system of quotas for women candidates in the party’s electoral lists. However, only the top few members of a list are likely to be elected; so naming lots of women and putting them on the bottom of the list is a patently empty gesture; FMLN didn’t put all its women in high slots but it didn’t stick them in a group at the bottom either. In theory, women are to be representatives in proportion to their strength in the party, about one-third. So the 1997 elections conform to this guideline. The trend at the national level indicates that the ranks of female parliamentarians will continue to swell.

The picture is less rosy at the middle levels (municipal and department) of the pyramid, even where the war was most bitterly fought. Although the proportion of women in municipal and departmental (provincial) government is greater for FMLN than ARENA, it is still well below the 17 percent achieved by women at the national level. In fact, the


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Women: The Secret Weapon of Modern Warfare?

KELLY OLIVER

The images from wars in the Middle East that haunt us are those of young women killing and torturing. Their media circulated stories share a sense of shock. They have both galvanized and confounded debates over feminism and women’s equality. And, as Oliver argues in this essay, they share, perhaps subliminally, the problematic notion of women as both offensive and defensive weapons of war, a notion that is symptomatic of fears of women’s “mysterious” powers.

The figures and faces from wars in the Middle East that continue to haunt us at the beginning of the twenty-first century, are those of women: think of Palestinian women suicide bombers, starting with Wafa Idris in January 2002, or the capture and rescue of Pfc. Jessica Lynch early in the U.S. invasion of Iraq just over a year later, or the shocking images of Pfc. Lynndie England and Army Spc. Sabrina Harman at the Abu Ghraib prison in spring 2003. These images and stories horrify yet fascinate us because they are of young women killing and torturing. As they have circulated through the U.S. media, their stories share a sense of shock and confusion evidenced by various conflicting accounts of what it means for women to wage war. They have both galvanized and confounded debates over feminism and women’s equality. And, as I will argue, their stories share, perhaps more subliminally, the problematic notion of women as both offensive and defensive weapons of war, a notion that is symptomatic of age-old fears of the “mysterious” powers of women, maternity, and female sexuality.

Syndicated columnist Kathleen Parker suggests that the prison abuses at Abu Ghraib are the result of what she calls the “myth of gender equality” (2004, 2). Indeed, the photographs of women’s involvement in torture and sexual abuse at
Abu Ghraib rekindled debates over both whether women should be in the military and gender equality. They also prompted a debate over the role of feminism, not only in response to the photos but also in the abuses themselves. Writers on both sides of the feminist divide implicate feminism in women’s criminal behavior at Abu Ghraib. For example, on the antifeminist side, MensNewsDaily.com suggests that women’s sadism is not only responsible for Abu Ghraib but also the norm: “all of the females implicated at Abu Ghraib will have little trouble finding jobs in the multibillion-dollar VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) domestic violence industry, just as soon as ‘American, gender feminist justice’ rationalizes away all their misbehavior” (Ray Blumhorst quoted in Parker 2004, 2). And a columnist for the American Spectator argues that the abuse at Abu Ghraib “is a cultural outgrowth of a feminist culture which encourages female barbarians” (George Neumeyer quoted in Marshall 2004, 10). Some conservative journalists have blamed the torture on the women’s feminist sensibilities, arguing that the abusers resented the Islamic attitude of men toward women and therefore they enjoyed what they took to be their feminist revenge on the prisoners (Warner 2004, 75).

While conservatives blame feminism for the brutality at Abu Ghraib, even feminists associate advances made by the women’s movement with the abuse. For example, columnist Joanne Black concludes, “Throughout history, when they have had the chance, women have shown themselves as capable as men of misusing power and inflicting brutality. They have, till now, merely lacked the opportunity. Feminism has remedied that. Sadly for those of us who thought we were better, women have proved themselves men’s equal” (2004, 4). Brooke Warner blames a postfeminist world in which “young American women” have “a certain-I-deserve-it attitude.” She claims that “brashness, confidence, and selfishness are norms” and that “American military culture promotes these values as much as the university system, though it manifests itself as physical rather than intellectual prowess” (2004, 75). Both sides thus implicate feminism in the torture for giving women opportunities equal to men, and for increasing their confidence to the point of creating violent women.

