From conceptualization to implementation:  

women in peacebuilding revisited  

Torunn L. Tryggestad, PRIO  

Introduction  

Two weeks ago the 10th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was commemorated in New York. A series of events took place throughout the week, organised by UN member states, UN entities and a broad variety of civil society/women’s organisations. Among these events was the open debate on WPS in the UN Security Council. Ever since UNSCR 1325 was adopted in October 2000, open meetings on this particular resolution have been organised annually. This year’s open debate, however, was different. And it was different in many ways. First, a record number of 86 statements were given by member states, UN officials and representatives of organisations such as the EU and the ICRC. The open debate lasted from 10:00 in the morning to 22:30 in the evening. Second, a record number of high-level government representatives – including Secretary of State Hillary Clinton delivered the statements. The open debate was initially scheduled for 29th October, but was moved to 26th October to accommodate Clinton’s attendance. Third, the open debate also gathered a large crowd of civil society representatives as observers, whom also caused a bit of a commotion in breaking the strict etiquette of the Security Council when giving the Civil Society Advisory Group representative and Hillary Clinton a long
applaud after their respective statements. All these exceptions from the formal and informal rules and procedures of the Security Council testifies to the international community’s reinforced commitment to ‘women, peace and security’, observers argued. According to Hillary Clinton women’s inclusion in peace and security matters is not “a nice thing to do”, as if we are doing women and ourselves a favour. Women’s inclusion in the work for peace “is a necessary global security imperative”.¹

Undoubtedly, there is now a strong political awareness and commitment to the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda. The question still remains, though, how this political commitment manifests itself in policymaking and operational activities. Has it made an impact on women’s lives on the ground in conflict and post-conflict countries? Research suggests that the UN system and UN member states still have a long way to go in terms of unpacking what it actually means and takes to include women in efforts at preventing and managing conflicts and building peace. The added value is still not fully understood. My presentation here today focuses particularly on the UN and the extent to which women and women’s concerns now form in integral part of the peacebuilding policy development and operational activities of the organisation. It builds primarily on my research on the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and what is now referred to as the UN peacebuilding architecture, looking particularly at its first two founding years – 2006-2008. I chose to look at the PBC, since, as a new entity it is supposed to

embody the dominant norms and ideas that currently applies to UN thinking on peacebuilding.

The UN Peacebuilding Architecture

The UN peacebuilding architecture has three components; the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

The PBC was formally established through concurrent resolutions adopted by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council in December 2005. It was established in an atmosphere of strong political tensions between member states from the Global North and the Global South. Because of these tensions it took another six months before the PBC was made operational in June 2006. The tensions first and foremost stemmed from disagreements on procedural matters and membership composition. However, these disagreements also had a negative impact on just about any issue to be discussed by the PBC. Thus, when I started out my research, I did not expect women’s issues or concerns to be particularly well catered for within the framework of the PBC.

The PBC itself is not a body responsible for operational activities. Rather, the Commission’s mandate is to provide advice on how to develop integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding; to marshal resources for post-conflict

---

2 Much of the following text builds on already published material by author (Tryggestad 2010).

recovery activities; to improve the international community's attention to
countries in a precarious post-conflict phase; and to improve coordination at the
strategic level among all actors involved in peacebuilding activities.

In terms of structure, the PBC includes an Organizational Committee (OC),
country-specific committees (also referred to as country configurations) and a
Working Group on Lessons Learned (WGLL). The Commission has 31 members,
representing key UN bodies such as the Security Council, the General Assembly
and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and important groups of
member-states, such as major donors and troop contributors.

In support of the work of the PBC a Peacebuilding Support Office (the second
component) was also established, located within the UN secretariat under the
executive office of the Secretary-General. The supportive functions of the PBSO
are amongst others to draft reports, conduct research and analysis and to handle
communications and outreach activities to stakeholders. The PBSO is also
supposed to serve the UN Secretary-General in coordinating UN agencies
engaged in peacebuilding activities. Another important role of the office is to
administer the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the third component of the UN’s
peacebuilding architecture.4 The PBF was launched in 2006 to fill the funding
gap that exists for countries finding themselves in an immediate post-conflict
phase but still not on a path towards recovery. This is a phase when other
international funding mechanisms may not be available. The Fund ‘seeks to

---

minimize the risk of a relapse into conflict by addressing the most immediate challenges facing post-conflict countries’.

The UN peacebuilding architecture is a complex construction established to address what is perhaps an even more complex agenda of post-conflict peacebuilding. One would thus think that gender issues would have difficulties making its way to the PBC agenda. However, I found that in comparison with many other UN entities dealing with peace and security matters, the provisions of Resolution 1325 were surprisingly well integrated into all three components of the peacebuilding architecture. Though no direct reference to Resolution 1325 is made in the founding resolutions outlining the rationale and mandate for the PBC, they contain several paragraphs on women and women’s concerns. For instance, the important contributions women’s organisations make to peacebuilding efforts are recognised (para. 14). Also, the resolutions reaffirm the important role of women in peacebuilding (para. 15). One of the operative paragraphs also calls upon the Commission to integrate a gender perspective into all its work (para. 20).

