GENDER and ARMED CONFLICT

Overview Report

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© Photos by Jenny Matthews. Jenny Matthews is a documentary photographer working with Network Photographers. Since 1982, she has been working on a world wide project looking at Women and War. Many of these photos featured in her book Women and War, published by Pluto Press in 2003, and were also part of a photo exhibition in London, UK, co-sponsored by ActionAid on the same theme.

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BRIDGE was set up in 1992 as a specialised gender and development research and information service within the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK. BRIDGE supports gender mainstreaming efforts of policy-makers and practitioners by bridging the gaps between theory, policy and practice with accessible and diverse gender information.

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Adronyms

ACORD  Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development
AWAG  Abused Women and Girls
AWCPD  African Women’s Committee on Peace and Development
AWID  Association for Women’s Rights in Development
BICC  Bonn International Center for Conversion
CEDAW  Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA  Canadian International Development Agency
DAC  Development Assistance Committee
DEVAW  Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women
DID  Development-Induced Displacement
DDR  Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFID  Department for International Development, UK
ECOSOC  United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU  European Union
GBV  Gender-Based Violence
GTZ  Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit/German Technical Co-operation
ICC  International Criminal Court
IDP  Internally Displaced People
ILO  International Labour Organisation
NAWOCOL  National Women’s Commission of Liberia
NGO  Non-Governmental Organisation
NRA  National Resistance Army
NURC  National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RAWA  Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan
SALW  Small Arms and Light Weapons
SFOR  Stabilising Forces
STI  Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN  United Nations
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNHCR  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM  United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMIK  United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo
UNSC  United Nations Security Council
UNTAET  United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
USAID  United States Agency for International Development
WHO  World Health Organization
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Armed conflict negatively affects women and men and results in gender-specific disadvantages, particularly for women, that are not always recognised or addressed by the mainstream, gender-blind understandings of conflict and reconstruction. Gender inequality reflects power imbalances in social structures that exist in pre-conflict periods and are exacerbated by armed conflict and its aftermath. The acceptance of gender stereotypes is one of the main reasons that such gender blindness persists.

Stereotypical perceptions of roles
Stereotypical interpretations shape and are shaped by social, political, economic, cultural and religious contexts. Armed conflict encourages expectations that men will fight and women will support them on the 'home front'. The popular perception is that men are soldiers or aggressors and women are wives, mothers, nurses, social workers and sex-workers. It is true that it is primarily men who are conscripted and killed in battle, but women make up the majority of civilian casualties and suffer in their role as caregivers, due to a breakdown of social structures (Byrne 1996). However, women are also combatants, as evidenced in Sri Lanka and Liberia, and men are also victims. These realities have consequences for gender relations, which often go unnoticed and unresolved.

Gendered impacts of armed conflict
The impacts of armed conflict on gender relations are significant. Forced displacement and gender-based violence (GBV) are two examples of impacts that are not inevitable outcomes of armed conflict, but rather are deliberate strategies of war that destabilise families and communities. Physical and sexual violence, particularly towards women and children, occur with greater regularity during and after armed conflict. Women experience rape and forced pregnancy, forced sex work and sexual slavery, often at the hands of ‘peacekeepers’, police or occupying forces, as occurred in Bosnia. Although men are the primary perpetrators of violence towards women and children, it is important to note that men too are subject to victimisation and violence, including sexualised violence.

International laws and institutions
Gender differences are entrenched within public and private institutions that intervene to end armed conflict and build peace (El-Bushra 2000a, Kabeer 1994). International organisations such as the United Nations (UN), governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) vary from ignoring women or taking a gender-blind approach, to treating women stereotypically. Still others look at women without a consideration of women’s relative inequality in the context of gender relations.

Often where the term ‘gender’ is used, the focus still tends to be on women and girls without taking into account the ways in which gender inequality and power imbalances between women and men exacerbate their disadvantage. Impacts of armed conflict such as forced displacement and GBV are not understood as human rights violations, but rather as cultural or private issues that are best left alone. Furthermore, many governments have yet to ratify the international commitments designed to protect the human rights of women and girls during and after armed conflict. Lack of recognition or enforcement prevents any real progress towards gender equality.
Mainstreaming gender concerns into conflict resolution and interventions

Interventions, such as humanitarian assistance and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for ex-combatants, exacerbate gender inequality if they are administered in gender-blind ways. Mainstreaming gender awareness into the structures that govern armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction requires better cooperation between international institutions, states and NGOs. If we are to build more equal post-conflict societies, it is particularly important to involve women’s organisations at the decision-making level in the formation of political and legal structures.