On the one hand, some feminist scholars and journalists explain the abuse by pointing to women’s marginal place in the male-dominated military, which not only makes it more likely that they will follow orders and try to fit in but also that they will be scapegoated and held up as representatives of all of their sex, which certainly is true of how the press portrayed the three women indicted. Conservatives, on the other hand, argue that coed basic training is responsible for what one commentator calls the “whorehouse behavior” at Abu Ghraib. The same commentator asks if police soldiers at Abu Ghraib were weak in basic operational skills, “because 10 years ago, for political reasons, politicians and feminist activists within the ranks established coed basic training to promote the fiction that men and women are the same and putting young women in
close quarters with young men would somehow not trigger natural biological urges?” (Thomas 2004, 10, emphasis added).

Much of the conservative commentary surrounding the Abu Ghraib torture has explicitly or implicitly associated women and sex: we see explicit comments on women triggering men’s sexual urges and the presence of women leading to “whorehouse behavior.” But, as Susan Sontag points out, these images of women smiling while engaging in sexual abuse and sadistic torture that captivate public imagination are subliminally familiar to us from the S&M porn industry, which is booming on the internet and popular with soldiers and which traditionally puts women in the dominatrix role (2004, 27). Feminists have argued for decades that the prevalence of pornography promotes violent images of sex and desensitizes us to sexual violence. Perhaps desensitization to sexual violence is part of why human-rights groups at first were unsure how to categorize the abuse.

Gender stereotypes also play a role in the confusion regarding these images: not only because women are the torturers but also because men are the ones being sexually abused. Of course, we know that men sexually abuse and rape female Iraqi prisoners, but that is so much business as usual that it does not capture our imaginations in the way that images of women sexually abusing men does. It makes us wonder, How a man can be raped by a woman? How can a man be forced to perform, and thereby seemingly be an agent of, sex acts? These types of questions point to our assumptions about desire, sex, and gender. And gender stereotypes make the smiling faces of Lynndie England and Sabrina Harman abject, in Julia Kristeva’s sense, as terrifying or repulsive and at the same time fascinating or captivating.

But gender also reportedly plays a role in the abuse itself. Some journalists claim that women were used as “lethal weapons” against Iraqi male prisoners. In the words of a Baltimore Sun reporter, “Forcing men in a fundamentalist Muslim culture to parade naked (let alone feign sex acts) in the presence of women was conceived as an especially lethal brand of humiliation” (Ollove 2004, 18, emphasis added). This report suggests that the presence of women in the Abu Ghraib prison allowed for even more humiliating forms of torture supposedly used to “soften up” prisoners before interrogation. Because of their “sex” and its seemingly “natural” effect on men, women become the means to compound not only sexual and physical abuse but also abuse of religious and cultural beliefs.

Playing on traditional associations between women and poison, but now in the context of war, New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd calls this a “toxic combination of sex and religion” (2005, 17). This “toxic combination” actually seems to be part of the military’s interrogation strategy in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where hundreds of prisoners from Afghanistan have been held for over four years now. In January 2005, nine pages of a manuscript held by the
Pentagon and written by Army Sergeant Eric Saar, who worked as a translator at Guantánamo Bay prison, were leaked to the press. The pages describe female interrogators using “sexual touching,” “provocative clothing” (including miniskirts, bras, and thong underwear), and “fake menstrual blood” to “break” Muslim prisoners by making them unclean and therefore unworthy to pray. Accompanying the pages was a letter from Guantánamo officials in which they marked for deletion a section describing a Saudi prisoner whose face was smeared with red ink pulled from the pants of his female interrogator who told him it was menstrual blood. The officials marked the section “secret,” advising the Pentagon that it revealed “interrogation methods and techniques that were classified” (Novak 2005, 33). Menstrual blood has become a top-secret interrogation technique. As bizarre as this seems, it should be no surprise, since within patriarchal cultures of all varieties menstrual blood represents the abject and unclean. Perhaps, menstrual blood is imagined as threatening because it provokes fears of women’s procreative powers, or as Kristeva suggests, because it conjures the maternal body as an uncanny border and ultimate threat to individual autonomy. And, although in the popular imaginary it is not alone in the category of “gross” bodily fluids, you still don’t see menstrual blood showing up in Hollywood films that recently are filled with vomit, semen jokes, and toilet scenes (if it did, imagine the transformation in Something about Mary’s special “hair gel”). Obviously, the military’s use of menstrual blood as an interrogation method calls for more analysis; for now, though, let’s return to the discourse of “sexual tactics.”

