

PROMOTING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACE IMPLEMENTATION: OBSERVATIONS FROM MONUC

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Introduction

Although reference is made in the 1995 Beijing platform for action, to the subject of women and peacekeeping, it was not until the year 2000 that the UN put in place a strategy to include gender in all aspects of multidimensional peacekeeping operations.² The components of this plan are mapped out in the Windhoek Declaration and Namibia Plan of Action.³

In October 2000, the United Nations Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.⁴ The resolution specifically addresses the impact of war on women and women's contributions to conflict and sustainable peace. In July 2002, the Security Council re-affirmed this commitment by calling for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the implementation of peacekeeping mandates. An important result of Resolution 1325 was the establishment of the MONUC Gender Office in March 2002.⁵ The office has a specific mandate to work within both MONUC and the Congolese population to mainstream a *gender perspective* in all decisions taken on policy and programming initiatives. The Office for Gender Affairs is staffed by 5 personnel (four UN personnel and one locally employed civilian).

The mainstreaming of a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations is a strategy that aims to ensure that the concerns and experiences of women as well as men are factored into the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies and programmes in all spheres of the mission: political, military, administration, as well as in humanitarian and human rights fields. The principle is to allow both men and women to benefit from assistance and programmes in the same manner, and for them to be consulted and involved in the process. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that access and opportunity is given equally to men as well as women, thereby aiming to achieve gender equality.

Despite the extant UN instruments and statements of good intent, training opportunities and a handful of women in senior positions, there remain many challenges to overcome. In particular, it is essential to include a gender per-

spective in the planning stages of a peacekeeping mission, from conceptualisation to implementation, as well as in its strategies and its policies. This will allow for a gender perspective to be incorporated in a concrete and practical manner.

Efforts to mainstream gender in MONUC

In MONUC, the strategy of tasking an office responsible for gender mainstreaming at a sufficiently high level and institutionally within the Office of the SRSG was a practical endeavor to genuinely take women into consideration in the mission's programming and policy development. Providing the Gender Advisor with decision-making authority was initially considered to be sufficient to ensure attention was given to gender considerations by military, police and civilian peacekeeping officers in any given situation. However, since peacekeeping missions are thought to be male institutions, the reality is that it takes a great time and effort to both sensitise and obtain the attention of all decision-makers, particularly at the strategic level. The importance of this issue and its merits go to the very core of the gender office's mandate to continue to raise the profile of gender mainstreaming at the highest levels of MONUC.

However, lack of understanding is also clearly illustrated at country level (Troop Contributing Countries), where the decision is taken to identify and deploy military observers (milobs): nearly 99% of MILOBS are male. Moreover, there are only a few women in the contingents, mainly deployed in "traditional" female roles such as nurses and administrators. It is clear, therefore, that in order to overcome this situation, gender considerations must be taken into account at the earliest stages of national planning for participation in peace operations - well in advance of the implementation phase of the mission.

It remains that in order to get budget controllers, planners and policy makers to understand the need to factor in a gender dimension into the peacekeeping equation, expertise and training is required to enable them to understand the importance of mainstreaming gender into all aspects of a mission. The major challenge remains that of convincing these controllers, planners and policy makers that training on gender is essential enough to dedicate time, attention and effort to such training. Only when this challenge is met, will the implementation of policy reflect the various instruments that currently exist and become a reality on the ground.

It can also not be assumed that women policy-makers will, necessarily, be more supportive of gender issues than their male counterparts. Experience has proven that it is a fallacy to believe that women will always be sensitive to gen-

der issues. In fact, in general, women who have struggled to be included in male dominated environments will not want to get involved in the gender debate for fear of conveying the impression of being less competent. This poses a serious problem as efforts to subject such women to Gender Sensitisation Training are almost 99% ineffective, because women, by virtue of their sex, presume to understand the issue and comprehend what it is all about. In most cases, this is simply not true.

Therefore, the first and most important aspect of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that senior planners, decision makers as well as technical experts, both male and female, understand the issues the same way the gender experts do. Only then will informed decisions be taken. Failure to have a common understanding results in uninformed or gender-blind decisions that can have a devastating effect. For example, women may be allowed to occupy certain gender sensitive roles, with the hope that this would satisfy those who insist on the need to integrate a gender perspective. This is nothing more than tokenism.

Gender mainstreaming requires programmatic integration in all elements of activity and throughout the various efforts and activities. It requires regular monitoring and evaluation of the progress made and the problems encountered, as well as making sure that there are mechanisms in place for ensuring accountability of objectives. Above all, gender mainstreaming requires strategic use of resources: human, material and financial. In MONUC, for example, the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration (DDRRR) programme reflects a gender perspective in all aspects of its work: in the location or construction of transit centres, in decisions on repatriation, and in matters relating to health and education for dependants, including children. This is an integral aspect of the DDRRR programme as the needs of both men and women are different, especially as they have been affected by the conflict in very different ways.

