

Peace Mediation Essentials

Gender and Peace Mediation



Without taking the gender-specific context of conflict and peacebuilding into account, negotiation processes lack substance and legitimacy and this may jeopardize their sustainability. This imperative is mirrored by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on «Women, Peace and Security», which calls for the stronger participation of women in peacebuilding, the prevention of gender-based violence and protection of the rights and needs of women and girls during and after armed conflicts, and a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding. While bearing in mind all three components, this guidance note takes a gender-sensitive perspective to the specific context of peace negotiations.

Content

Key Messages

Background

Key Principles

Questions for the Mediator

Additional Sources and Links

Key Messages

- Both women and men are actors for change, conflict and peace. Think of creative ways to strengthen women's capacity to survive, articulate their ideas, experiences.
- Gender* awareness is not a question of political correctness, but a question of accurate analysis, effective, sustainable and equal processes, and professionalism.
- There are indications that a "critical mass" of 30-40 % women participation in a peace process is needed to really make a difference.
- Collect and make use of information on how women and men are differently affected by the conflict and involved in peacebuilding.
- Consult as early as possible gender experts, individual women and women's organisations, who work on questions of gender, conflict and peacebuilding.

The Mediation Support Project (MSP) is a joint venture between swisspeace and the Center for Security Studies (ETH Zurich) and is funded by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

August 2008

* Gender defines the socially constructed processes of the relations between and among women and men. It includes three dimensions: (1) individual gender identity: social roles for individual women and men; (2) gender symbolism: stereotypes of "masculinity" and "femininity" and socially constructed ideas on "women" and "men"; (3) gender structure: organisation and institutionalisation of social, economic, political activities in the public and private sphere. For more information see Box 1 and see: Cordula Reimann, 2002: "All You Need Is Love ... and What About Gender?" Bradford University, Working Paper 10. [Download](#)

Different needs and interests of women and men

Box 1: Three dimensions of Gender (Triangle)

Different levels on leadership

1000Women:

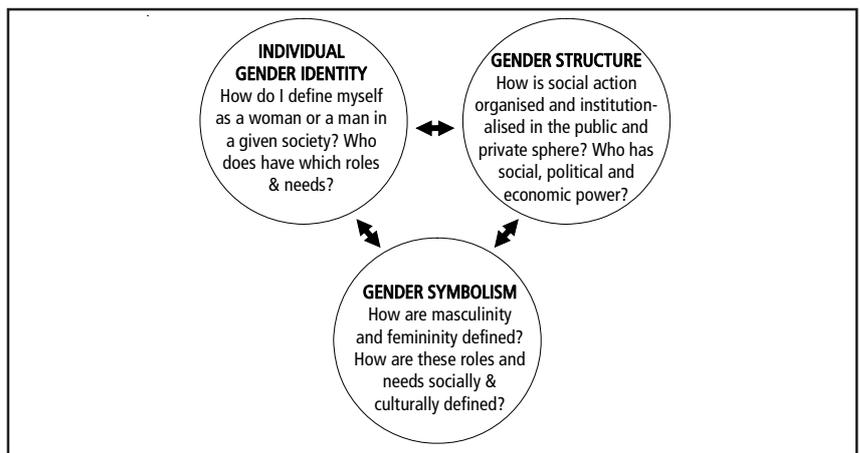
[Further information](#)

Including the views of all members of society

UN Security Council Resolution 1325

Background

While both women and men experience violent conflicts as gross human tragedies, the roles, experiences, needs and interests of women, girls, men and boys tend to be different. Women and men are involved in fighting, yet the majority of fighters remain men. Women tend to take over male-dominated roles, as heads of households, while at the same time looking after family members and caring for the injured. Both women and men are exposed to gun and gender-based violence. While men tend to be the prime targets of gun violence, women are mostly affected by sexual and domestic violence, displacement and social discrimination.



In violent conflicts, women and men act as agents for change, conflict and peace. Yet, with men being at the top of decision-making, most decisions in peace negotiation processes are taken by men. As the Initiative “1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize” has shown, women are mainly involved in the middle level leadership and in grassroots organisations and civil society peacebuilding organisations.

Actively including the perspective and views of all members of society – instead of excluding women as 50% of the population – increases the fulfilment of the needs, capacities and necessities of all members of society. Without taking the gender-specific context of conflict and peacebuilding into account, negotiation processes lack substance and legitimacy and this may jeopardize their sustainability.

