

Incorporating a gender perspective in civilian-based peacekeeping

While awareness is growing that conflict and post-conflict situations have significant gendered implications that need to be addressed by any kind of intervention - local, national, or international; governmental or non-governmental - in practice systematic efforts to implement gender analysis and gender-sensitive policies are still exceptional. This is mainly related to lack of sufficient gender knowledge in organizations and institutions dealing with peace and security; absence of sufficient financial and human resources to implement a gender perspective; and gender not being made a priority in the work in itself.

In recent years IFOR's Women Peacemakers Program has been receiving signals from the field that civilian-based peace services are struggling to implement a gender perspective in their work. Based on this observation the WPP decided to conduct a one-year pilot research on how to incorporate a gender perspective in civilian-based peace work. This pilot project aims to contribute to growing gender awareness and sensitivity within the praxis of existing peace teams and other peacebuilding initiatives, in order for them to effectively promote and contribute to gender equality as a condition for a just, lasting peace.

The process for implementing the pilot project started early 2006, when the WPP sent out a call for cooperation to seven civilian-based peace services. Responses were very positive, and resulted in a formal agreement between Peace Brigades International's Indonesia Project (PBI-IP) and the WPP for the pilot. PBI-IP proved to be an ideal partner, for not only is PBI the oldest civilian-based peace organization in the world, it is also in the process of developing an organization-wide gender and diversity policy¹. With gender already being featured on the PBI agenda, the pilot would be able to build on the work already done. The research was conducted by *Maria Delgado*, a researcher, a human rights activist, and a former member of a peace team.

Civilian-based peacekeeping

In her book *Civilian Peacekeeping. Preventing Violence and Making Space for Democracy* (2006), Lisa Schirch refers to civilian peacekeeping as involving unarmed individuals placing themselves in conflict situations in an intentional effort to reduce inter-group violence.² According to the author, civilian peacekeeping, also called unarmed peacekeeping, peace teams, or third party non-violent intervention, performs many of the same tasks as military peacekeeping.³ While military peacekeeping usually includes activities such as maintaining ceasefires, limiting violence, assisting in the withdrawal of troops and demobilization of armed groups, accompanying humanitarian aid missions, protecting refugees and internally displaced people, civilian peacekeeping primarily aims to reduce levels of direct violence, so that civil society actors can safely carry out non-violent activism, defend human rights, or promote dialogue. Among the advantages of civilian peacekeeping in terms of preventing and deterring violence, Schirch notes that civilian peacekeepers are inexpensive, have access to and legitimacy with grassroots groups, use non-violent forms of power to prevent violence, and often have a committed constituency of peace supporters around the world.³

As civilian-based peacekeeping organization, Peace Brigades International (PBI) works for the protection of human rights and the promotion of non-violent transformation of violent conflict by sending out teams of international volunteers (so-called *peace teams*) to areas of repression and conflict. PBI teams accompany human rights defenders and organizations threatened by political violence, in order to create space for local activists to work for social justice and human rights. In 1999, upon the written request of various Indonesian and East

¹ PBI established a *Gender and Diversity Working Group* in 2005, which is in charge of developing a *Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Strategy* for PBI.

² Schirch, 2006: 15.

³ Schirch, 2006: 17

Timorese human rights groups, PBI established a permanent presence in Indonesia with the PBI Indonesia Project (IP) where it focuses on offering protective services and providing participatory peace education.

Gender and the IP

The pilot research assessed how gender dynamics play out in the IP's work, considering its institutional structures and policies, recruitment and training processes, and activities in the field. It looked at some of the challenges and dilemmas encountered in the field, and how these are addressed by the teams. To broaden the scope of the field research, additional information was gathered from other PBI field projects, as well as from other international civilian-based peacekeeping organizations.

The observations of the pilot research resulted in the formulation of a set of recommendations for peace teams. For instance, in the context of civilian-based peacekeeping, field teams are both living and working together, in a context often unfamiliar to them. Gender awareness and sensitivity of team members is important in a setting where interaction is shaped by everyone's personal socialization, which differs considerably based on one's cultural, educational and generational background. Gender therefore needs to be addressed from the start, and hence become firmly imbedded in the organization's recruitment processes, as this will impact on how gender is ultimately addressed in the field. A gender-sensitive recruitment policy goes beyond the number of men and women working for the organization; it also ensures equal opportunities for everyone, as well as a safe and comfortable working atmosphere.