Indeed, the all-encompassing upheaval caused by armed conflict creates the potential to redefine gender relations in the post-conflict period in more gender equitable ways. But without greater support for organisations and interventions that promote gender equality in all sectors, there is a high risk that longstanding patterns of oppression will be re-established.

Recommendations

The report makes a number of recommendations:

Take the lead from the local: Interventions need to be based on context-specific evidence about what women and men are doing, and not on stereotypical interpretations of gender roles and relations that presume to know what they should be doing. Interventions should involve local organisations – particularly women’s groups – in decision-making capacities. Outreach and support designed to assist families and communities adjust to shifting gender roles and relations should be assessed on the local level to ensure they are appropriate to the particular community or region. The programmes of states and international organisations must also reflect the concerns and priorities expressed by local populations.

Improve implementation of existing international laws by international institutions and states, particularly in terms of recognition of impacts of armed conflict such as forced displacement, impoverishment and GBV as violations of human rights and not as private, cultural concerns that are unavoidable outcomes of war. Implementation and enforcement of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 would represent a significant step forward.

Increase funding to specialised services that deal with the distinct needs of women and men who suffer violent impacts of armed conflict such as rape and torture. For women, specialised services must include counselling and outreach to manage gynaecological/reproductive health concerns related to rape, forced pregnancy and sex work. More health and counselling services should also be made available for men who move away from masculine, stereotypical gender roles or resist violence and combat and, as a result, become victims of physical and sexual violence.

Involve women and provide gender training: The involvement of women is necessary but does not in itself guarantee that gender concerns will be addressed or that women are automatically gender-aware. Training in identifying and addressing gendered concerns is important for everyone involved in post-conflict reconstruction. Peacekeepers in particular must receive tailored gender training in order to build
trust with communities, as well as to minimise the threat of sexual and physical violence from peacekeepers themselves.

Without a proper understanding of how gender roles and relations are shifting, we jeopardise the goal of a sustainable and peaceful post-conflict society. Greater cooperation is needed between all the actors involved in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction to address the power imbalances that lead to gender inequality. Without significant steps towards gender equality, there can be no real or meaningful peace.

Executive summary written by Lata Narayanaswamy.

‘To the railway station – the only hive of activity – in the midst of desolation, the surreal scene of 326 women rebuilding a station which has no trains … They are mostly widows, some of whose husbands have been taken to filtration camps. Ask why they are doing it. They reply, so that the city will exist again’.

1. Introduction

1.1 Why study gender and armed conflict?
Armed conflict exacerbates inequalities in gender relations that existed in the pre-conflict period. This study explores the impact of armed conflict on gender relations, analysing the distinct ways that both women and men are affected. It highlights the gender-specific disadvantages experienced by women and men that are denied by conventional interpretations of armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Interventions must account for the diverse realities of women and men, who may simultaneously play the roles of activists and parents, soldiers and victims. Recognising and addressing this diversity is vital to establishing more sustainable, gender-equal societies in the aftermath of conflict. Women experience significant disadvantage in the course of armed conflict, but it does not necessarily follow that men are always the perpetrators and therefore the winners, and women the losers. This report shows that both women and men experience armed conflict in distinct ways that in turn may alter gender relations.

The inequality that women experience during and after armed conflict in all societies derives from dominant understandings of gender roles. ‘Gender’ refers to the perceptions of appropriate behaviour, appearance and attitude for women and men that arise from social and cultural expectations. In the context of armed conflict, the perception persists of women as wives, mothers and nurturers, whereas men are cast as aggressors and soldiers. Although women and men do often assume these traditional parts, there is a tendency in the mainstream literature to exaggerate the extent to which they play stereotypical gender roles in armed conflict. The reality is that women are also active as soldiers and aggressors, while men may be both victims as well as combatants.

Gender relations, then, refers to the ways women and men interact. A key focus of this report is to explore the impact of armed conflict on gender relations in terms of how power dynamics between women and men are affected by the distinct types of disadvantage that armed conflict imposes. Existing analyses of armed conflict and post-conflict resolution are weak in various ways – some ignore women while others take a gender-blind approach or define the role of women in stereotypical ways. Still others look at women without considering gender relations.

