



## Gender and Armed Conflict

ESCWA, Centre for Women  
UN-ESCWA

### ECW has the pleasure to launch the first issue of its monthly Newsletter!!

The ECW Newsletter is a monthly internal electronic issuance that targets ESCWA substantive divisions and aims at assisting them in engendering their work programs.

Each issue will discuss and explore the gender dimension found in a certain theme that pertains to one of the substantive divisions such as water, energy, transport, migration...etc.

Due to the recent conflict in Lebanon and the on-going regional instability in countries such as Palestine, Iraq, Sudan, and Algeria; our first edition entitled "Gender and armed conflict", will focus on the impact of wars and armed conflict on women. In addition to different articles on the topic, the first edition will conclude with recommendations that could be used in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any project undertaken in countries that are experiencing war and conflict.

The Newsletter will also include information on some

of the activities that ECW is undertaking with other divisions, creating an atmosphere of multi-disciplinary work and inter-divisional cooperation.

*We hope that you enjoy this first edition!*

### How is Gender Related to Conflict?

Gender relations are typically characterized by unequal access to, or distribution of, power. Given that gender discrimination is so prevalent, it influences substantively the 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<sup>1</sup>

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 and the acquirement of new roles such as the sole provider to the family<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Amani El Jack, Gender and Armed Conflict, Bridge, 2003.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid



*"Women and children are main victims of War"*



### Special events in the ESCWA Centre for Women

▶ *ECW discussed with the Lebanese parliamentarian Committee on the woman and child, the impact of the recent war in Lebanon on women.*

▶ *ECW and SDD are jointly working on a project entitled "Interregional cooperation to strengthen social inclusion, gender equality and health promotion in the MDG process (ESCAP with ECA, ECE, ECLAC and ESCWA)"*

▶ *ECW will participate in SCU first national workshop on gender statistics, under the umbrella of the UNDG -ITF supported project for "the Development of National Gender Statistics in Iraq " (Amman 11-13 Dec)*

### Individual Highlights:

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## The Impact of Wars and Armed Conflict on Women

Although entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and wars, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex.

Women are particularly susceptible to marginalization, poverty and the suffering engendered by armed conflict, especially when they are already victims of discrimination in peacetime. They may be particularly vulnerable if they are held up as "symbolic" bearers of cultural and ethnic identity and the producers of the

future generations of the community.<sup>3</sup> Present-day conflicts show that women are increasingly becoming the target of fighting. Women are often the **targets of sexual violence** during armed conflict when rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual abuse and assault are used as deliberate strategies of war. Rape is often employed by military forces to destabilize, humiliate and degrade a population. Sexual violence targeting women and girls has been used in all recent conflicts, including in the former

Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, India (Kashmir), Rwanda, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Angola, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, East Timor, Liberia, Algeria, the Russian Federation (Chechnya), and northern Uganda.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>ICRC study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women  
<sup>4</sup>Ibid

### "Female-headed Households"

That being said, men also have to be clearly recognized as vulnerable, as in some conflicts as many as 96% of the detainee and missing population are men. They are also prone to be wounded or killed as legitimate targets as members of armed forces or groups, who still largely recruit amongst male populations. Consequently, armed conflicts greatly affect the lives of women and can completely change their role in the family, the community and the "public" domain, once they are the only ones left to ensure the survival of the family and the society.

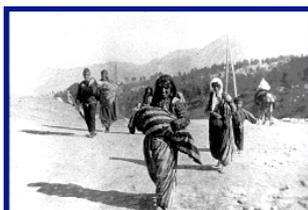
The breakdown or disintegration of family and community networks forces women to assume new roles.<sup>5</sup>

Armed conflicts have created large numbers of

**female-headed households** where the men have been conscripted, detained, displaced, have disappeared or are dead. Women invariably have to bear greater responsibility for their children, and the wider community when the men in the family have gone. Women are heads of households and breadwinners, taking over responsibility for earning a livelihood, caring for farms and animals, trading, being active outside the home, and caring for the sick, wounded and the elderly in very harsh conditions. This necessitates the development of new coping skills and confidence, requiring courage and resilience to help sustain and rebuild families and communities torn apart by war. In the absence of men, women have to fight more

to get jobs and enough money to ensure the survival of the family. This sometimes leads to a migration phenomenon towards the cities where women find new jobs such as selling in markets or providing certain services. Some of these "empowerment" changes might be reversed in post-war situations. Women are often expected to withdraw again into the home either because men are back and want the jobs, or because the community is trying to go back to the "normality" of the pre-war status quo.

Ibid<sup>5</sup>



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*"96% of the detainee and missing population are men."*

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## “Displacement, Social exclusion, and Poverty”

The very fact that many of the men are absent often heightens the sense of insecurity and danger for the women and children that are left behind. Increased insecurity and fear of attack often causes women and children to flee.