This imperative is mirrored by the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on “Women, Peace and Security”, which calls for a) the stronger participation of women in peacebuilding, b) the prevention of gender-based violence and protection of the rights and needs of women and girls during and after armed conflicts, and c) a gender-sensitive approach to peacebuilding. While bearing in mind all three components, this memo takes a gender-sensitive perspective towards peace negotiations.*

* For the specific question of women participation in peace processes, see the complementary UN-Operational Guidance Note “Women in Peace Processes and Agreements” [Download](#)

Key Principles

What gender perspective on mediation does and does not involve

	What a gender perspective does involve	What a gender perspective does not involve
Conflict analysis	Conducting a gender-sensitive conflict analysis, i.e. asking what different and same needs, fears and interests do women and men have, and who has the power among the conflict parties.	Conducting a conflict analysis mentioning the roles of women in a separate section or focusing only on women as "victims".
Different roles	Looking at the inequalities and different roles between and among women and men. Designing interventions that take inequalities and differences between women and men into account.	Treating women and men as the same or focusing exclusively on women.
Actors for change	Recognising that both women and men are actors for change, conflict and peace.	Treating women only as a "vulnerable group".
Different needs	Recognising that men and women have different needs. E.g. men may be the prime victims of direct violence and women may be survivors of gender specific violence, and therefore they have specific psycho-social and health needs.	Ignoring gender-specific dimensions of violence against men and women.
Quotas	Including women in the negotiation process: Moving beyond counting the number of participants to looking at impacts of initiatives. However, generally a "critical mass" of 30% participation is required to have an impact.	Striving for equal or 50/50 (men/women) participation. "Enforce" quotas and affirmative action to ensure an equal - politically correct - participation of women as mediators or representatives of conflict parties.
Cultural specifics	"Conservative" cultures: Working with men as tribal leaders or elders and negotiating the rights and public resources for women by appealing to the men's self-interest	Working with local authorities and accepting the gender-specific asymmetries as "culture-specific", given and unchangeable.
Group differences	Understanding the differences among different groups of women and men.	Assuming that all women or all men will have the same interests.
Context-specific analysis	Understanding the specific situation and documenting actual conditions and priorities.	Assuming and generalising who does what work and who has which responsibilities.
Indicators	Coming up with indicators for a successful application of a gender-sensitive negotiation process, e.g. increased gender awareness of men and women participating in mediation processes.	Assuming that as soon as there are women in the negotiating team and/or at the "peace table", the negotiation will automatically be gender-sensitive and conflict issues will be dealt with in a gender-sensitive way.

Avoid stereotypes

Understanding and analysing conflicts

Although conflict situations tend to increase both men's and women's vulnerability, it is important not to relegate women to the category of victim. Women as well as men make choices, develop coping strategies, mobilise scarce resources and play significant roles in their communities.

Just as not all men share the same interests and priorities, neither do all women. There are class, ethnic, religious, age and other power differences among women and these are often heightened during conflict.

Context specific analysis

Each situation and conflict must be understood on its own terms. It is misleading to carry assumptions from one country to another about the gender division of labour or who are combatants or how societies reconstitute themselves following war. Given that gender identities and relations can change over time and during conflicts themselves, it is important to carry out context-specific analyses and consultations.

Box 2: Gender and Conflict
Analysis
[Download](#)

More information on how to carry out a gender sensitive conflict analysis can be found in the UNIFEM Policy Briefing Paper 2006 "Gender and Conflict Analysis"

Equal opportunities

Designing and implementing mediation interventions

Some activists translate the insight that 'gender' involves looking at women and men into the conclusion that therefore both should be given equal opportunities. And clearly, the call for equal participation is a fundamental human right and political sine qua non.

Respect for cultural context

Yet, the political call and demand for women's participation in societies with rigid and fixed gender stereotypes may be less welcome or even rejected. Culture is subject to constant change by society and is not monolithic and fixed. The key is to identify and negotiate entry-points in/for the negotiation process, which respect cultural characteristics like "honour" and "face saving" while opening up space for women's and men's needs and interests. The lesson is to stress that women's participation will benefit the sustainability of the negotiation process and hence is in the very self-interest of the elders and tribal leaders.

Specific peace fora

A crucial insight from a gender perspective, however, is that in order to have more equitable impacts on the peace process, it may be necessary to provide specific resources to women and women's organisations or focus attention on women's particular priorities. This could take the form of separate "peace fora for women", which take place prior or during the "official peace negotiations". It is crucial that these separate "negotiating fora" for women work closely together and are institutionally linked with the official negotiation processes and are based on a deeper understanding of gender roles and relationships.

Box 3: Examples of Women's Involvement in Mediation processes

Burundi: [Further information](#)

Somalia: [Further information](#)

Sri Lanka: [Further information](#)

Narrowing the gaps

Indicators

Top five questions for the mediator

Burundi

The All-Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference, which was held alongside the Arusha talks in 2000, brought together female members from the nineteen negotiating parties, observers, refugees, internally displaced women and diasporas to develop a common vision for Burundi's peace and reconstruction. Nearly eighty participants presented their recommendations to President Mandela, heads of negotiating parties and the facilitation team.

Somalia

Somali women at the Arta Conference in 2000 represent themselves as a "sixth clan" at the negotiations, joining four major clans and a coalition of smaller ones.