Similarly, language on women is also integrated into the peacebuilding strategies developed for the first two countries on the PBC’s agenda - Burundi and Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{5} Both documents cater well for ‘women, peace and security’ concerns in such important areas as capacity-building measures for women’s political, social and economic participation; inclusion of women’s civil society organizations in

\textsuperscript{5} See Strategic Peacebuilding Strategy for Burundi (PBC/1/BDI/4, 22 June 2007) and The Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Cooperation Framework (PBC/2/SLE/1, 3 December 2007).
peacebuilding efforts; and integration of women’s legal and human rights in the processes of security sector reform. Further, PBC field missions met with civil society organizations, including women’s organizations, and gender specialists were invited to give presentations at both formal and informal meetings of the two country configurations. In addition, PBC member-states did on several occasions cooperate with the NGO community in New York in the organization of thematic seminars or roundtables focusing on the challenges of mainstreaming gender into the Commission’s work.  

When it comes to the PBSO, the head of the office during the formative years was a strong advocate for women’s issues, and treated the ‘women, peace and security’ agenda as a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed into a broad variety of peacebuilding challenges. A gender advisor was also seconded to the PBSO, from UNIFEM, to help the PBSO management mainstreaming gender throughout its activities. Also, PBF funds were disbursed to projects and programmes of direct or indirect benefit to women. This included projects focused on awareness raising regarding resolution 1325, preparatory work on democratic dialogue; and rehabilitation of women’s role in community reconciliation and

---

6 One such example is the roundtable on ‘Enhancing Security and the Rule of Law: How Can Gender Be Better Integrated into the Priorities of the UN Peacebuilding Commission?’, held on 5 June 2007. This event was initiated by International Alert and the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security, co-organized with the permanent missions of Norway and the Netherlands (both PBC members at the time), and hosted by the delegation of the European Commission to the UN and the Liaison Office of the General Secretariat of the Council of European Union.

7 The PBSO is headed by an Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support. During the first formative years this was Carolyn McAskie. Currently it is Judy Cheng-Hopkins.
reconstruction processes. According to ambassador Løvald, the Norwegian chair of the Burundi configuration from 2006-2008, many of the women-oriented projects in Burundi grew out of local initiatives. They were not initiated in New York, though the principle of funding projects and programmes that had a particular focus on women enjoyed strong support at headquarters.\(^8\)

Further, a report published by the PBC Working Group on Lessons Learned in June 2008 stated that the integration of a gender perspective is a key principle and element of peacebuilding, and that resolution 1325 constitutes a normative framework that enjoys widespread acceptance.\(^9\)

The empirical evidence in my study represents something new when it comes to integrated efforts at including women and women’s concerns in peacebuilding. It brought with it high hopes for the future in terms of changed and more gender sensitive UN policies. However, two years later things do not seem to have changed as much as one perhaps would have expected – or hoped for.

**Women and Peacebuilding - Two Years On**

When the Secretary-General presented his progress report on peacebuilding to the Security Council in August this year, women’s issues were hardly

---

\(^8\) E-mail correspondence with the author, 14 November 2009.

mentioned. A short paragraph refers to the ongoing work on preparing a separate report on the issue of women and peacebuilding. When the latter report was finalised there were strong disagreements among member states – as well as senior UN officials – as to when and how it should be presented to the Security Council. Many (both diplomats and UN officials) were of the opinion that it should not be presented and considered as part of the Security Council open debate on peacebuilding, but rather be considered as part of the open debate on ‘women, peace and security’ – i.a. a women’s issue to be considered separately from the broader discussion on peacebuilding. In the end those favouring an integrated approach managed to convince sceptics that the ‘women and peacebuilding’ report should be considered as part of the Security Council debate on peacebuilding. However, the report ended up not really being debated, simply taken note of.

The women and peacebuilding report points out that in many respects women’s post-conflict needs resemble the five recurring priorities outlined by the Secretary-General in his 2009 report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict. These are: a) safety and security; b) confidence in the political process through inclusive dialogue and post-conflict elections; c) access to basic services such as water and education; d) a functioning public administration; and e) economic revitalisation (notably employment creation).

Still, these prioritise and how to meet them are not discussed from a gendered perspective. The PBC Working Group on Lessons Learned’s statement from 2006 that the integration of a gender perspective is a key principle in peacebuilding seems already to have been forgotten.

The ‘women and peacebuilding’ report also states that policy makers and those involved in programming and budgeting have failed to translate political commitments and guidance materials into concrete gender sensitive projects. Only a very low percentage of budgets are allocated to address women’s needs or the advancement of women. The Secretary-General admits that efforts at engaging women and address women’s issues in the context of peace processes must be accelerated and commitments must be made more concrete.

