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Gender-Responsive SSR **What Does it Mean and What are the Challenges for its Implementation?**

The integration of a gender perspective is widely recognised as one of the key principles of security sector reform (SSR). However, despite this, gender perspectives are often not strategically addressed or, worse yet, not considered at all during the practical implementation of SSR. The failure to ensure gender-responsive SSR prevents the reform process from contributing to an effective, accountable and sustainable security sector. Contributing factors to this missed opportunity are common misunderstandings related to the concept of gender itself, for example that gender can be added after the reform process has been designed or that gender only concerns women. In fact, gender is a fundamental component of SSR which is why it needs to be adequately and strategically integrated throughout the whole reform process.

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SUMMARY

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- › *Gender-responsive SSR implies an inclusive reform process that ensures that the respective security needs, experiences and perspectives of men, women, boys and girls are responded to when SSR is being planned and implemented.*
- › *The integration of a gender perspective is recognised as one of the key principles of SSR. Despite this, practical implementation of SSR often fails to be gender-responsive.*
- › *A number of misunderstandings and detrimental simplifications of the concept of gender contributes to preventing it from being strategically addressed during SSR.*
- › *To strengthen gender-responsive SSR practitioners need move beyond simplistic understandings of gender and recognise it as a fundamental component of the reform process.*

INTRODUCTION

The ways in which the failure to integrate gender impedes rights-based, effective and sustainable results within work on peace and security have been thoroughly motivated in no less than the eight resolutions within the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The agenda's second resolution, the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1820 which was adopted in 2008, specifically underlines the need for women's engagement in SSR processes.¹ The Secretary General's 2013 report on SSR highlights the importance of linking SSR activities to a gendered analysis.² Similarly, the first UN Security Council Resolution on SSR, UNSCR 2151 which was adopted in 2014, emphasises the importance of women's equal, effective and full involvement in SSR.³

Despite these policy commitments a strategic and sustainable integration of a gender perspective in SSR is often omitted. An analysis of how existing gender dynamics influence the context in which SSR is being implemented is frequently not prioritised. The use of disaggregated data, both related to participation in the security sector and to different security needs and experiences, is many times not recognized as a key source of information. Approximately 1% of spending on SSR is allocated to initiatives that identify gender equality as a significant objective.⁴

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Building on the FBA's approach to SSR, this brief aims to outline why the integration of a gender perspective is one of the key principles of the reform process. It also aims to raise some of the common misunderstandings related to gender and how they prevent gender-responsive SSR.

WHY IS GENDER RELEVANT FOR SSR?

Understanding why gender matters for SSR requires an understanding of both the concept of SSR and the concept of gender. Gender is used to describe the socially constructed roles related to being a man or a woman (as opposed to the biological definition sex). These gender roles, sometimes referred to as femininity and masculinity, express and reinforce the norms and values associated with being a man or a woman, boy or a girl. Gender therefore contributes to the limitations and possibilities that men and women have in a particular context. It does, for example, directly impact the division of labour between men and women and their respective possibilities to access and control resources.

Notions of femininity and masculinity also interact with other aspects of identity that influence power such as age, ethnicity and social class. Gender-responsive SSR requires an understanding of how all these aspects interact and produce different forms of inequalities in relation to for example protection from violence, access to security services and opportunities to influence security priorities.

The aim of SSR is a democratic, representative and sustainable security sector that adheres to principles of human rights and the rule of law. SSR strives to contribute to a security sector that is both capable as well as held accountable for providing security for its population. Gender-responsive SSR implies an inclusive reform process that accounts for the different gender roles applied to men, women, boys and girls in the relevant context. It is a reform process that promotes gender equality through ensuring that the security needs, experiences and perspectives of all groups of the population are adhered to equally when SSR is being planned and implemented.

1. UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 1820 (2008) [on acts of sexual violence against civilians in armed conflicts]*, 19 June 2008, S/RES/1820 (2008).

2. UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on securing states and societies: strengthening the United Nations comprehensive support to security sector reform*, 13 August 2013, S/2013/480.

3. UN Security Council, *Security Council resolution 2151 (2014) [on security sector reform]*, 28 April 2014, S/RES/2151 (2014).

4. UN Women, UNDP, PBSO, 2014 summary of *Findings of Seven Action Plan Baseline Study*, (Data for OECD-DAC aggregates provided by the DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET)).

HUMAN SECURITY – WHO'S SECURITY?