A draft of Sergeant Saar’s manuscript obtained by the Associated Press (AP) describes the U.S. military “us[ing] women as part of tougher physical and psychological interrogation tactics to get terrorist suspects to talk.” One of the officers in charge of the prison, Lt. Col. James Marshall, refused to say whether the U.S. military intentionally used women as part of their tactical strategy. But according to a document classified as secret and obtained by the AP, the military uses “an all-female team as one of the Immediate Reaction Force units that subdue troublesome male prisoners in their cells.” And the Federal Bureau of Intelligence has complained about the “sexual tactics” female interrogators use. Reportedly, “some Guantánamo prisoners who have been released say they were tormented by ‘prostitutes’” (Dodds 2005a, 11).

Aside from the AP release by Paisley Dodds, little media attention has been paid to the sexual and religious abuse in Guantánamo. What there has been, however, is instructive in its characterization of the abuse as “women us[ing] sex to get detainees to talk” (Dodds 2005b, 15), “women us[ing] lechery as an interrogating tactic” (News Journal 2005, 4), “sexually loaded torment by female interrogators” (Novak 2005, 33), and “the use of female sexuality as a tactic” (Jacoby 2005, 11). The headnote of an article in Time magazine reads, “New reports of detainee abuse at Gitmo suggest interrogators used female sexuality
as a weapon” (Novak 2005, 33). The rhetoric of women as weapons is even more explicit in reports of Guantánamo than in the reports of Abu Ghraib. It is telling that the media continues to associate women and sex, going so far as to say that female sexuality is a weapon. Here, sexualized interrogation tactics become metonymical substitutes for all of female sexuality. And female sexuality itself is reduced to a tactic or strategy to “break” men, a threatening weapon that can be used against even the most resistant men.

This condensation between interrogation tactic, weapon of war, using sex, and female sexuality itself reveals a long-standing fear of women and female sexuality evidenced for centuries in literary, scientific, and popular discourses of Western culture. Indeed, it is the familiarity of the association of women and their sex with torment and deadly threats that makes these reports so uncanny. The association of female sexuality and danger recalls Sigmund Freud’s account of the fear of castration women evoke in men. In Freud’s writings, female sexuality not only makes visible and concrete the threat of castration but also the threat of death (Freud 1919, 244–45). Maternal sex, in particular, is imagined as both life-giving and devouring, and therefore uncanny; that is to say both shocking and familiar.

Certainly, photographs from Abu Ghraib and reports from Guantánamo of women torturing men with sex have this effect. They remind us of Hollywood images of the femme fatale seducing men and driving them to their deaths, or of pornographic images of the sadistic dominatrix wielding a whip or leash and their Hollywood counterparts, Catwoman, Electra, or Charlie’s Angels, pseudofeminist avengers who use sex and violence to entrap and kill men. Although the image of the feminist superheroine getting revenge against the men who dominated her may be relatively recent, the image of female sexuality as potent and deadly as the black widow spider’s has been part of our cultural imaginary for centuries.

In the rhetoric surrounding Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, it seems that what the media describes as a toxic cocktail is two parts female sexuality and one part the feminism that unleashed it, with a religious twist that makes it particularly disturbing. Female sexuality can be used to contaminate and make impure because it is seen as impure, not just within conservative Islam (as represented in Western media) but also within the U.S. military and the American cultural imaginary more generally. Within popular cultural representations from Hollywood to commercial advertising, female sexuality is represented as abject, as both terrifying and fascinating; like the Abu Ghraib photographs, it shocks and repulses us yet we can’t take our eyes off of it. As Sontag points out, at the same time that they make us ashamed, there is a shameless quality to the photographs: “Soldiers now pose, thumbs up, before the atrocities they commit, and send off the pictures to their buddies. Secrets of private life that, formerly, you would have given nearly anything to conceal, you now clamor...
to be invited on a television show to reveal. What is illustrated by these photographs is as much the culture of shamelessness as the reigning admiration for unapologetic brutality” (2004, 29). Presumably, male guards have performed all kinds of torture on both male and female prisoners at Abu Ghraib and other U.S. prisons; but with the exception of the photograph of the hooded Abu Ghraib prisoner standing on a box, arms out, attached to electrical wires, the photos that have captured our imagination are photographs of women engaging in sexualized torture. As Sontag says, “The photographs are us,” but not primarily because we are shameless and admire brutality, but rather because within our culture, women, and particularly female sexuality, are represented as abject and threatening. The association between women, sex, and violence makes these images an striking reflection of our culture.