Where the term ‘gender’ appears, its usage often implies that women (and girls) are predominantly ‘victims’ who experience ‘special’ circumstances and have ‘special’ needs, while men are depicted as the ‘perpetrators’. But the term ‘gender’ should not be used in such a limited fashion. Rather, it should allow us to understand that women and men function in a variety of roles – stereotypical or otherwise – and to examine how changes in these roles affect gender relations.

The destabilisation of gender relations that frequently accompanies armed conflict and its aftermath also opens up potential opportunities. Following the upheaval of war, we have a clean slate to start again and ask some fundamental questions about what kind of society we want and how gender relations will
function within it. In other words, it is a time when ‘social upheaval might open a door to the changes we hope for’ (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002: 11). The reality is, however, that sometimes these changes are not forthcoming, as we will see later on in this report.

In order for social upheaval to lead to more equitable relationships between men and women, it is advisable to first perform a gender analysis. This allows us to identify the nature of existing power relations between men and women in a particular society and to understand how conflict and its aftermath affect these relations. It also highlights the fact that marginalised groups who do not readily conform to female and male stereotypes, such as male pacifists or women in the military, experience conflict in diverse ways.

A mother may be a breadwinner and an activist, and this engagement in both stereotypical and non-stereotypical roles has consequences for gender relations in her household. Interventions designed to assist her that are not gender-sensitive may assume, for instance, that her needs are limited to those of a mother. This type of interpretation denies that people, women in particular, take on multiple roles and responsibilities and experience a wide range of negative impacts in times of social upheaval.

A gender analysis allows a more nuanced understanding of how women fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously affects gender relations in the household and in society. The language of gender moves away from stereotypical interpretations of what women and men should do and what they should need, to accepting and supporting what women and men are doing and what they do need.

This report addresses the following concerns:

- **Intersections of gender and armed conflict.** Section two provides an overview of the types and stages of armed conflict. The analysis is continued in Section three, which covers the gendered dynamics of armed conflict. In Section four, we look at the gendered impacts of armed conflict, illustrated with the examples of gender-based violence (GBV) and forced displacement.

- **Tools to mainstream gender.** Section five presents and critiques the theoretical frameworks, international laws and other guidance currently used to implement more gender-sensitive approaches to armed conflict.

- **Making the case for gender-sensitive approaches.** Using the critiques from the previous chapters, Section six examines the consequences for gender relations of humanitarian assistance, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) and peacekeeping/peace-building, rounding out the case for a more gender-sensitive approach to all aspects of conflict and post-conflict resolution/peace-building.

- **Strategies for improvement.** Section seven provides an overview of some of the practical tools available to mainstream gender into the institutions that govern armed conflict and its aftermath. Three examples of successful gender mainstreaming programmes provide insights into how mainstreaming may be achieved in practice. Finally, this section looks at how women’s organisations have responded to the lack of attention paid to the gendered dimensions of armed conflict. Section eight offers conclusions and recommendations for action.
2. Understanding armed conflict

2.1 Causes of armed conflict
The causes of armed conflict are often linked with attempts to control economic resources such as oil, metals, diamonds, drugs or contested territorial boundaries. In countries such as Colombia and the Sudan, for example, oilfield exploration has caused and intensified the impoverishment of women and men. Entire communities have been targeted and killed, displaced and/or marginalised in the name of oil development. The control of resources, like the exercise of power, is gendered. Those who do not have power or resources – groups that are disproportionately, though by no means exclusively, made up of women – do not usually start wars.

Unresolved struggles over resources, combined with the severe impact of displacement, impoverishment and increased militarisation in zones of conflict, serve to prolong existing armed conflicts. Moreover, conflict tends to cause and/or perpetuate inequalities between ethnic groups and discrimination against marginalised groups of women and men, thereby paving the way for the outbreak of future conflicts.

Armed conflict as the world moves into the 21st century is growing in its complexity. At the international level, inequality in the distribution of power and resources has become more pronounced. Coupled with structural inequalities between and within nation-states, this disparity has led to more regional conflict, as well as an escalation of international armed conflicts. Furthermore, the nature of warfare itself has dramatically changed due to the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons technology. Nations have placed greater emphasis on increasing and/or reinforcing military strength. This worsens existing constraints on women’s rights, which in turn exacerbates inequalities in gender relations.

At the same time as increased militarisation has further limited the rights of women within countries, gender equality has been co-opted at the international level to justify military intervention into sovereign nations. The liberation of women from the oppressive Taliban regime, for example, constituted one of the justifications for the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. But in the five years prior to the invasion, there was a consistent lack of regard for the plight of women, despite attempts by both local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to draw attention to the violation of Afghan women’s human rights.