The concept of SSR is based on human security. This means that SSR has a people-centred approach to security that is based on the security needs of men, women, boys and girls. This does not mean that traditional concepts of security, related to for example the protection of state territory and sovereignty, lack importance. The delivery of human and state security should rather be seen as mutually reinforcing, but a human security approach ensures that individuals' insecurities are at the centre of analysis.

When the concept of human security was introduced in the UN's Human Development Report (1994)⁵ the report highlighted the importance of addressing people's insecurities through a comprehensive and context-specific approach. Issues that were previously not considered security threats, such as for example food security, health security and environmental security became recognised as areas of importance to promote all-inclusive human security as well as development.

The security needs and experiences of men, women, boys and girls can differ. Conceptions relating to gender are a strong contributing factor to this. For example, because of their gender roles men and boys tend to be more associated with the political sphere than women and girls, which makes them more vulnerable to forced recruitment, abduction and political violence in conflict and post-conflict settings. Women and girls on the other hand are known to be more affected by domestic and sexual violence as well as human trafficking.⁶

Other aspects of identity that influence gender, such as ethnicity, age or sexual orientation can also impact the particular security needs of an individual. This implies that neither the group 'women' nor the group 'men' can be assumed to constitute homogenous groups with the same needs, experiences or perspectives. An inclusive human security approach to SSR relies on an understanding of how gender influences different aspects of security needs and experiences.

The growing recognition and understanding that security needs and experiences vary, not least in fragile and conflict affected contexts, have regrettably contributed to a narrative where women are sometimes referred to as powerless victims.⁷ Part of the critique against the WPS agenda has therefore been that its emphasis on the protection of women and girls has impacted negatively on the advancement of women's full and meaningful participation in work on peace and security. The specific insecurities of women and girls are often considered private and frequently associated with stigma and shame, as exemplified by female survivors of domestic or sexual violence. Because women and girls are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence⁸ and because these insecurities continue to lack prioritisation, the sustained emphasis on addressing them is highly motivated. However, in promoting the security sector's ability to ensure that the whole population's security needs are equally met, measures need to be taken that do not disadvantage women as important actors for change. Otherwise, promoting women's protection risks preventing women's opportunities for meaningful engagement in processes related to peace and security.

5. *Human Development Report 1994*. UNDP, New York, Oxford University Press.

6. Elroy, G. (2016). *A Gender Perspective in CSDP, Training Manual*. Folke Bernadotte Academy.

7. Salahub, JE. and Nerland, K. (2008). Just Add Gender? Challenges to Meaningful Integration of Gender in SSR Policy and Practice. In: Sedra, M, ed., *The Future of Security Sector Reform*. The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

8. Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term that includes, among other forms, both domestic violence and sexual violence. GBV refers to violence against a man, woman, boy or girl because of their biological sex and/or their gender role, that result in physical, sexual and/or physiological harm.

THE SECURITY SECTOR – WHO PARTICIPATES AND WITH WHAT INFLUENCE?

Sweden defines the security sector according to the definition in the OECD DAC handbook on Security System Reform.⁹ According to this definition, the security sector actors can be categorised in four main categories; core security actors, management and oversight bodies, justice and the rule of law and non-statutory security forces. The mandate of each security sector actor will look different in each context and depends on the legal framework in which the sector operates. According to the OECD definition, the actors that should have legitimacy on the use of force belong to the first category of core security actors. The second category of management and oversight bodies commonly include the executive and the legislative branches of government while the third category includes the judiciary, justice ministries as well as customary and traditional justice systems. Private security companies may be included in the final category of non-statutory security providers.¹⁰ Civil society organisations may be placed in the second category if they have an oversight function and/or as a non-statutory security force if they provide informal security and justice. The category of non-statutory security forces can consequently include a variety of actors with different roles and future in the security sector. Defining the security sector according to these four categories is a broad definition of the sector that aims to promote an inclusive approach to reform that emphasises the often forgotten actors such as civil society as well as finance and ombuds-institutions.

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Unfortunately, existing gender roles in many of the contexts undergoing SSR continue to prevent the equal and meaningful participation of women and men in the reform processes. In many contexts, existing gender roles lead to fewer women being accepted into, or wanting to be a part of, the security sector. Because women tend to be in minority in relation to security sector engagement, a gender-responsive approach often includes strategies to promote and increase women's involvement in the sector.¹¹ This, however, sometimes contributes to the misconception that gender only concerns women and women's participation. Quite the contrary; equally important for gender-responsive SSR is to understand the norms of masculinity and how those may contribute to specific insecurities for men and boys. Another important aspect can be to understand how a lack of gender-responsive SSR may prevent the security sector's ability to be accountable to the whole population rather than to an elite.