In reports of women’s involvement in torture, there is a telling slippage between the rhetoric of tactic, technique, and weaponry—what we might call the rhetoric of téchnê—and the rhetoric of natural biological urges and female sexuality—what we might call the rhetoric of physis. Implicit in this discourse is the notion that women’s sex is an especially lethal weapon because it is natural. Within popular discourse, women’s bodies, menstrual blood, and female sexuality can be used as tactics of war because of the potency of their association with the danger of nature, of Mother Nature, if you will. Akin to a natural toxin or intoxicant, women’s sex makes a powerful weapon because, within our cultural imaginary, it is by nature dangerous. Yet it becomes more threatening because we imagine that it can be wielded by women to manipulate men; it can become the art of seduction through which women beguile and intoxicate to control and even destroy men; think again of Hollywood’s femme fatale.

The condensation between the rhetoric of technology and nature in the construction of woman as weapon is even more dramatic in British and American media reports of Palestinian women suicide bombers. A news story in the London Sunday Times describing the frequency of suicide bombings by Palestinian women begins: “They are anonymous in veils, but when they go out to kill they may be disguised with a ponytail and a pretty smile. . . . Israel’s new nightmare: female suicide-bombers more deadly than the male”; the reporter goes on to call them Palestine’s “secret weapon”; and says that their trainers describe them as the new “Palestinian human precision bombs.” One Islamic Jihad commander reportedly explains, “We discovered that our women could be an advantage and one that could be utilized. . . . [Women’s bodies have] become our most potent weapon” (Jaber 2003, 1). In this report, women’s bodies are “secret weapons,” “human precision bombs,” and “potent weapons,” and the means to fight a war machine. The image of the human precision bomb again combines the rhetoric of technology and nature to produce “female suicide-bombers more deadly than the male.”
Like the women involved in Abu Ghraib, *shahidas* (female martyrs) not only unsettle assumptions about gender but also manifest age-old associations between women and death. Images of pretty, young nineteen- and twenty-year-old women torturing or killing, even killing themselves, transfix us with their juxtaposition of life and death, beauty and the grotesque. Compare what the *Times* calls their “ponytails” and “pretty smiles” to what has been described as Sabrina Harman’s “cheerleader’s smile” (Black 2004, 4) or as Lynndie England’s “perky grin” and “pixie” haircut (Cocco 2004, 51). If images of these American women conjure fun-loving girls—“America’s sweetheart” or “cheerleaders”—then images of Palestinian *shahidas* are portrayed as tragic rather than comic, more masochistic than sadistic, sadly beautiful rather than perky. Within Palestinian communities, *shahidas* are reportedly described as beautiful, pure, and self-sacrificing; their images are printed on posters and pocket-sized icons to be idolized (Victor 2003). While female interrogators transform from chaste cheerleaders into whores, Palestinian *shahidas* become even more virginal in their violent deaths.

Like the women torturers, these women killers leave us with the stinging question of how our ideals of youth and femininity, or girls and women, can be reconciled with such brutality! Yet our bewilderment, confusion, and indignation, as evidenced in the rhetoric of popular media, are symptoms of the return of the repressed. For centuries, women have been associated with both beauty and the grotesque; within the history of our literature, philosophy, and medicine, they have occupied both the position of virgin and of whore. They have been portrayed as using sex as a weapon of seduction that is figured as all the more deadly because of its connection to nature. In a sense, we have always imaged girls’ ponytails, haircuts, and smiles as dangerous lures.