A commitment to gender justice in peace teams reflects for example in local initiatives and programs that empower women and girls, in order for women and men to become equal partners in peacebuilding and reconciliation. A gender mainstreaming strategy⁴ thus includes gender-specific activities and affirmative action, whenever women or men are in a particularly disadvantageous position, as to overcome the direct and indirect effects of previous discrimination. Nonetheless, gender mainstreaming is not only about adding a woman's program or a gender equality component into an already existing activity, such as for example peace education, nor about the increase in the participation of women. It is also about ensuring that the specific experiences, knowledge, and interests of women and men bear on the peace team's agenda and practices⁵. This might even entail changing this agenda, revising the organization's goals, strategies, and actions in order for both women and men to be able to influence, participate in, and benefit from its work.

Though PBI has formulated a gender and diversity policy, it faces, as other civilian-based peace services do, challenges in implementing this policy. Implementation of this policy starts with a thorough gender analysis of all areas of activities and structures so that gender differences and disparities can be diagnosed (gender baseline). Once the baseline situation has been established, real progress in terms of further implementation depends on the

⁴ In July 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined the concept of gender mainstreaming as follows: "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the **process** of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality."

⁵ For this reason, it is important that any gender mainstreaming also focuses on the concept of *masculinities*. As some feminist critics have observed, the impact of some measures to mainstream gender in military peacekeeping missions - namely, to incorporate more female personnel as well as gender advisers and gender units, and to implement gender trainings - has been little because it is not linked to a discussion on militarism *an sich*, and in particular on militarized masculinities, or on masculinities in general.

allocation of adequate resources for mainstreaming, which includes both financial and human resources. One of the biggest challenges peace teams face in this regard is its volunteer-based structure, which poses a major challenge to the sustainability of the gender mainstreaming efforts. The high turnover of volunteers can lead to chronic institutional memory loss, in particular in relation to the transfer of expertise and lessons learned. In addition, the demanding work load in a complex setting can lead to gender mainstreaming being pushed aside when competing with other priority areas for time, limited funding and staff allocation.

It is equally important for peace teams such as Peace Brigades International's Indonesia Project to formulate a clear vision and position in relation to respecting gender equality in light of a context where gender inequality is the norm; and offers guidelines - for example in the organization's code of conduct- on how it expects its female and male staff members and volunteers to behave and respond in this regard. Female and male team members will encounter different experiences in the field, and hence have different needs. A gender-sensitive approach implies taking these needs into account. For example, any dismissive assumption that sexual harassment is part of the operational costs of deploying white/foreign/Western women abroad should be avoided. One former IP volunteer stated in this regard:

The teams in the field often work in an environment of gender discrimination, sexual violence and ethnic conflict, and as an international organization PBI should set positive examples. For the work in Papua it can be said that the majority of human rights workers are male while women are in a marginalized position and often are not part of relevant human rights discussions. Female PBI volunteers can be an example of women working for human rights. The role of male PBI volunteers is not less crucial, as they can set examples of men who respect women as equal counterparts meeting with local women at eyelevel, listening to them and treating them as subjects and not as objects as it is widely common in Papua. Such a male approach can be an important experience for both women and men in the local context and open the window for alternative gender interaction.+

In countries experiencing violent conflict, or just coming out of a situation of war, it is crucial to raise awareness on key international instruments such as CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 and UNSCR 1820, since women's rights are more than ever at a risk of being violated. Peace teams in this regard can play a role in informing and educating the human rights defenders and organizations they work with, and they can actively support and involve those women organizations that are working for women's rights. This is especially important in light of the growing awareness amongst the international community that women's rights are a core component of any human rights work, and that women's active participation is crucial for any sustainable development to take place.

Peace teams, perhaps even more than any other international peace institution, are well equipped to develop a progressive and gender-sensitive response to conflict. Its bottom-up, grassroots approach, its respect for the local culture, its educational method, combined with the modest life-style of its field teams and close contact with the communities they serve, are a great potential for starting this transformative journey, contributing to a more peaceful future for women and men.

Note:

Currently, WPP is finalizing the publication based on the results of the pilot research. This publication formulates some preliminary recommendations for civilian-based peace services in terms of incorporating a gender perspective in their work and will be published in the beginning of 2009. For more information, keep track of our website:

<http://www.ifor.org/WPP/index.html>