



## **Bridging Theory and Practice: Peace Support Operations**

A set of three Occasional Papers resulted from a March 2016 symposium that addressed challenges in mainstreaming gender in peace support operations.

An overarching goal was to identify which strategies and programs have been effective in convincing leaders of the importance of including women in peace support operations. This discussion revolved around the extent to which an “operational effectiveness” argument – operations and institutions are more effective when they include a broader gender perspective – can and should be utilized to advance women’s roles in security operations. While there was no consensus on this point, participants shared challenges in working to incorporate gender more fully into peace support operations and offered ideas about how to overcome obstacles.

Topics discussed included training methods, appropriate audiences, and how to translate training into action and institutional policy. The 15 participants from eight countries emphasized the importance of institutions (e.g., the United Nations and contributing states) taking responsibility for both women’s inclusion and the integration of a gender perspective into peace support operations. Discussions highlighted potential accountability mechanisms, including setting clear responsibilities for implementation and collecting sex-disaggregated data. However, accountability should go beyond simply counting the number of women involved in peace support operations, and seek to evaluate the extent to which women are included in a meaningful and empowered way.

Each of the papers in this set tackles different aspects of the challenge of mainstreaming gender in peace support operations, and points to good practices for how to integrate gender into security operations more broadly.

Dr. Margaret Jenkins, in “Policy Tensions Related to Gender and Peacekeeping: The Need for a Two-Level Game,” critiques the assumptions that typically underlie gender mainstreaming initiatives in peace support operations to understand why progress has been slow. Jenkins argues that there has not been enough focus on the end-goals for gender mainstreaming – analysis of what a completely gender-mainstreamed peacekeeping operation would entail. She examines the tensions between common assumptions on the one hand, and policy and practice on the other, offering specific suggestions to bridge these gaps:

- Avoid gendered assumptions about how women behave. Advocates for women’s inclusion often make assumptions about the skills and characteristics women can bring to peace and security (e.g., women are better listeners than men, are more sensitive or caring, or are more attuned to the needs of women and children). However, these assumptions have not been fully corroborated; in particular, there is little evidence that the presence of women changes the attitudes of male



- peacekeepers or reduces sexual exploitation and abuse. Moreover, such assumptions may undermine longer- term gender equality goals.
- There needs to be more rigorous understanding of how men and women are treated on deployment, whether they have different roles, and whether these different roles have a different effect on the mission and its objectives.
  - Gender mainstreaming should consider possible policy responses to current unequal gender pressures and norms (e.g., care responsibilities at home), while simultaneously working to transform these gender parameters to create truly gender mainstreamed peace support operations.

Dr. Sabrina Karim and Dr. Kyle Beardsley, in “A Guide to Implementing Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping,” recommend a new form of peacekeeping that ensures both the full participation of women and protection of civilians from peacekeeping abuse. They highlight obstacles to achieving these goals, and the changes needed in the ways that peacekeeping missions prioritize different skills, expertise, and identities in missions. More specifically, they suggest a need to:

- Foster a culture of gender equality in contributing country militaries and police forces and in peacekeeping missions. This could contribute to women’s full participation in peacekeeping missions, and also help guarantee civilian protection.
- Change the culture of missions through shifts in leadership practices, changes in standards for recruitment and in standards for promotions/demotion, focusing on training and professionalism, and developing role models, mentors, and networks for women.

They recognize that challenges to implementation include a lack of political will, a lack of resources, politicization of appointments and placements, a lack of information (especially about the effects of training), institutional inertia, cultural taboos, and vague language about gender mandates.

Dr. Louise Olsson and Capt. Anna Björsson, in “Gender Training for Leaders: The Swedish Gender Coach Program,” draw lessons from a program which aims to strengthen the ability of senior leaders in security, defense, and foreign affairs ministries to understand and ensure gender equality in their organizations. Senior leadership is instrumental both for creating demand for the organizational changes, and for ensuring an effective use of expert support functions, such as gender advisers. The authors detail the evolution and strengths of this program to offer best practices for leadership training programs in other security forces. They argue that such training must be designed to facilitate the leaders’ ownership of the process, and that key elements include:

- A parallel support structure, in which the person providing gender training has a similar level of seniority to the person receiving training, allows for potentially sensitive issues to be addressed more effectively;
- Strong leadership commitment, perseverance, institutionalization of practices, and education of personnel are required to build organizational capacity on gender equality.



Each paper offers a new perspective on integrating gender into peace support operations, and together provide insights into the nuances of the complex process of incorporating gender and women into peacekeeping.

GIWPS hopes that these contribute to the agenda of advancing a gender perspective in peace support operations to better fulfill their stated mandate – to protect and support communities in conflict around the world.

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