Human rights officers have also recognised the benefits of having women included in investigation missions on serious human rights violations. In many instances, these violations concern women and it has been determined that women are more ready and willing to disclose their plight to other women, rather than to men. Similarly, humanitarian officers have testified to the positive role women can and do play as decision-makers in internally displaced and refugee camps, as well as in the communities where conflicts occur. Male Military Observers (MILOBS) in the field have reported that, after gender sensitisation training, they were more inclined to seek out women in the communities in order to speak and listen to them. This tactic has enabled them to gather valuable information, as they have discovered that local women, who go in search of food or water or medical care for the children and the family, usually find themselves in those locations where they actually witness

armed conflict. In fact, some MILOBS have revealed that before receiving gender sensitisation training, they never considered women to be valuable sources of information - because their military training taught them only to look for other men in uniform. However, in present day conflict, especially in Africa, the battlefield is in the community.

Efforts aimed at training UN Civilian Police (CIVPOL) trainers and the local police on gender sensitisation have shown that as a result of increased awareness, local police officers themselves identify the need for more female police to deal with the numerous problems affecting women in conflict. As with human rights officers, police have noted that women prefer to report sexual violations to other women. Gaining the confidence of women to report such violations is essential in light of the fact that rape is a favorite weapon of war in present day conflicts.

The positive impact of incorporating a gender-sensitive approach to peacekeeping is becoming progressively more evident. There is a need, however, to record and document successes to ensure best practices are used when formulating policy decisions in the major areas of peacekeeping missions - which include protection, assistance, justice and post-conflict reconstruction issues. Such valuable information would be most useful for preparing checklists on gender mainstreaming for future assessment and fact-finding missions, which normally precede peacekeeping operations.

Reporting on gender and peacekeeping

Gender advisors on the ground feel that the creation of a clear reporting structure within MONUC is crucial, if they are to elicit support and direction for their on-going work. Currently, such reporting structures and processes do not exist for gender advisors, and although the idea has been mooted, it is taking some time to be effected. Nevertheless, some creative ways have been sought to share information amongst gender advisors and structures related to peacekeeping or dealing with gender issues in general. For example, a system of monthly reporting was devised on the ground by the Gender Office in MONUC. The reports that are generated are shared internally with colleagues in the various sections of MONUC, with gender advisers in other UN missions, and with others working in peacekeeping operations. This has been particularly useful to sustain influence at the decision-making level, and to ensure women's issues remain an essential component on the peacekeeping agenda. One concrete outcome of this reporting strategy, is that it enables the Gender Office to equip decision-makers at the highest level with information that will enable them to take programmatic decisions with regard to, for example, verification missions in country. Ensuring that gender decisions are appropriate-

ly made will, in turn, enhance the mission's ability to address the root causes of the conflict.

A recent visit by a Security Council delegation to the DRC, and the interaction of its members with women representatives in Bunia, provided the Council with a first hand insight into the realities of the violence being suffered by women in the conflict in Ituri. However, achieving this goal was not easy; it required putting in place strategies to influence decision-makers at the highest level to understand and agree to the importance of linking ordinary grass-roots women with members of the Security Council. The outcome of this initiative paid rich dividends, as evidenced by the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1493 on 28 July 2003.

The importance of reporting on the "Mainstreaming of Gender Issues in a Peace Mission" cannot be over-emphasised. It enables the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council and respond to its requirement to include information on gender mainstreaming and all other aspects related to women throughout the operation. Despite the importance of integrating a strategic approach to gender in peacekeeping missions, the benefits are not always immediately evident and thus it can demand great effort for little visibility. As a new initiative, and in the absence of established policy procedures, it will take time to achieve the desired results. Nevertheless, as a result of the information disseminated to date, it is now generally accepted that greater efforts must be made to increase the number of women in peacekeeping missions, to ensure a gender balance. Also accepted is the need to train peacekeepers, not only troops and low-level civilians, but also decision-makers in all spheres of the peacekeeping mission and at the highest levels.

However, it is clearly not sufficient to have just one staff member as a focal point for women's issues in a peacekeeping operation. Time and attention is required to effectively analyse all activities at all times, to ensure that a gender perspective is being integrated in all aspects of the mission. This demands making maximum use of all competent personnel capable of delivery on gender issues.

Staffing of peacekeeping missions: Reducing gender disparity

A number of international instruments - including the UN Charter, the Beijing platform for action, the ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) conclusions, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as the Hague Agenda for Peace and the Namibia Plan of Action, to name but a few - refer to women's equal participation in peace processes. In reality, however, women's representation at the peace-negotiating table and in peace operations is far

from satisfactory. Women in the DRC had to work and lobby hard to get their voices heard during the Sun City negotiations, which culminated in the signing of the Transitional Constitution in April this year.