In reality, military interventions are NEVER the answer to resolving gender inequalities. Armed conflict and its aftermath either cause gender inequality or exacerbate existing gender inequalities, which are further compounded by divisions on the basis of race, class, caste, sexuality, religion or age.

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War and justice for women … like oil and water
War exacerbates women’s suffering. In their roles as mothers, nurturers and caregivers, women invariably account for a large proportion of civilian casualties. Women in Afghanistan, for example, have constituted the majority of civilians injured or killed as a result of the mis-targeted bombing of houses,
hospitals and other civilian structures (Malakunas 2001). The destruction of resources and the poisoning of farms have endangered all civilians’ lives (Edwards 2001). Furthermore, even though women assume non-stereotypical roles as combatants, policy-makers and/or heads of households, attempts to have their voices heard in official processes are often dismissed. Few resources are made available to address and prevent gender-specific violations such as rape and forced marriage.

2.2 Types of armed conflict
Distinctions between international/inter-state and national/civil conflicts have been made by a number of scholars (Byrne 1996). Recent insights suggest, however, that contextualising these distinctions is critical to ensure gendered impacts are fully considered. It is important to recognise national/civil conflicts are not only internal but transnational in nature, insofar as they take place within a particular international context.

Regardless of the type of conflict, the concept of men going to war at the ‘front’ and women staying safely at home with children and the elderly does not reflect the reality of war. In fact, the distinction between ‘conflict’ and ‘safe’ zones, whereby the home and workplace are viewed as safe, is a long-held myth, and has been problematised by feminists for some time (Byrne 1996; Cockburn 1998; El Jack 2002; Giles and Hyndman forthcoming). In conflict zones, war comes to women as they work on their land. War targets their homes – abducting, displacing and/or killing them along with their children (El Jack 2002).

2.3 Stages of conflict
As Byrne (1996: 8) states, conflict may be said to have the following stages:
1. Run-up to conflict (pre-conflict)
2. The conflict itself
3. Peace process (or conflict resolution)
4. Reconstruction and reintegration (or post-conflict)

Types of gender inequality and appropriate responses to particular gender-specific needs differ depending on the stage of armed conflict. This breakdown allows us to hypothesise about the likely impacts at a given stage and design an intervention that takes account of the gendered dimension. The potential for designing detailed and tailored responses, however, is limited by the shifting boundaries of armed conflict itself. As Cockburn and Zarkov (2002: 10) tell us:

…war can surely never be said to start and end at a clearly defined moment. Rather, it seems part of a continuum of conflict, expressed now in armed force, now in economic sanctions or political pressure. A time of supposed peace may later come to be called ‘the pre-war period’. During the fighting of a war, unseen by the foot soldiers under fire, peace processes are often already at work. A time of postwar reconstruction, later, may be re-designated as an inter bellum – a mere pause between wars.
An additional concern in this breakdown is that the tendency to consider conflict and post-conflict reconstruction as real, identifiable and autonomous stages creates a conceptual divide. What constitutes peace from a feminist perspective may differ from mainstream views because for many, particularly women, 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. What is required, then, is a more nuanced interpretation of these stages, where interventions that address gender inequality in armed conflict reflect the fact that events occur simultaneously and stages overlap.
3. Gender dynamics of armed conflict

3.1 Gender relations and conflict
Gender relations are typically characterised by unequal access to, or distribution of, power. Given that
gender discrimination is so prevalent, it influences other 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 (UNDP 2002).

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 (Byrne 1996).

3.2 Women and conflict
Women in war zones may face contradictory demands from government and society. On one hand, the
nation calls upon women to participate in nationalist struggles in their capacity as members of the
national collective. In various war zones, women have been mobilised in armed conflict because their
support, labour and services have been needed. At the same time, the construction of women as
‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of the culture’ within nationalist liberation movements has often constrained
their activism in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction processes (Stasiulis 1999).

The construction of the identities of women in their gendered roles as ‘mothers’ and ‘guardians of the
culture’ implies they are ‘victims’, thus justifying the intensified use of power and violence to ‘protect’
them. Often there is a perception that this ‘protection’ has failed, as is the case where public acts of
physical and sexual violence such as rape occur. Sexual crimes, which disproportionately affect women,
may be carried out in full view of family and community, thereby rendering the victims as ‘tainted’ and
unworthy of protection (Bennett et al. 1995).

