

The Civilian Capacities Initiative and Gender-Responsive Peace-building: An Inclusive Approach?

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Summary

The UN Civilian Capacities (CivCap) initiative is a response to rebuilding countries in transition from war to peace. This policy brief focuses on gender-sensitivity in this initiative and the UN's ability to support this development.

Gender perspectives in the initiative appear somewhat limited, as the reform seems to focus on deploying senior-ranking women and having indicators to measure women's participation. There is a need to look at the following four levels of analysis:

At the **sub-national level**, the general principals of the Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325 should be adapted in light of country-specific realities.

At the **national level**, participation of women in state-building processes and reforms is essential in support of the CivCap claim to "inclusive political processes."

For the **mission level**, rather than separating gender units from other units, a better approach might be to have gender experts employed in various units across the entire mission.

At the **international level**, it is necessary to challenge overall gender perspectives. Over the past ten years, there has been a tendency to shift from understanding gender perspectives as inclusive approaches of participation in peace-building and political processes and towards a focus on the victimization of women.

Introduction

This policy brief takes up the topic of the UN Civilian Capacity (CivCap) initiative and the level of gender sensitivity in peacebuilding approaches to countries in transition from war to peace. As any assistance by external civilian capacities is a matter of last resort, the focus here is on the national realities within such countries. In addition, this brief discusses overall tendencies in the understanding of "gender perspectives" at the level of the international community. Finally, some points regarding UN-supported missions in post-conflict countries are made. We begin with an overview of the background for the CivCap initiative and its substantive elements.

The UN has over the past two decades been engaged in complex peacekeeping and peace-building missions around the globe. Such work calls for timely and accurate human resources to meet the rapidly changing political and humanitarian circumstances on the ground. In particular, civilian experts are elements crucial to supporting local and national processes of the rule of law, public administration reform and other essential tasks.

The UN has been criticized for its bureaucratic recruitment processes that result in long-term vacancies in missions and hence slow responsiveness in these critical recovery and reconciliation processes. More substantively, the UN has been criticized for not securing local ownership and building on existing institutions in the respective countries.¹ There has more often been

¹ See especially Sending, Ole Jacob (2009) "Why Peacebuilders Fail to Secure Ownership and be Sensitive to Context," Security in Practice, 1. Oslo: NUPI.

a top-down procedure by international peacebuilders favoring liberal norms, rather than a bottom-up approach based on what has worked from concrete experience in the national/local context. As Sending argues: “[P]eacebuilding professionals with functionally specific expertise in a particular issue-area (security sector reform, rule of law, human rights, gender, etc.) assume a position of authority in knowing what needs to be done in countries they often know little about.”²

This means there is a crucial need not only to take stock of how civilian expertise for UN missions is identified, trained, deployed and functions on the grounds, but also to ensure a match with national demands, with national ownership on the part of countries in transition from conflict to peace. An emphasis has also been to encourage better South-South cooperation.³ Henceforth, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed in 2009 Jean-Marie Guéhenno, former Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping, to head an independent Senior Advisory Group to undertake a review of the UN’s civilian capacity needs. Their report was shared with the UN Security Council and General Assembly in May 2010, and USG Susana Malcorra, head of the UN Department of Field Support, has been charged with taking the recommendations of the report forward.⁴

These recommendations emphasize in particular the end-user perspective, i.e. the national capacities themselves and the respective needs in conflict-affected communities. Specifically, the group identified three critical areas of attention in supporting civilian capacities in the post-conflict context, namely in terms of the (i) national capacity, (ii) capacity of Member States to be deployed via the UN or directly and (iii) capacity within the UN to help countries in their transition. In particular, there are five civilian capacity areas identified by the UN Civilian Capacities Team resource pool of expertise (‘CAPMATCH’): 1) Safety and Security, 2) Justice, 3) Core Government Functionality, 4) Economic Revitalization and 5) Inclusive Political Processes.⁵

Moreover, the group has acknowledge both gender perspectives and women’s contribution to these processes as essential for achieving the goals set in e.g. protection against violence, rule of law and security. They emphasize in particular the role of UN-Women

to lead the way in the processes of 1) having senior field officers on the ground and 2) ensuring indicators being met in terms of women’s peace and security in the countries affected by war in line with Resolution 1325(2000) and the UN Strategic Results Framework on 1325.