Between 1957 and 1989, only 0.1% of field-based military personnel in UN peacekeeping missions were female.⁶ The UN Secretary-General aimed to rectify this in 1996 by announcing that, by the year 2000, women should constitute 50% of staff in the UN system, including field missions. However, according to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Progress of the World's Women report, women made up only 4% of police and 3% of military personnel in UN operations in 2000.⁷

Moreover, despite the advent of the Gender Office in MONUC, advocacy efforts aimed at increasing the number of females in the military and the CIVPOL components of the mission have not rendered the figures any different. The Office's efforts still continue as the necessity to have more women represented in the mission becomes increasingly evident in the post-conflict reconstruction phase. Within the civilian staff component of the mission, significant changes have been made in the percentage of women in senior positions as compared to the pre-2002 situation: for United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), there are 49 women out of a total of 213, representing 23%; and for International staff, there are 191 out of a total of 419, representing 31%. For the CIVPOL, there are only 3 women out of 74, or 4%, and this percentage is even lower for the military.

In MONUC, the percentage of women at the various levels of the civilian international staff are as follows:

Table 1: MONUC's Gender Profile

Under Secretary-General:	0%
Assistant Secretary-General (ASG):	50%
D2:	14%
P5:	25%
P4:	31%
P3:	19%
P2:	47%
Field Staff - PL ⁸ :	0%
Field Staff - OL ⁹ :	25%
General Services -	PL:63%
General Services -	OL:54%

It is evident from the above that most women are located at the general services level - the lowest grade - where they are supporting the majority of men at all other levels.¹⁰ It is heartening to note, however, that since the establishment of the Gender Office last year, the percentage of women Heads of Sections and Divisions in the substantive areas of MONUC's operations has risen from 0.5% to 20%. It is also during this period that a woman was appointed to one of the two ASG positions in MONUC. If this positive trend continues, one can hope to see a significant difference in the input of women in programmatic decisions taken in the future. The main problem remains not the lack of qualified women to serve in positions of leadership in peacekeeping missions, but as mentioned in the UNIFEM study on Women, Peace and War, it is a result of the inherent discrimination in the system that limits women's participation in UN peacekeeping.

As far as recruiting personnel for the military and the CIVPOL components is concerned, the UN has given MONUC the mandate in resolution 1493, Article 10 "...to increase the deployment of women as military observers as well as in other capacities". Clearly, however, the onus is on Troop Contributing Countries to recruit, train and deploy women as part of their military or CIVPOL personnel.

In the DRC, the inattentiveness to recruiting women is keenly felt at the level of the host community, where most of the cleaners and daily workers are local women, and the percentage of professional women within the national staff has not even reached the 10% mark. Moreover, there is not one woman in the National Staff Association Executive. The opportunity for upward mobility for local women employed by the UN is therefore very limited in a country like the DRC.

Addressing host country gender Issues

The mandate of the Gender Office also allows for interaction with the Congolese population. This is an essential mechanism by which policies and programmes can impact the peace and post-conflict and reconstruction processes in the host country. However, to ensure that women are integrated in the decision-making process, men (who are primarily represented at the strategic level) must understand that providing access and representation to women in decision-making positions is not a favor to be granted, but rather an inherent right. In the DRC, as mentioned earlier, women worked very hard to be heard during the negotiation process. They used various strategic tools, such as the Nairobi Declaration, to outline their priorities and be represented at the negotiating table. However, despite all these efforts, their participation in the transitional institutions is very minimal, with only 7% representation. The other 93% of the positions were allocated to men.

Many verbal pronouncements are being made concerning commitment to have women in decision-making positions, but the reality is far from satisfactory. What makes the situation worse is the fact that the Transitional Constitution mentions in Article 51 that “Women have a right to a significant representation in local, national and provincial institutions”. The challenge is to define what ‘significant’ means. Women have advocated a minimum level of 30%, as recommended in the Beijing Platform for Action.¹¹ Again, it takes time to make this a practical reality. Gaining representation, being heard, and taking the appropriate action to ensure women participate as equal partners in decision-making processes remains elusive for women in the DRC. This is a big challenge, that will require years of dedicated effort to overcome.

In the short term, addressing the issue of responsibility and accountability regarding the high incidence of sexual violence suffered by women at the hands of all the fighting forces is essential. It is very clear that civilians, mostly women and children, are the main targets of the conflict in the DRC. The fact that women are increasingly targeted and suffer disproportionately at the hands of all armed groups was perhaps the driving force behind women leaders’ advocacy for a change in the mandate of MONUC to allow for a more robust force.

As the cease-fire comes into force, and the country moves to re-establish law and order, the Gender Office has been training the local police force. However, as in the case of the CIVPOL in MONUC, women officers are under-represented, or even non-existent, in the Congolese police. Getting the message out that it is absolutely necessary to recruit women officers has been taken up by MONUC at the highest level, with the political leadership of the DRC.