No sex please, we’re fighting!
A notable exception to the exclusion of and discrimination against female combatants occurred in Tigray,
a province of Ethiopia. The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) was formed in 1975 to fight for a
democratic Ethiopian state. They actively encouraged women to join the fighting. Education for women
and child-care were provided to facilitate their participation. Sexual relations were banned with the aim of
concentrating energies on the struggle. Exceptions were later made to allow for marriage and children.
One woman recounts: ‘The no-marriage law had a positive role: between men and women there was
talk, not sexual activity. A man would look at a woman in relation to her job, not in relation to whom she
goes with’. (Adapted from Bennett et al. 1995: 9)

Examples of women’s initiatives to achieve peace are often cited as evidence that women are innately
nurturing in contrast to men, who are characterised as innately aggressive and warlike. Yet research by
feminists in the North and the South has challenged the so-called peaceful nature of women by examining their involvement in national liberation struggles, their direct and/or indirect support of armed conflicts and their contributions to war and militarism generally (Babiker 1999; Byrne 1996; Cockburn 2002; El-Bushra 2000; Moser and Clark 2001; Kelly 2000).

Women as aggressors

The stereotype of women as innately nurturing does not always reflect experience on the ground. The abundant examples of women as active combatants or supporters of ‘oppressive’ states show assumptions about the behaviour of women or men can be very shortsighted and naive:

- Women became members of the Nazi party in large numbers and served in the extermination camps.
- Pinochet’s regime in Chile in the 1970s received support from middle-class women.
- Protestant and Catholic working-class women have been present in mobs in Northern Ireland.
- Women have served in, as well as rallied around, the US military.
- There are instances where women have condoned the use of rape against ‘enemies’ and those constructed as ‘not proper women’. (Adapted from Jacobs, Jacobson and Marchbank 2000: 12-13)

Whether in their traditional and perhaps stereotypical capacity as wives and mothers, or in their roles as aggressors and supporters of conflict, women continue to experience discrimination, due to the unequal power structures that govern their relationships with men.

3.3 Men and conflict

Women and men experience violence differently during and after conflict, in their capacities as both ‘victims’ and ‘perpetrators’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 7). Sexual violence is largely inflicted on women, but men and boys are also raped during armed conflicts in a form of violence designed to shatter male power. Yet even when there has been documentation of men’s experiences as victims of abuse on the battlefield, men continue to be described as ‘masculine heroes’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 3). Zarkov (2001) argues that in the case of the former Yugoslavia, the refusal to identify men as victims of sexual violence during armed conflict was rationalised in terms of power relations during war as well as in the subsequent nation-building process, which dictated who could be labelled victims of sexual abuse. In other words, a woman can be a victim but a man is never a victim, which is a denial of one of the gendered realities of armed conflict.

It is not only in terms of sexual violence that men suffer. Men also experience human rights abuses that are different from but equally unjust to those afflicting women, whether as prisoners of war, as soldiers or as people who diverge from gender norms (e.g. homosexuals, male pacifists). Men are also directly targeted in armed conflicts and they make up the majority of casualties caused by small arms and light weapons (SALW). The increasing number of households headed by women in conflict zones is an illustration of men’s specific vulnerability (El Jack 2002).

Masculinity and armed conflict: Do the two go hand in hand?

The connection between ‘masculinity’, militarisation and armed conflict is significant. Feminist analyses identify military structures as patriarchal, male institutions run by and for men, based not on ‘biological
traits of men but … on cultural constructions of “manliness” (Turshen and Twagiramariya 1998: 5). In many cultural contexts, being a ‘proper man’ is also defined by the ability to use a weapon (Jacobs et al. 2000: 11).

Does this mean that men are inherently violent? NO – male violence directed at other men, women or children is a reflection of ‘masculine expectations’ imposed by societies and reinforced by states keen to manipulate these expectations for their own political ends (Cockburn and Zarkov 2002; Dolan 2002; Jacobs et al. 2000). Men who feel they are unable to fulfil their ‘masculine’ roles as protectors or aggressors may vent their frustrations on their families. This leads to further violence and a lack of understanding of personal and women’s needs, and how these change in the face of conflict.

The fact that war is usually perpetrated by men does not prove men are inherently violent. War is waged by those who have power, and men are usually in the most powerful positions. There have also been cases of female leaders in power, such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, engaging their countries in conflict.
4. Gendered impacts of armed conflict

Gender inequalities are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict and continue during post-conflict reconstruction. Both women and men suffer war abuses and traumas, disruptions and loss of resources. The impact of these losses is experienced in different ways and women are often disproportionately affected.