There are, however, more to the gender inclusive approaches than simply deploying senior female staff and measuring impacts through standardized indicators. Securing local ownership and ensuring that there is country-specific expertise cannot be achieved in a standardized way.⁶ There is thus a need to discuss some substantive aspects in order to understand what the CivCap reform entails when it comes to gender sensitive support to national expertise for countries in transition from conflict to peace and possible approaches.

Questioning “civilian capacities” and what it entails

The knowledge and skills demanded to build and support national capacities in transition from war to peace involves a number of questions. For a start, when is a country in a post-conflict situation? The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), for instance, was swiftly defined as post-conflict country after the peace treaty in 2003 despite the on-going rebel activities and violence that continues to affect the daily lives of civilians. This, in turn, affects international responses and donor funding towards state-building activities, despite the need for basic conflict-resolution measures in remaining conflict zones. The approach does not “align with national priorities” as actions serve political interests of the international community rather than actual needs within the country.

Another question to be asked is who are the national capacities in the first place and in what areas of expertise? What worked preceding the war in terms of curbing the level of violence committed against men and women? This question relates to among other things the justice system, the police and the traditional rule of law mechanisms. Here, it is essential to ask both women and men from different levels of the societies affected by war. Moreover, and in areas which have been impacted by conflict for longer periods of time, affected people will be much more able to identify types and circumstances of violence and how this could be reduced. It also, however, creates major changes in people’s lives, meaning for instance previous social bonds being cut, displacement of the young male population and greater responsibility for women in livelihood terms.


2 Ibid, p. 8

3 Cedric de Coning, John Karlsrud and Ingrid Marie Breidlid (2013). “Turning to the South: Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict” forthcoming in *Global Governance* 2(1).

4 For more details on this process, see e.g. Cedric de Coning and John Karlsrud (2011). “Preparing and Mobilizing Civilian Capacity for the Future: Recommendations for Implementing the Guéhenno Report,” Policy Brief 2 (2011), Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

5 The CAPMATCH portal was established during the General Assembly in 2012. For more info, see <https://capmatch.un.org/Capmatch/>

6 Autesserre, Séverine (2010). *The Trouble with the Congo. Local Violence and the Failure of International Peacebuilding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Moreover, one can question if the support to “core government functions” is seen as legitimate to the conflict-affected communities. In the countries where UN operations are based (e.g. Haiti, Liberia, DRC), central government and support functions like the army and the police are often the origins of war. Moreover, the international solutions to many of the conflicts are to “reward” instigators of violence with high positions in the government or in the national army. This is highly problematic and it is a dire need to question the obsessive focus on the government and the state institutions and see if there are other, more “legitimate” areas where the UN can focus its civilian support.

Mainstreaming gender perspectives into the Civilian Capacity Initiative

The overall idea of gender mainstreaming in peace-building and capacity-building activities relates to 1) gender equality, 2) gender representation and 3) gender analysis. Mainstreaming is thus from the very basic acknowledgment of a balanced representation of both women and men to the implementation of political and development strategies and reforms that are based on gender disaggregated data and analysis. The discussion on gender perspectives below is structured into four interrelated areas of concerns: The sub-national, the national, the mission and the international level.

At the **sub-national level**, there is a need to adapt general principals of the Women, Peace and Security resolution into knowledge of country-specific realities. How can women in conflict-affected communities take ownership and identify specific needs through the principals of participation and reconciliation? The women in conflict-affected areas are often found at the front line of conflicts, for instance working for their families survival, or have joined or are closely associated with members of armed groups.