Therefore, **this category constitutes today 80 % of the world's refugees and displaced.** Displacement disproportionately disadvantages women, because it results in reduced access to resources to cope with household responsibilities and increased physical and emotional violence. Displacement also implies **social exclusion and poverty** conditions that are themselves likely to prolong the conflict. Furthermore, food scarcity and inequalities in aid and food distribution are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict, rendering women and

girls more susceptible to malnutrition. Additionally, female refugees have special needs related to pregnancy and lactation that should be addressed while distributing national or International aid in refugee camps.

A recent UNHCR assessment report revealed that serious inadequacies in clothing, blankets, and sanitary materials existed among female camp-based refugees. This inadequacy in needed basic goods impeded the ability of women refugees to participate in education, employment and other activities. The report also highlighted the security constraints facing women in refugee camps since simple daily activities such as gathering firewood or fetching water continue to place refugee women at risk of sexual and physical harm.

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*“Female refugees have special needs related to pregnancy and lactation.”*

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## “Women in war stricken countries are no longer legally protected”

In addition to experiencing displacement, women in war stricken countries are, in general, **no longer legally protected.** The laws that were in place to protect them are no longer enforced. Therefore, their movement is sometimes restricted; and their access to certain documentation or **issuance of passports** is denied. Furthermore, in war situations, **forced marriages** are widespread and divorce and **custody rights** are no longer enforced since studies reveal that during conflict situations, many divorced

men take advantage of social unrest, and lack of legal enforcement to abduct their children or travel away with them, without the prior knowledge or permission of the mothers.

Politically, spending on armament during conflict situations minimizes the resources that could be otherwise allocated to the promotion of good governance and sustainable development. Therefore, efforts aiming at reforming legislation that discriminate against women no longer

constitute state priority and are either halted or discontinued during times of war and conflict.

## “Politically Marginalized ”

Although women disproportionately bear the consequences of wars and conflict, yet they seldom have a say in political decision-making; as **the decision to “go to war”** is usually reserved to male politicians or military leaders. 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. Therefore post-conflict reconstruction efforts could present a valuable opportunity to address gender concerns and include women in political decision-making, and conflict resolution processes in war-stricken areas.

This position was reaffirmed by the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for

Action (BPFA), and the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000); which requests member states, to increase the political representation of women, include them in decision making, peace negotiations and conflict resolution mechanisms, and protect them in armed conflict as they are one of the most vulnerable segments in society during wars and conflicts.



*“Many divorced men take advantage of social unrest, and lack of legal enforcement to abduct their children or travel away with them, without the prior knowledge or permission of the mothers.”*

## *Recommendations: how to mainstream gender concerns during conflict situations<sup>6</sup>*

- Implement and enforce UNSC resolution 1325 which calls for increasing the political representation of women, and including them in decision making, peace negotiations and conflict resolution mechanisms.
- Provide gender training and raise awareness among policy makers on the importance of including women in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.
- Involve women local organizations in decision making while conducting relief or conflict -related interventions.
- Provide specialized services for women who suffer from violent impacts of armed conflict, including counselling and outreach programmes to manage reproductive health concerns related to physical assault as well as psychological troubles resulting from armed conflict.
- Recognize that the impact of armed conflicts such as forced displacement, impoverishment and gender biased violence as human rights violations and not as private, cultural concerns that are unavoidable outcomes of wars.
- During displacement, measures to assist women refugees should include: assistance to organize refugee women and include them in camp management, direct involvement of women in food distribution, wider availability of reproductive health services, safe houses and counselling services for victims of trauma or violence.

<sup>6</sup>Amani El Jack, *Gender and Armed Conflict*, Bridge, 2003.



*“Recognize that the impact of armed conflicts such as forced displacement, impoverishment and gender biased violence as human rights violations”*

## Matrix<sup>7</sup>

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Aspects of gender relations	Definition	How they change as a result of conflict	Implications
<a href="#">Gender roles</a>	Everyday activities of women and men	Women take on more responsibility for providing for the family, men's work becomes less	Women gain confidence in their ability while men feel 'lost'
<a href="#">Gender identities</a>	Expected characteristics and behaviors of men and women ('masculinities' and 'femininities')	Survival strategies or exposure to new ways of living may lead to change, but values remain unchanged.	Gap between expected behaviors and ability to meet expectations
<a href="#">Gendered power structures</a>	Institutions (household, community, state) which shape attitudes and behaviors and which control resources	Women gain some new power within household but other structures remain male dominated.	Women have responsibility but not power. Their experiences may lead them to organize, work towards establishing their rights
<a href="#">Gender ideologies</a>	Culturally determined attitudes and values which have been established over time and which provide justification for all the above	Attitudes and values change very slowly, and may in fact become more hard-line.	After the war is over, women may be 'sent back to the kitchen'. Possible 'backlash' against women's empowerment. But gov't and civil society can work together to consolidate positive changes

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.accord.org.za/>

We're on the Web!

See us at:

[www.escwa.org.lb](http://www.escwa.org.lb)

### Interesting Facts And Figures

At the beginning of the 20th century, 90% of war victims were soldiers and 10% civilians. In the wars of the last decade, 90% of the victims were civilians- mostly women and children.

### About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

*You are not born a Woman,  
You become one  
(Simone De Beauvoir,  
1908-1986)*

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