A gender-balanced security sector means having equal participation of women and men in all areas of work and at all levels, including at senior positions. Men and women's equal opportunities for participation is a fundamental human right and emphasised in numerous international commitments and conventions.¹² A more gender-balanced security sector is also known to be more effective.¹³ Unfortunately, support for a more gender-balanced workforce, especially within core security functions, is sometimes constructed in a way that reinforces rigid gender roles instead of focusing on creating an inclusive and more democratic security sector. Attempts to increase women's participation are at times promoted by emphasising that women will contribute with certain feminine values and traits that can balance the security sector's prevalent norms of masculinity. Similarly, women's participation is often motivated by their contribution to handling security issues traditionally considered 'women's issues' such as issues of gender-based violence.

9. OECD DAC, OECD DAC *Handbook on Security System Reform, Supporting Security and Justice*. Paris, OECD DAC, 2007.

10. Ibid.

11. Such an approach aims to promote a gender-balanced security sector which is further described below.

12. For example: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

13. See for example: *Gender Equality and Security Sector Reform, mainstreaming gender equality in security provision, management and oversight*. SSR Backgrounder, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

Successful attempts to promote women's equal and meaningful participation in the security sector are not achieved by assigning women responsibilities that are traditionally considered women's issues.¹⁴ Such initiatives are rather counterproductive in terms of promoting gender equality as it categorises men and women according to pre-defined and stereotypical roles. Neither should women be expected to balance potentially harmful norms of masculinity. Such expectations not only reinforce detrimental norms regarding the division of labour between men and women but also place a responsibility on women employees that should rather be the responsibility of the entire workforce.¹⁵ Equal and meaningful participation by both men and women produces a representative and more capable, as well as trusted, security sector workforce. In short, a gender-balanced security sector, that represents women and men of different ages and with varying experiences and perspectives, is likely to be more informed and responsive to different security needs.

THE OBJECTIVES OF AN EFFECTIVE, AFFORDABLE, ACCOUNTABLE AND TRANSPARENT SECURITY SECTOR

A capable, democratic and sustainable security sector that adheres to principles of human rights and the rule of law is dependent on the reform's key objectives of effectiveness, affordability, accountability and transparency.

An effective security sector is a sector that is responsive to different security needs and experiences of the population. A gender-responsive reform implies making the security sector actors and institutions knowledgeable of the different insecurities faced by men, women, boys and girls in the relevant context.

Additionally, it entails support to making the security sector capable to respond accordingly. In some of the contexts undergoing SSR, the core security actors have been unable or unwilling to provide security equally for the whole population. There are examples of where security sectors' have prioritised to provide security for a small elite or overlooked domestic violence as an important issue of insecurity. In response to this security gap, there are often informal provisions of security and justice by non-state actors. This means that such actors are likely to have first-hand and context-relevant expertise regarding the insecurities faced by certain groups in the specific context. They can also have access to, and knowledge of, the key actors involved and affected by certain insecurities. Women's organisations often represent valuable sources of information in terms of insecurities faced by certain groups of the population. An effective security sector draws on the expertise coming from various branches of the security sector to strengthen its security provision to the whole population.

In order to be sustainable, the security sector also needs to be affordable. It needs to be sized in accordance to the needs of the population and in line with what a government can afford. Many of the countries undergoing SSR are highly reliant on foreign financial assistance which makes the idea of a self-sustaining security sector, even given time, to appear more or less impossible. However, the sustainability and legitimacy of any SSR effort will depend on the national government's (eventual) ability to collect revenue and fund its own security sector.¹⁶

The capacity to collect revenue will, in turn, partly depend on the population's trust for their government. And, that the security sector, as part of the public

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14. Mobekk, E. (2010). *Gender, Women and Security Sector Reform*, International Peacekeeping, 17:2, 278-291, DOI: 10.1080/13533311003625142.

15. Hendricks, C. (2012). Research on Gender and SSR in Africa, Challenges and Gaps. In: Eriksson Baaz, M. and Utas, M. ed., *Beyond Gender and Stir, Reflections on Gender and SSR in the Aftermath of African Conflicts*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet (NAI).

16. Keane, R. and Ommundsen, T. (2015). *Money Matters: Addressing the Financial Sustainability of Security Sector Reform*. SSR Paper 11. Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

administration, is recognised as a legitimate service provider. A distribution of resources that promotes the equal rights and opportunities to participate in the security sector, as well as the sector's responsiveness to different security needs, is therefore imperative for sustainable and affordable SSR.