Though strong political commitments and targeted efforts at improving policy development seem to speak to the contrary, women and gender concerns are still not being effectively integrated into peacebuilding activities in the field. The idea that women and women’s issues are something separate from the generic activities – and something that can be added later – is still prominent. The UN system simply needs to unpack what ‘women’s inclusion’ is all about. Why and how is it relevant? What can it add to daily activities that will improve or make peacebuilding efforts qualitatively different? The peacebuilding architecture of the UN can serve as an illustration of this need for unpacking what women and peacebuilding is all about. The concepts seem to be fairly well developed, whereas much is still lacking in terms of how these concepts should be
operationalised in the field. This is also where research can make an important contribution.

**Concluding Remarks**

Women’s groups and organisations, together with a relatively small group of female academics, have for the last decade strongly advocated for why it is important and relevant to include women in peacebuilding processes.\(^1\) It is both a rights issue (women have a right to be heard and be part of decision making) and an issue of more effectively achieving sustainable peace. Women are crucial to economic recovery, social cohesion and the political legitimacy of any new government. Women’s activists have undoubtedly played a very important role in changing mindsets and strengthening the awareness among politicians and senior diplomats for the ‘women, peace and security agenda’.

Still, they have not been equally successful in being listened to and taken seriously by those who translate policy into actual projects and make decisions as to budget allocations. Also, they still seem to have a long way to go in terms of being acknowledged in those think tank environments and academic circles where the concept of peacebuilding is discussed, criticised and refined. Ten years after the adoption of Resolution 1325, male academics and ‘think tankers’ still dominate the discourse on peacebuilding – and thus also influence theory development and policy making both at the UN and in member states.\(^2\) Few of

\(^{1}\) Among the small group of female scholars writing about conflict management and peacebuilding from a gendered perspective the most prominent are Sanam Anderlini, Cynthia Cockburn, Jennifer F. Klot, Dyan Mazurana, Elisabeth Porter and Dubravka Zarkow.

\(^{2}\) Among these are academics and analysts such as Mats Berdal, Michael Doyle, Mark Duffield, Bruce D. Jones, Roger MacGuinty, Roland Paris, Mike Pugh and Oliver Richmond.
these scholars have paid particular attention to women’s issues or the highly
gendered aspects of post–conflict peacebuilding in their publications. And if they
do it is in passing. The challenges of peacebuilding seem to be treated as gender
neutral. Or if particular gendered dimensions are acknowledged it appears to be
handled as something that should be discussed separate from the broader
peacebuilding discourse. It is still treated as something that can be added later,
when the more pressing challenges of peacebuilding – such as power sharing and
security sector reform - have been resolved.

Activists and researchers approaching peacebuilding from a gender perspective
argue that the policy of adding women and women’s concerns later generally
does not benefit women. On the contrary, it appears very difficult to effectively
include women and women’s issues late in a peace process.

Afghanistan is a case in point. In 2001 the international community used women
as an entry point to Afghanistan. The restoration of Afghan women’s human
rights was put forward as a central motivation for the intervention and the
international engagement in that country. Once the Taliban was ousted, the
international community promised Afghan women that their rights and concerns
should be attended to in an integrated manner. However, first the more pressing
security challenges had to be attended to. In the words of Asila Wardak, the
Director of Human Rights and Women's Affairs in the Afghan Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, and long time women’s rights activist; "In 2001, with the support of the
international community, we had a window of opportunity to change things for
women in Afghanistan. And we were promised to be included in the peace
process. Now – 10 years later – concerns for Afghan women and their rights and security have reemerged on the agenda of the international community. But now I am afraid it is too late. As years have passed conservative elements have got a foothold in politics, in state bureaucracy and in public life. They make it hard for women. I call them Taliban with tie”.15

Though some gains have been made, what women in Afghanistan now fear is that their rights and security will be subject to negotiations and trading in order to prepare the ground for a political solution of the conflict and the subsequent withdrawal of international military forces. With the military withdrawal they also fear that the international community’s commitment to Afghanistan – politically and economically – will wither. This is a scenario that is not particularly conducive to women’s rights and women’s participation in the peacebuilding process. After ten years in Afghanistan – the international community might well leave Afghan women in a situation just as precarious as it was when the intervention took place back in 2001. This is the price that Afghan women might have to pay for ‘waiting until later’.

Research Challenges

- Too much of the existing research on women, peace and security is being conducted by women’s NGOs and advocacy groups. This makes the research undertaken an easy target of criticism on scientific grounds (research being dismissed as unscientific – thus not taken seriously).

---

15 Conversation with author in Oslo, 4 November 2010.
• More field based research and analysis is needed - conducted by trained researchers with affiliation to well-established research institutions/environments.

• Pairing of female (activist?) researchers with an interest in gender/women's issues with well-established mainstream male researchers? Pragmatic way of being heard? Example: Recent study on women in Afghanistan conducted by the Kroc Institute, University of Notre Dame (David Cortright and Sarah Smiles Persinger).

• Increased efforts at facilitating a dialogue between mainstream scholars and policy makers within the field of peace and security and scholars and activists within the field of women/gender studies. It would help to demystify how the two different environments think, what are their arguments (pros and cons), revise or improve arguments etc.

• More research is needed on the gendered dimensions of peace and conflict – in the true sense of the term ‘gender’. Not as women only but as the gendered relations between women and men.

References