Addressing the problem of impunity has also been raised by women’s groups, who have been advocating for detailed information and data collection in order to better protect victims and witnesses, who are mostly women. For example, local women’s groups have been advocating for better protection of female victims and witnesses in trials and other public fora. They fight against impunity and advocate for the documentation of cases of violence against women in order to bring the perpetrators to justice, while at the same time to ensure that women - either victims or witnesses - will not be exposed to retaliation or intimidation.

Another challenge in the post-conflict reconstruction process concerns the changes being made to the existing legislation, which aims to harmonise the various international instruments ratified by the DRC within the country’s current laws. Despite the fact that both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have both been ratified by the Government, much

of the local legislation does not reflect the provisions of these instruments. For example, the minimum age of consensual sexual relations in the DRC is 14, whereas according to the CRC is 18. Added to this, as mentioned by the UNIFEM Report on Women, War and Peace, UN policies are ambiguous in regulating social relations between UN peacekeeping personnel and local women and prostitutes, as well as the financial and legal responsibilities related to the children born to women in relationships with peacekeepers.

Although the Code of Conduct for peacekeepers is being widely disseminated to all civilian, military and police personnel, and although MONUC is serious about its zero tolerance policy as far as sexual exploitation is concerned, it is very difficult for action to be taken with respect to sexual misconduct. Proving that a crime was committed is very difficult. The best strategy at MONUC's disposal for dealing with this problem, is still that of enhanced sensitisation.

Conclusion

MONUC's Gender Office continues to work according to the mandate with which it was entrusted: to raise awareness within MONUC as well as within the Congolese population; to monitor progress in gender mainstreaming; to address the issue of violence against women; and to promote participation of women in the democratic process. The gender training provided by MONUC to military, police and civilians staff will continue to influence the political leadership and institutions in the DRC. This will better enable the necessary policy framework to be put in place in order to regulate actions and decisions made by the Congolese government and civil society. Mainstreaming human rights, including women's rights in law enforcement and in judicial institution building (police/judiciary/prison) will be a priority, with advocacy directed at increasing the numbers of female police officers and male officers to be provided with gender training. Acquiring the necessary budget to ensure that the scope of the training is adequately addressed will be essential as the reconstruction process unfolds.

An integrated strategy is thus essential in order to effect the necessary changes within the political process and to ensure equal participation of women in the democratic process – in this regard, MONUC's Political Affairs and Public Information divisions already work very closely with the Gender Office and its partners in civil society.

Finally, addressing the problem of sexual violence has been identified by all agencies as a priority. A joint project proposal is in the process of being finalised on the issue. This project will target relevant institutions, such as the health, judicial, political and educational sectors. Implementing the provisions

of this project will be a priority for both government and non-governmental actors.

The involvement of women in peace implementation is now widely regarded as a strategy to ensure sustainable peace, since women tend to take a practical approach to addressing and solving the root causes of conflict. The major challenge for the future will be to get women and women's issues represented at all levels. Doing so would enable critical and necessary decisions to be made with regard to policy formulation and resource allocation. Once this is achieved, the attainment of sustainable peace will not only be an aspiration, but will have a real chance of becoming reality.

Notes

1. Ms Amy Smythe is the Senior Gender Advisor, MONUC.
2. The Beijing platform for action was passed in September 1995 and is an agenda for women's empowerment, which reaffirms the human rights of women and girls. For additional information go to: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>, (21 October 2003).
3. Windhoek Declaration: The Namibia Plan of Action On "Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective In Multidimensional Peace Support Operations", was adopted in May 2000. For full text go to: www.thecommonwealth.org/gender/htm/publications/papers/WindhoekDecl.doc, (21 October 2003).
4. S/RES/1325 (2000). For addition information, go to: www.un.org (15 October 2003).
5. For additional information on the work of the Gender Affairs Office of MONUC, visit their website located at http://www.monuc.org/gender/women_armed_conflict.asp, (21 October 2003).
This, according to Louise Olsson in *Mainstreaming Gender in Multidimensional Peacekeeping: A Field, Perspective*, Journal of International Peacekeeping. Winter 2000.
6. UNIFEM, *Progress of the World's Women, Volume 1 Report on Women War and Peace*, http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=149 (21 October 2003).
7. Field staff PL - Professional Level - is a category of permanent field staff who are deployed from one mission to another. They are mainly professionals.
8. Field Staff OL- Other Level - are those in administrative functions.
9. General services refers to all administrative support functions (local and international staff).

10. Article 182 in *Women in Power and Decision-making* states that “Despite the widespread movement towards democratisation in most countries, women are largely underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision-making levels by 1995.” Go to: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>, (21 October 2003).