SSR should also aim to promote a more accountable security sector through democratic control and oversight. Control and oversight may be exercised both within the government, through for example the executive and government ministries, and externally through for example parliament, the judiciary, ombuds-institutions, and civil society. Promoting the participation of previously excluded or discriminated groups in oversight bodies responsible for SSR will help make these institutions more representative. Participation can be direct or through information exchange with commonly excluded groups such as for example women's organisations. This in turn is likely to increase the public's interest and confidence in the security sector which can contribute to strengthening the accountability of the sector. Broadened participation in oversight mechanisms is also likely to strengthen the capacity of these institutions as they will become more informed of the different security needs and experiences faced by different groups in society.

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A transparent security sector is another criterion to promote a sustainable and democratic provision of security. If, for example, corrupt practices interfere with the allocation of positions in the security sector, the security forces will be less effective and staff will often have little or inadequate education and limited training since they are not selected based on merit. Furthermore, men and women are known to be affected differently by corruption, where women tend to be more exposed to the impact of corruption in relation to accessing public services and attaining political office.¹⁷ Transparent provision of security is an important aspect of gender-responsive SSR as it can contribute to a more inclusive and fair reform process.

A gender-responsive reform is consequently both a prerequisite for the fulfilment of these four objectives as well as a result of their realisation. An inclusive reform process, that promotes the security sector's responsiveness and accountability to the whole population, will be both more effective and sustainable.

PRINCIPLES OF CONTEXT-SPECIFICITY AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

The core principles of local ownership, context specificity and gender-responsiveness are all necessary building blocks of SSR in order to achieve an effective and accountable provision of security services.

Gender-responsive SSR is closely linked to the reform's key principles of context specificity and local ownership. Although the reform may be associated with a post-conflict setting there is no blueprint for how SSR should be implemented. SSR can take place in a variety of settings, ranging from conflict to stable democracies. As the security sector can never be reformed in isolation from its socio-economic context it is crucial to understand the needs and priorities of the broader population. In order to properly account for local dynamics that will influence the reform, a contextually relevant approach should specifically consider views and concerns expressed by groups in the population who may have been excluded from influencing the national security agenda.

A lack of local ownership will also undermine any reform efforts. Promoting locally owned SSR is sometimes mistakenly associated with being contradictory to the principle of a gender-responsive reform. In contexts that receive international support to SSR and where national counterparts may be reluctant to promote gender equality, gender-responsive SSR is sometimes accused of being disrespectful of

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17. Transparency International (2014) *Gender, Equality and Corruption: What are the Linkages?* Policy Brief No 1/2014.

local culture and values. Such an accusation unfortunately displays a misunderstanding of who actually represents local ownership. Indeed, local ownership is often confused with being representative of the executive and/or capital-based civil society organisations who tend to represent a first point of contact when international actors initiate support for a SSR process. However, a true commitment and ownership, that creates the necessary base for a sustainable reform process, needs to build on a cross-section of society that mirrors the population in terms of different security needs, experiences and perspectives. A SSR process that fails to respond to and account for the whole population will be less sustainable, legitimate and effective.¹⁸ Such a statement, however, does not intend to diminish the challenges sometimes associated with the integration of a gender perspective in SSR. Rather, it aims to broaden the understanding of local ownership which in turn can help generate tailor-made solutions based on a broad constituency.

A POLITICAL, TECHNICAL AND HOLISTIC PROCESS

Many times SSR is misguidedly interpreted as a purely technical reform. On the contrary, SSR is also highly political. Both because it is likely to challenge (and even alter) power relations and because the security sector is, in many aspects, the most visible representative of the state. How the workforce of the security sector, for example the national police, reflects the population in terms of representation is therefore crucial for building the population's trust in the sector (and in the state as a whole). It is central in order to strengthen the social contract between the state and its citizens.

SSR is also holistic which implies that any support provided to the sector needs to relate to the broader reform process, be firmly based on human security as well as the objectives and principles of the reform. An isolated support to, for example, the training of police officers on forensics, will be unsustainable if it does not account for how this support fits into the broader reform of the justice chain. Similarly, holistic SSR points to the importance of recognising that actions performed without a gender perspective is not likely to be effective nor sustainable. A training on gender and human rights for security sector actors is likely to be less effective if not accompanied with a legislative framework that promotes and ensures gender equality. The holistic nature of SSR implies that while gender needs to be considered for every step and part of the reform process, it also needs to be linked to the larger aim of a democratic, sustainable and effective security sector.