States and organisations persistently fail to enforce international laws and conventions designed to protect the human rights of women and promote gender equality. Assistance providers, be they governmental, non-governmental or multilateral, have been slow to tackle the escalation of women's human rights abuses, particularly during and after armed conflict. Decision-makers sometimes discourage or even prevent the development of gender-sensitive initiatives.

One reason gendered initiatives lack support is the divide in thinking between technical and social support. Technical support refers to assistance with immediate needs such as re-establishing running water, sewage systems, health facilities or electricity supply. Social support, by contrast, refers to assistance with longer-term issues that are harder to tackle, with fewer quantifiable results, and are therefore considered to be lower priority, such as schooling, training and social service provision. Both types of support, however, bring into question social, cultural and religious practices. But during periods of conflict, it is considered inappropriate to address gender relations. The result is that the effect of technical interventions, such as large-scale sanitation projects, on the dynamics between men and women, is not raised (Williams 2002).

Regardless of the geographical, economic, political or social context, armed conflict makes it more difficult to access food, health, education and other basic goods and services. This section analyses two specific impacts of armed conflict – gender-based violence (GBV) and forced displacement. In exploring these issues, it also seeks to demonstrate how war exacerbates pre-conflict conditions characterised by inequality and lack of access to resources.

4.1 Forced displacement

‘Forced displacement is the clearest violation of human, economic, political and social rights and of the failure to comply with international humanitarian laws’ (Moser and Clark 2001: 32). People have often been uprooted from their homelands due to political, religious, cultural and/or ethnic persecution during conflict. Whatever the cause, displacement is a source of human rights violations and results in distinct types of disadvantage for both women and men.

Internally displaced people (IDPs) are not protected by international law

Displacement does not necessarily mean that people leave or are forcibly removed to destinations that are far from their homes during and after armed conflict. Armed conflict in the 1990s saw millions of people internally displaced, or still living within the borders of their country. The UN Refugee Convention of 1951 protects refugees outside of native borders, but does not cover IDPs. The international
Displacement is often viewed as a temporary or transitory phenomenon. However, experience in countries such as Peru, Sri Lanka, Somalia and Sudan shows it is actually a prolonged process. Globally, many generations have been displaced as a result of armed conflict, with a significant number of those affected having being displaced more than once and for significant periods of time (Indra 1999).

Displacement disproportionately disadvantages women, because it results in reduced access to resources to cope with household responsibility and increased physical and emotional violence (El Jack 2002). Displacement also implies social exclusion and poverty – conditions that are themselves likely to prolong conflict.

Forced displacement is frequently used as a strategy of war that targets gender relations through family breakdown and social destabilisation. Displacement often leads to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities for both women and men. Demographic change due to conflict has led to more women becoming heads of households. This has contributed to changes in the division of labour that have created new opportunities for women but in some respects further marginalised their place in society.

Displacement does not affect all women the same way. In Sudan, for example, ethnic groups such as the Dinka, Nuer, Nuba as well as other groups in the South and the Nuba Mountains, are marginalised due to their minority status. Women from these groups constitute an increasing number of war fatalities and casualties. Furthermore, the added responsibilities women have in productive, reproductive and community work are often transferred to younger girls and boys within the family. In particular, younger girls have to assume more responsibilities such as caring for children, the elderly and the sick, along with managing burdensome domestic work. This shift of responsibility impacts on the welfare and future of female household members (ibid).

Despite experiences of vulnerability and trauma during the process of displacement, some women benefit from displacement. They may be given priority for training and development programmes in health and education, as well as in income-generating activities. The skills women gain enable them to assume new roles within their households, becoming the main breadwinners when men have been killed or have problems finding employment after removal from their homes and communities. This shift in responsibilities represents a move away from stereotypically ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ roles. Men however may react to these changes with depression, alcoholism and an escalation of violence against women in public and private (de Alwis and Hyndman 2002).

Greater autonomy does not necessarily translate to gender equality

Case studies conducted by the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD) in Angola, Sudan, Somalia and Uganda show that although conflict has broadened women’s economic roles and given them greater autonomy, it has rarely led to increased political influence or greater gender
equality. Everyday relationships within the household were about the only place where change was observed, but it would be too soon to say whether this would last in the long-term (El-Bushra, El-Karib and Hadjipateras 2002: 5).