Speaking perhaps to a deep-seated stereotype or a biological fact that has repercussions for our psychic lives, in her book *Army of Roses: Inside the World of Palestinian Women Suicide bombers*, Barbara Victor laments that “the most mysterious aspect of the cult of death that has permeated Palestinian society, especially when it comes to shahida, is the transition that each woman makes from bearer of life to killing machine” (2003, 33). Victor’s rhetoric of a “transition from bearer of life to killing machine” repeats the slip from nature to technology that makes images of these women so unsettling. She is mystified at how bearers of life become killing machines; yet the association between the mother and death seems central to a patriarchal imaginary within which women’s life-bearing power is precisely what makes them so dangerous, not to mention so mysterious and alluring. What Freud saw as the mystery of woman’s life-bearing–death-giving sex that led him to call female sexuality a “dark continent” (Freud 1993).

Reportedly, the actions of women suicide bombers have led several Islamic clerics to proclaim that women, like men, can reach paradise as martyrs, despite
earlier beliefs that women could not be holy martyrs. Training women from conservative religious groups, however, requires loosening restrictions on their freedom of movement and contact with men outside their families. It also means changing regulations on what they wear and on showing their bodies, which men typically are not permitted to see, even in death (Daraghmeh 2003, 22). When nineteen-year-old Hiba Daraghmeh blew herself up on behalf of Islamic Jihad in May 2003, one influential cleric said that she didn’t need a chaperone on her way to the attack and could take off her veil because “she is going to die in the cause of Allah, and not to show off her beauty” (Sheik Yusef al-Qaradawi quoted in Bennet 2003, 1). The conservative patriarchal religious restrictions on women’s movements and bodies become fluid as leaders begin to imagine the strategic value of women as weapons of war. On the morning of January 27, 2002, just hours before Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian woman suicide bomber blew herself up, Yasser Arafat spoke to women in his compound at Ramallah and told them, “Women and men are equal. . . . You are my army of roses that will crush Israeli tanks” (Victor 2003, 19).

Like metaphors used to describe the American women prison guards, the metaphor of women as an “army of roses” is a condensation of technology and nature that figures women on the dangerous frontier between technê and physis. They become beautiful but thorny flowers, armed with bombs that can crush modern technologies of war; they represent nature’s threatening power against modern technology.

Arafat also invoked the rhetoric of women’s equality to encourage women to participate in violence. Like the “equal-opportunity abusers” at Abu Ghraib, female suicide bombers have sparked a feminist debate among Palestinians over the question of whether women should, as one reporter put it, “hop over conservative societal barriers to join the almost exclusively male ranks of suicide bombers” (Daraghmeh 2003, 22). Like the feminist debates (or debates over feminism) ignited by photos taken at Abu Ghraib, the appropriation of the rhetoric of equality in order to justify women’s participation in violence and warfare, especially suicidal forms, not only points to the fluidity of discourse but also to problems inherent in the rhetoric of equality as it has been employed by both feminists and conservative patriarchs waging war.

Just as metaphors of women and female sexuality as dangerous, or the lethal condensation of artifice and nature is nothing new, the appropriation of the rhetoric of equality has been used for centuries to justify military action and imperialist occupation. Western governments still use it when it is convenient to justify sending in “freedom fighters” to “liberate” societies branded “backward” because of their treatment of women. In U.S. justifications for the invasions in Iraq and especially in Afghanistan, we have seen what Gayatri Spivak calls Western imperialist discourse of “saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 1988; Cooke 2002; Cloud 2003; Abu-Lughod 2002). Selective
appropriation of feminism and concern for women has become essential to imperialist discourses. For example, at the turn of the nineteenth century, English Lord Cromer, British consul general in Egypt, founded the Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage in England at the same time he used arguments about women’s oppression to justify the occupation of Egypt (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784; Viner 2002; Ahmed 1992). And, in the 1950s, much of the rhetoric used to justify French colonial rule in Algeria focused on the plight of Algerian women, whose oppression was seen as epitomized by the veil (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784; Larzeg 1994). We have seen a similar concern with the veil in recent media used to justify military action in Afghanistan, where the burka and veil became the most emblematic signs of women’s oppression. The media was full of articles referring to the U.S. invasion as liberating Afghan women by “unveiling” them and President George W. Bush talked about freeing “women of cover” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 783). There is more to say about the obsession with “unveiling” Muslim women, but that discussion will have to wait for another time. For now, consider how conservative politicians employ, and thereby trouble, feminist rhetoric even as they cut programs that help women, including welfare, Planned Parenthood, and affirmative action.