METHODS TO IMPLEMENT GENDER-RESPONSIVE SSR

Gender-responsive SSR is achieved with the two complementing methods of gender mainstreaming and gender specific initiatives.

Gender mainstreaming in SSR is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of men and women, boys and girls an integrated part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SSR. It is a method to promote gender equality and to ensure that inequality is not perpetuated by any activities of the reform process. Examples of gender mainstreamed activities are: the development of legislation that promotes the equal rights of men and women and the development of codes of conduct to prevent and address gender-based violence and gender discrimination within the security sector.

Gender specific interventions are complementary to gender mainstreaming and represents initiatives that target specific issues that perpetuate inequality. Related to SSR such issues may be associated with a particular security need, for example to respond to violence against male youth. Or, to a lack of equal representation of

18. For more information see for example: Gordon, E., Welch, A.C. & Roos, E., (2015). *Security Sector Reform and the Paradoxical Tension between Local Ownership and Gender Equality*. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5334/sta.gj>

men and women in the security sector, which could require specific measures to promote the employment, retention and advancement of the underrepresented group.

Gender mainstreaming in SSR should consequently not be confused with efforts to promote a more gender-balanced security sector. Although the strategies are mutually reinforcing, and both aim to contribute to a gender equality in the security sector, they require different approaches.¹⁹

GENDER-RESPONSIVE SSR GOING FORWARD

Conflict-sensitive efforts to promote gender-responsive SSR must build on context-specific knowledge and an assessment of how such initiatives will be perceived in the specific context. This is especially important when implementing SSR in contexts where initiatives to promote gender equality in the security sector experience resistance. Initiatives that challenge existing gender roles in terms of, for example men and women's division of labour, risk doing harm without a proper assessment of support structures in place to sustain such a potentially norm-challenging initiative. For example, efforts to increase women's participation in the security sector need to build on an analysis of how such an initiative will be perceived by the social structures and values and what preventive and protection structures are in place to support such an initiative. Without the support structures in place, initiatives to promote equal participation can prevent women from participating in the security sector meaningfully. There are, for example, risks associated with discrimination and/or harassment of new recruits if an initiative is perceived as conflicting with local norms and traditions. There are also examples where women have accepted less influential positions or started to embrace violent masculine behaviour to avoid discrimination or maltreatment.²⁰

To strengthen the implementation of gender-responsive SSR, practitioners need to recognise the importance of gender-integrated SSR assessments and analyses. Any efforts to support the transformation of security institutions need to be based on a thorough understanding of how the social relations between men, women, boys and girls influence their respective needs and opportunities in relation to the reform process. Only when understanding how the existing gender norms in society limit and promote certain values and behaviours, will it be possible to support a transformation of the security sector that contributes to an inclusive and just security provision.

All SSR analyses should include sex-disaggregated data and aim to address both information of the overall management of the security sector (including opportunities for participation and inclusion) as well as how security needs and experiences vary for different groups of the population. It is also important that the analysis addresses the respective capacities of men and women related to for example their livelihoods and survival strategies. This is important in order to emphasise both men and women's role as important actors for change as well as to identify possible entry points for a more gender equal reform process going forward.

CONCLUSION

As recognized by numerous international agreements and strategies, gender equality is a crucial part of a peaceful and democratic society. SSR, that aims to ensure the provision of human security equally, has a specific responsibility to be

19. See the following interview with Louise Olsson for more information: <http://peaceoperationsreview.org/interviews/louise-olsson-we-need-to-push-for-a-more-gender-equal-peace/>

20. See for example: Jennings, K. (2012). Women's Participation in UN Peace Operations, Agents of Change or Stranded Symbols. In: Eriksson Baaz, M. and Utas, M. ed., *Beyond Gender and Stir, Reflections on Gender and SSR in the Aftermath of African Conflicts*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet (NAI).

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gender-responsive. Gender-responsive SSR is also a prerequisite for a successful reform as it will both influence and be affected by challenged power dynamics. To strengthen gender-responsive SSR in practice, there is however a need to move away from simplistic and inaccurate understandings of what gender is and how it relates to SSR. It is imperative to strengthen the integration of a gender perspective throughout all stages of SSR, from the initial analysis and implementation to the monitoring and evaluation of the reform. In line with this, tools for a gender-responsive security sector reform such as gender mainstreaming and gender specific initiatives, including initiatives to create a more gender-balanced security sector, need to be integral parts of any SSR initiative. A gender-responsive SSR process will make the process more context-specific, locally owned and lay the foundation for a more peaceful and democratic society.