The relatively small gains women obtain during displacement do not necessarily translate to more equitable gender relationships. Advancement of ‘women’s interests at a superficial, women-focused level that fails to challenge overall paradigms of gender differences leaves women with new roles to fulfil but no institutional leverage to fulfil them effectively’ (El-Bushra 2000b: 6). Furthermore, there is concern that existing international laws and resolutions use the term gender but actually focus specifically on women. Although this is important, they simply do not provide the tools to understand gendered impacts, minimising the potential to foster more equitable gender relations.

4.2 Gender-based violence (GBV)

Physical and sexual violence, particularly against women, continues to be a well-documented feature of armed conflict. This report understands GBV to be violence, sexual or otherwise, which plays on gender norms and gender exclusions to break people down both physically and psychologically. Although it is most often women who are targets of GBV, both women and men may be victims and subject to rape; increased rate of HIV infection, as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs); damage to physical and psychological health; disruption of lives; and loss of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Violence against women
Conflict worsens existing patterns of sexual violence against women in two main ways. Firstly, incidences of ‘everyday’ violence, particularly domestic violence, increase as communities break down during and after conflicts (UN 2002). Secondly, ‘everyday’ violence escalates in the context of masculine and militarised conflict situations. The establishment of rape camps and the provision of sexual services to occupying armed forces in exchange for resources such as food and protection are two examples of GBV during and after conflict. Conflict breeds distinct types of power relations and imbalances. In the context of conflict, for instance, violence against women is more than the exercise of power over women. By raping women, who represent the purity and culture of the nation, invading armies are also symbolically raping the nation itself.

Some types of GBV are experienced almost entirely by women and girls during and after conflict, such as forced prostitution and sex work; increases in trafficking for sexual or other types of slavery; and forced pregnancy. Also, the impact of GBV has distinct consequences for women and girls including sexual mutilation; sterility; chronic reproductive/gynaecological health problems; and marginalisation from family and community due to stigma associated with sexual abuse (UN 2002).

In conflict zones, sexual violence has become a weapon of ‘ethnic cleansing’, as seen in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, where rape was used by Serbian police and paramilitary forces to punish women belonging to the Kosovo Liberation Army (Human Rights Watch 2000). Given that rape had been used in Bosnia, it became a causal factor in conflict-related displacement in Kosovo.
Rape as a weapon of war

Women recounted to Human Rights Watch their fear that they and their daughters would be raped. Rumors of rape circulated wildly as families attempted to flee their homes. Older women often dressed their daughters in loose clothing and headscarves in an attempt to disguise young girls as grandmothers. Other mothers smeared dirt and mud on their daughters’ faces to render them unattractive. As one mother told Human Rights Watch, ‘I was most afraid for my daughter[s]. I lost eighteen kilos during the war because I was afraid that my daughters might be raped’. In the words of another woman, ‘The girls were afraid of the police and put on scarves. The police took off their scarves and pinched their cheeks and told them not to act like old women. The girls were screaming’. According to a doctor in Pristina, ‘Rape was our greatest fear. Our main goal was to get our daughters – aged twenty-five, twenty-one, fourteen, and ten – out of the country’ (Vandenberg 2000).

Through the lobbying efforts of women’s organisations, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) now recognises and prosecutes sexual and gender violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to the statute, these criminal offences include ‘rape, sexual slavery (including trafficking of women), enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, other forms of grave sexual violence, and persecution on account of gender’ (Human Rights Watch 2002).

After incidences of sexual violence, women are often rejected by family or community. Despite pity for the trauma the women have suffered, society marks the victims as ‘damaged goods’ (Bennett et al. 1995: 9). Women also have particular healthcare needs as a result of these violations. For example, they require additional nutritional and health support if they are pregnant or lactating. Food scarcity and inequalities in food distribution are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict, rendering women and girls more susceptible to malnutrition (UN 2002). The increase in the rate of HIV infection in conflict zones is also a worrying trend – women face an increased risk, and therefore need special psychological, health and social support.

HIV/AIDS: A growing epidemic in the midst of armed conflict

HIV infection is increasing in conflict and post-conflict areas. Many conflicts are raging in areas where HIV infection is already very high (Smith 2002: 1). Disruption and displacement caused by conflict may lead to changes in sexual behaviour, an increase in the rate of sexual abuse (e.g. by armed forces), and to decreased access to blood screening facilities (ibid). Studies conducted in Rwanda and Sierra Leone found sexual favours were often demanded in exchange for food, which led to an increase in the number of women’s sexual partners (Benjamin 2001).