Recall that in her radio address just after the military campaign, Laura Bush used Afghan women to justify the invasion: “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. . . . The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (quoted in Abu-Lughod 2002, 748). President Bush echoed this sentiment in his 2002 State of the Union address: “last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free” (quoted in Cloud 2003). And an article in the San Francisco Chronicle associates Afghanistan itself with woman, noting that “as women emerge from the shadows, so will Afghanistan” (Ryan 2002, D3). In sum, the assimilation of the rhetoric of women’s rights and equality in the name of violence by conservative Christians as exemplified by the Bushes and conservative Muslims as exemplified by Islamic Jihadist clerics embracing *shahidas* demonstrates that the struggle for women’s rights and equality is as much a discursive struggle as a material one. As many feminists have argued, conservative convolution of feminist rhetoric suggests that the discursive constellation of rights and equality alone cannot account for sociohistorical or material differences that govern if not determine our lives and, perhaps more important, the meaning of those lives.

In her speech before UNESCO in December 2002, French intellectual Julia Kristeva commented on *shahidas*: “Women are sent off to sacrifice and martyrdom in imitation of the warlike man and possessor of power, which contemporary inquiry shows is a violation of Islam’s own principles. . . . Some currents of classic Islam do not hesitate to pander to this alleged ‘equality’ between
the sexes, without ever envisaging the sexual and subjective difference of the woman, revelator of new life values and creativity" (Kristeva 2002). Kristeva was suggesting that shahidas represent the triumph of a culture of death that values biology over biography, survival over meaningful life. Traditionally, in both Islamic and Christian cultures, women have been associated with biological life and denied access to the biographical; they have been associated with procreation as the survival of the species and not as the creation of new values and new meaning for life. In different ways, then, fundamentalisms in both traditions continue to victimize or ostracize women, who do not serve the procreative function as circumscribed by patriarchal religious law.

Fundamentalisms may use the rhetoric of women’s equality to valorize women’s suicidal violence, but they do not give women true freedom to recreate what it means to be a woman. What we need is not just the rhetoric of equality, which has been used to justify violence, but rather a new discourse of the meaning and joy of life, not life as mere biology but as biography. If women have been freed from age-old restrictions on their freedom, restrictions that justified their lives only in terms of procreative biology, then we need discourses that provide new justifications for women’s lives that move beyond procreation. Otherwise, at the extreme, women are free only to kill themselves.

We can read the shahida as a symptom of patriarchal restrictions within which the only meaningful place left to women who do not conform to the ideals of motherhood and femininity is martyrdom. She represents the return of the repressed ambiguities of human procreation, of human life and death, which straddling physis and téchnê on the frontier between biology and biography, between being and meaning, cannot be assimilated into, or circumscribed by, social codes. This ambiguous aspect of our existence has been relegated to women, maternity, and female sexuality. And, as women begin to occupy the position that we have built for them discursively, that is to say the position of deadly weapon, it should be no surprise that the return of the repressed explodes in our face.

While fascinated by images of teenage women suicide bombers and women torturers at Abu Ghraib, the teenage woman warrior who has most captured American hearts is Jessica Lynch. Hers is not a story of attack but of self-defense and ultimately of suffering and survival. Originally, media reports heralded Lynch as a “female teenage Rambo” who fought off the enemy firing her rifle until she ran out of ammo and in spite of bullet wounds engaged in a knife fight before she was captured by Iraqi forces. Her story is now so altered that it seems that her life was saved by Iraqi doctors who treated her with kindness and not as a prisoner of war after she sustained injuries in a Humvee crash; she neither fired her gun, stabbed any Iraqis, nor received any gunshot wounds or abuse at the hands of Iraqis.

In spite of the changing story, Lynch is celebrated as a heroine seemingly because she represents the best of American womanhood, whatever you take
that to be; she has become a Rorschach test for our ideals of both femininity and girl power: she is a “princess,” “damsel in distress,” a teenage “female Rambo” gunning down any man that gets in her way, the naïve “country girl” who grew up in a hollow in West Virginia whose pen pals are a group of kindergarten kids, “Miss Congeniality,” the “scrapy tomboy” who learned the ways of the woods and survival from her “sexist” brother and father—“a strong girl bred from good American stock” (Parker 2003, 21), and a “pretty blonde warrior” who suffered for us and just wants us to acknowledge that she is a “soldier, too.”