Yet, rather than action, women are often put in a category of vulnerable and victimhood, which will be returned to below, and their capacity is thus underutilized. As Schanebl & Tabyshaelieva (2012:3) put it: Women “frequently achieve visibility only for their suffering, not for their actual and potential roles as sources, initiators and agents of both conflict and peace.” In turn, the marginalization of women can distort the image of men in conflict situations, focusing on hyper-masculinity and power positions and overlooking some of the vulnerable and marginalized men (ibid). Moreover, it has been argued from several sources that the UN resolution 1820 (2008) on sexual violence in conflict is a step back as it focuses on women more as traditional victims of war, rather than promoting their full participation in overall peace and security matters.

In order to integrate women’s perspectives and participation in the CivCap initiative on for instance safety and security there is a need to look more closely into various level of security including these following fields: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security (Mayanja, 2011, p. 56). These aspects all fall into the category of human security, which in many ways define the multiple and interrelated aspects of insecurity for the local population in conflict/post-conflict settings. Though conflict-affected societies might suffer under all of these concerns, it is almost impossible to approach these areas without gender specificity of experience and interests. This includes for instance gender divisions of labor and property ownership and hence economic, food, environmental and personal security, which all can be affected differently for women and men and their dependents.

At the **national level**, participation of women in state-building processes and reforms is essential in support of the CivCap initiatives claim for “inclusive political processes.” One needs to question the underlying reasons for women’s exclusion in various political processes in the first place in order to approach this issue in post-conflict countries. Moreover, there is to some extent a window of opportunity associated with post-conflict countries as traditions and rules may be transformed and re-written. This can for instance be an increased awareness on human rights violations as well as women leadership in sub-national contexts. It is important that both national and international capacities take advantage of this opportunity.

At the **mission level**, there are some challenges and demands emphasized by recent internal desk reviews of the UN missions and the (dis)integration of gender units. First, the staff of these units can sometimes have a gender generalist background and not necessarily the overall peace and security aspects necessary in the missions. This means for instance that staff from the Security Sector Reform (SSR) unit will often have a widely different background and speak “another language” when it comes to their field of expertise. In fact, the jargon of SSR could seem unfamiliar to some of the gender experts and vice versa. Harmonization and using each other’s expertise can thus become difficult. Moreover, the number of staff in these separate units is limited and it is unjustifiable to say 20 gender experts or less have the responsibility of mainstreaming gender to the entire mission, as is often the case.

A suggestion that came up was to work on the structure and quality of these personnel. Rather than separating gender units from other units, a perhaps better

approach is to find experts and place them in different units across the entire mission. For instance having specialized experts in both gender and SSR who were a part of an SSR unit, not a gender unit could be a part-solution. This is a two-way process of communication.

At an **international level**, it is also a need to challenge gender perspectives overall. For the last ten years, there has been a tendency of moving away from understanding gender perspectives as inclusive approaches of participation in peace-building and political processes to rather a victimization of women. In many ways, we are moving backwards; from activity and participation to victimhood and passivity for women in particular and gender perspectives more generally. Here, there is a tendency of equating gender perspectives with sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) when it comes to areas of UN missions and post-war societies. SGBV can be seen as a symptom of structural failure and not the main target of concern for an inclusive approach to peace and security for both men and women.

It is true that women and men are affected differently by war due to their positions in society. However, both parties must be involved at the negotiating table and in the recovery of war-torn countries.

Conclusion

The issues and recommendations mentioned here are only some of the many challenges facing such a broad subject as civilian capacities in post-conflict situations and inclusiveness in engaging men and women in these various processes. Ultimately, there will be needs and views based on the specific context of countries in transition from war to peace. As a minimum standard, however, both men and women should be included in the processes that concern them as members of the nation-state, and future generations.

Literature

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