Sri Lanka

In 2002, in the third round of peace talks, the "gender sub-committee" consisting of female LTTE cadres and five women's activities and scholars appointed by the Sri Lankan government was set up to discuss the gender-specific concerns of the conflict.

Monitoring and evaluation

Although representation is important, it may not always be appropriate to set a goal of half women/half men participants at specific negotiation stages. It is more relevant to look at the overall impact of the intervention: Does a particular political event or initiative widen the gaps between women and men or move to narrow them (where possible)?

Possible indicators are, for example, sex-disaggregated data, participation of women in negotiating and mediation teams; and more indepth understanding of the relevant (different and same) interests and needs of women and men.

Questions for the mediator

- Does your conflict analysis include gender-specific and sex-disaggregated data and conflict information? For example on gender-based violence, different interests and roles of women and men.
- Do you have access to written or verbal information on the same and different roles and experiences of women and men during the conflict and their respective ideas for peacebuilding?
- How do you get in contact with individual women or women's organisations, which are well based and situated in the wider community? How do you collect sex-disaggregated data in the given conflict scenario?
- If women are not at the negotiation table – neither in the mediating team nor among the conflict parties – what are the reasons, i.e. what are the practical, social and political hurdles for women participating, how can these hurdles be surmounted?

Box 4: Gender sensitive
peace agreements
[Website](#)

Specific questions for the
mediator

- Are you familiar with the most relevant and local action plans of international norms (e.g. UN SCR 1325, CEDAW, ...), and mechanisms on and provisions for gender equality?

For a gender-sensitive peace agreement see the Guatemala comprehensive set of peace agreements, which explicitly mentioned women, indigenous women and the roles they played in maintaining the peace.

Pre-Agreement Phase (“talks about talks”)

- Is the term “gender” culturally understood? Are terms like “human dignity” and “human security” culturally more respected terms to discuss the different and same interests and needs of women and men?
- What do you know about the gender-specific composition of negotiation teams and conflict parties?
- Have you made contact with (male or female) gender experts, individual women, women’s groups or organizations?
- Are there “hidden” power asymmetries which hamper women participating in the peace negotiations, like the place of the venue, the times of meetings, lacking negotiating skills etc.?
- Are specific capacity-building trainings in negotiation techniques and skills and/or separate “negotiations for women only” necessary before the official negotiations take place?
- Are there “traditional forms” or new forums of mediation/negotiation by women?
- How can these informal activities be transferred into the formal peace processes?
- If women are not part of the mediating team, why not?
- Who are the women invited to the negotiating table?
- Are they well connected and linked to the wider social community and do they represent the majority of local women and their needs and interests?
- Have you got an overview of the most relevant gender-specific dimensions of the conflict issues, like the gender-specific violence, and the changed gender-specific division of labour during the conflict?

Agreement/Negotiation Phase

- Do you use a gender-sensitive language, i.e. do you specify whose interests, fears and needs are concerned?

- To what extent do you make certain assumptions about the interests and needs of women and men, which are more based on stereotypes than actual facts?
- If women are not present at the negotiation table, have you ensured that women are able to articulate their specific needs, interests and security concerns and feed their priorities into the peace agreement?

Post-Agreement / Implementation Phase of a peace agreement

- Have women and men been consulted and included in the monitoring mechanism for implementing the peace agreements?
- Do local men and women have ownership about the peace process that affects their life? How can this ownership be sustained?
- Are strategies in place on how to disseminate and publicise the agreement among the wider public, including local women's groups?
- To what extent do female and male ex-combatants equally benefit from Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) processes?

Additional sources and links

UNIFEM's "Portal on Women, Peace and Security" excellent and highly recommended homepage on latest international debates on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and rich case study material. [Website](#)

The Peace Women Project, hosted by the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, monitors and works toward rapid and full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. This brilliant website offers rich and up-to-date information and the ideal supplement to UNIFEM's "Portal on Women, Peace and Security". [Website](#)

Human Rights Watch produces on its website under Women and Armed Conflict a variety of reports on violence during conflict; recent reports have focused on sexual violence in the Congo, Sierra Leone, Iraq and Afghanistan. [Website](#)

Women Watch, an inter-agency website. A gateway to information and resources on the promotion of gender equality throughout the United Nations system, including the United Nations Secretariat, regional commissions, funds, programmes, specialized agencies. [Website](#)

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979. [Website](#)

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. 31/10/2000. [Download](#)

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820: Women and peace and security [Download](#)

The Mediation Support Project (MSP) aims to enhance peace mediation capacities by focusing on research, training, process support, and networking. The main partner of MSP is the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. MSP was founded in 2005 as a joint venture between the Swiss Peace Foundation (swisspeace) and the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the ETH Zurich.

Text: Dr Cordula Reimann
(swisspeace)
Editing: Maurus Blumenthal
Publisher: Mediation Support Project
Sonnenbergstrasse 17
CH - 3000 Bern 7
Tel: +41 (0)31 330 12 12
www.swisspeace.ch/mediation
msp@swisspeace.ch