“There’s a funny shift,” says military historian John A. Lynn. “We want to fight wars but we don’t want any of our people to die and we don’t really want to hurt anybody else. So Pvt. Lynch, who suffers, is a heroine even if she doesn’t do much. She suffered for us” (quoted in Eig 2003, A1). In other words, she is the perfect heroine because she represents feminine self-sacrifice, akin to that of the Virgin Mary, who suffers for us. She symbolizes our pain, and it is no accident that the power of this martyr image has everything to do with her being a woman. More particularly, she is venerated for her eight days in an Iraqi hospital because she is a seemingly innocent young pretty white girl, the girl next door; while Shoshana Johnson, an African American woman captured in the same skirmish and held for twenty-one days in various prisons and the victim of abuse, remains in the shadows. Lynch’s response to her rescuers from under her bedsheets—“I’m an American soldier, too”—when they tell her that they are American soldiers who have come to protect her and take her home, operates as a type of displacement for the confusion during Johnson’s rescue, when American soldiers at first did not believe she was one of them and ordered her down on the floor with her Iraqi captors.

Lynch, and to a lesser extent Johnson, became part of the military’s media campaign. The press and the Pentagon alike wielded Lynch’s story not only to shore up public support for the war but also to rally the troops on the ground. According to Rick Bragg, Lynch’s biographer, rumors of Jessica’s capture and torture made American soldiers “want to kill” and “proud” to do so (2003, 122). In the words of one New York Times reporter, “When American forces were bogged down in the war’s early days, she was the happy harbinger of an imminent military turnaround: a 19 year old female Rambo who tried to blast her way out of the enemy’s clutches, taking out any man who got in her way” (Rich 2003, 1). When these reports turned out to be false, metaphors of weapons, human shields, and propaganda wars again turned up in the press. Journalists began to figure Lynch and her dramatic rescue as “weapons” in the Pentagon’s “propaganda war” to bolster American confidence in the military.

In addition, Bragg speculates that the Iraqis kept Lynch alive because she had “propaganda” value for Saddam Hussein: “She was a pretty, blond American soldier and would look good on television, if Saddam held on to power long enough to use her as propaganda” (2003, 103). Bragg claims that Hussein’s
federal militia used Lynch as a “human shield” and the hospital where she was being held as a safe haven, knowing that “the Americans would certainly not bomb a hospital with a female U.S. soldier lying helpless in her bed. . . . She was more than a prisoner of war” (119).

Journalist Nicholas Kristof also describes women as defensive weapons, human shields that were used strategically in Iraqi. He says, “In the Muslim world, notions of chivalry make even the most bloodthirsty fighters squeamish about shooting female soldiers or blowing them up at checkpoints. For just that reason, I asked a woman to sit beside me in the front seat while I drove on a dicey highway in Iraq on the theory that befuddled snipers would hesitate to fire” (2003, A 31). In addition to figuring women as offensive weapons of war in the cases of Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo, and the shahidas, women also figure as defensive weapons of war that can protect men. Even “bloodthirsty fighters” will be “befuddled” by women’s presence.

The Lynch story evolved from the story of a teenage Rambo to the story of a wounded helpless girl saved by Iraqis because she was blonde and pretty. Kristof explained, “An Iraqi doctor felt so sorry for Jessica Lynch that he risked his life to help rescue her, and that probably wouldn’t have happened if she’d been a big, hairy, smelly Marine” (2003, A31). Or, in the words of Lynch’s brother (quoted in Bragg 2003, 154), “Look at that face. Who isn’t going to fall in love with that face?” We could say that the Jessica Lynch story became part of what, in another context, Rey Chow has called the “King Kong Syndrome,” in which beauty tames the beast and even the most bloodthirsty fall for a sweet-faced white woman. As Chow says, “Herself a victim of patriarchal oppression[,] . . . the white woman becomes the hinge of the narrative of progress, between enlightened instrumental reason and barbarism” associated with the third world; “The white woman is what the white man ‘produces’ and what the monster falls for” (Chow 1989, 84, emphasis added). Given her status as a heroine, with TV documentaries and books about her, it seems that the monstrous enemy insurgents and their doctors are not the only ones to fall for the helpless white woman; the American public has greedily swallowed her bittersweet story, perhaps as a tonic for war wounds and imperialist guilt.

In conclusion, women have been a central element in discursive constellations revolving around recent military action in the Middle East, whether as individuals supposedly representing all American women or all Muslim women, as heroines or as scapegoats, as victims or torturers, as oppressed or as feminist avengers. In all of the cases that I have touched on, women have figure as either offensive or defensive weapons of war—and not just as weapons of war, but as the most dangerous and threatening weapons. Within this rhetoric, a woman can break even the most devout with just the threat of her sex; her ponytail and pretty smile become deadly weapons; and with the charms of her vulnerability and sweet face, she can subdue even the most bloodthirsty and win over the hearts of friend and enemy alike.
The words of New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof crystallize the rhetoric of woman as weapon. He writes, “The only time I saw Iraqi men entirely intimidated by the American-British forces was in Basra, when a cluster of men gaped, awestruck, around an example of the most astoundingly modern weapon in the Western arsenal. Her name was Claire, and she had a machine gun in her arms and a flower in her helmet” (Kristof 2003, A31). Traditionally, bombs and bombers have received female names. The B-29 bomber that dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima at the end of World War II was named after the pilot’s mother, Enola Gay; atom bombs tested at the Bikini Atoll in summer 1946 during the immediate postwar nuclear testing explosion were also named after women, one after Hollywood “bombshell” Rita Hayworth’s most famous femme fatale character, Gilda, and another named “Helen of Bikini.” Now, the most astounding modern weapon in the Western arsenal is named Claire. The secret weapon of modern warfare turns out to be a woman wielding a gun and a flower. She occupies a place in our imaginary not so different from Hollywood’s femme fatale who, with a flower in her hair and a gun in her purse, lures men to their deaths. She herself is a deadly blossom . . . perhaps part of an army of roses. It should come as no surprise that women continue to occupy the position that we have built for them discursively, only in more explicit forms. Women become weapons, at the extreme, literally blowing up, the bombshell become the bomb.

Notes

2. “Ok, I was getting into it before we got to the menstrual blood. Up until that point it was sounding like a damn lap dance. . . . I can’t help it. I am a guy. . . . I guess I have to admit to myself that I am sorta into that whole ‘women with power thing’ because this thing sounds like fun to me” (Steward 2005).
3. This photograph conjures the image of Christ’s crucifixion. Cloud (2004, 306n85) suggests that “the image of a hooded Iraqi standing on a crate, holding wires he was told would electrocute him if he fell, seem to mimic images of veiled women in Afghanistan.”
4. In ancient philosophy, téchnê refers to the art, craft, or skill involved in deliberately producing something, while physis refers to the natural world (www.philosophy-pages.com).
5. “On his very first day in the Oval Office, [George W. Bush] cut off funding to any international family-planning organizations which offer abortion services or counseling (likely to cost the lives of thousands of women and children); this year he renamed January 22—the anniversary of Roe v. Wade that permitted abortion on demand—as National Sanctity of Human Life Day and compared abortion to terrorism: ‘On September 11, we saw clearly that evil exists in this world, and that it does not value life. . . . Now we are engaged in a fight against evil and tyranny to preserve and protect life” (Viner 2002, 21).
6. Note that Bush refers to the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan, not only appealing to family but also to an association between Afghanistan itself and women or girls.

7. As Kristeva speculates, and Victor’s Army of Roses corroborates, “these are amorous disasters—pregnancy outside of marriage, sterility, desire for phallic equality with the man (like the woman-nihilists who committed suicide in the cause of the Russian Revolution)—which influence the vocation of shahidas” (Kristeva 2002). And while the enlisted women whose photographs have been associated with war in Iraq may not be amorous disasters, they are poor women who typically join the military to avoid the poverty that can lead to various sorts of “amorous disasters.” For an analysis of these “amorous disasters,” see Oliver 2007.

8. Kristeva says, “Fundamentalism dedicates those women it wants rid of to idealization and the sacred cult, for the amorous life of these women, with their intolerable and inassimilable novelties, marks the incapacity of the religious word (parole) to pacify the ambivalent bonds of free individuals, emancipated of archaic prohibitions but deprived of new justifications for their lives” (2002, 125).

9. In addition to their use as human shields, Kristof also details in this article several ways in which women are useful in Muslim countries like Iraq as part of military strategy.

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