HIV infection is often considered to be primarily a medical issue that is not a priority in conflict. Its pervasive links to unstable social, economic and political circumstances are overlooked (Smith 2002: 2). Given the degree of stigma that persists for those infected with HIV, both women and men are not likely to talk openly about their concerns. Consequently, there is an even greater need to reach out to those affected. This is particularly the case with women, who are typically unable to access medical services.
Men as direct and indirect targets
Although men are most often the perpetrators of rape and violence in armed conflict and women the victims, men themselves may also be subject to physical and sexual abuse. Sexual abuse, torture and mutilation may be directed at men either as detainees or prisoners of war (UN 2002). In Northern Uganda, research conducted in the early 1990s showed an increased prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among men, ‘allegedly due to indiscriminate rape of men’ by the National Resistance Army (NRA) (Dolan 2002: 74).

ACORD’s experience of running workshops on sexual violence confirms the difficulty of quantifying the extent of male rape because victims are reluctant to speak out (Dolan 2002). Dolan argues that ‘the level of stigma attached [to male rape] is even higher than that associated with female rape’, and ‘undermining men’s sense of masculinity becomes a key channel for men to exercise power over other men’ (2002: 75). In this sense, rape or violent sexual abuse as demonstrations of ‘masculinity’ or power are potentially weapons that can victimise both women and men in conflict zones.

Men are also the indirect targets of violence against women. The rape of women has long been considered a public act of aggression, where raping and ‘dishonouring’ women is a way of ‘violating and demoralising men’ (Bennett et al. 1995: 8). Women are perceived to be the preservers of family honour, and often symbolise a nation’s racial purity and culture. The ‘abuse and torture of female members of a man’s family in front of him is used to convey the message that he has failed in his role as protector’ (UN, 2002: 16). It represents an attack on the entire country at the same time it violates women’s human rights.

Although men are likely to be the aggressors, we cannot ‘make assumptions about the behaviour of men as a group … some men do not benefit, and may indirectly suffer, from acts of sexual violence carried out against female family members’ (Jacobson et al. 2000: 2-3). This is not, however, to minimise the greater suffering that women directly experience as a consequence of sexual abuse, but rather to illustrate that GBV disrupts and destabilises gender relations in often irrevocably damaging ways that negatively impact everyone.

A weapon of war shrouded in silence
‘[Women who were] raped during the war tell their close friends. You hardly hear of women coming out in public to talk about all those things that happened to them. They would rather suffer in silence until they can get over it. They try to live with it or live with the idea that it didn’t happen to them alone. If hundreds of other girls can live with it, you can also live with it and, gradually, it vanishes away … but most of the raping was done in the open. A particular rebel may like your daughter, and right in front of you – the mum, the dad, the other sisters and brothers – it will be done openly. So that was how many girls got to know that their friends were raped.’ (Extract from the narrative of Agnes from Liberia in Bennett et al. 1995: 39)

GBV and gender relations
How does GBV impact on gender relations? One impact is visible in the private or domestic sphere,
where women are likely to experience increased violence, not only at the hands of occupying or state forces, but also by men in the household in the post-conflict period. Women in war zones often experience physical and sexual abuse by male spouses who have been demeaned by the armed conflict and crippled by guilt and anger for having failed to assume their perceived responsibility of protecting their women (El Jack 2002). It is important to remember, however, that increased GBV during and after conflict often reflects patterns of violence that existed in the pre-conflict period.

Notions about ‘public’ versus ‘private’ domains present barriers to dealing with victims of physical and sexual violence. Violence is considered to be a private issue, both within and beyond armed conflict. The divide between public and private renders many of these problems ‘invisible’ – ‘either literally, since it happens behind closed doors, or effectively, since legal systems and cultural norms too often treat it not as a crime, but as a family matter, or a normal part of life’ (WHO 2003). This is further complicated during armed conflict because physical and sexual violence, particularly against women, often occur in public or in full view of family and/or community. For both women and men, however, recovery from the trauma is often hindered by an inability to discuss it because it is considered a private matter.

Sex work and sexual slavery during periods of conflict also have consequences for gender relations. Women in conflict zones are sometimes driven to provide sexual services to soldiers in order to survive. But as the box below demonstrates, men are unwilling to accept women’s changed roles, leading to long-term resentment and family disruption.

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**No small sacrifice: Sex work and armed conflict**

‘Men feel the women are responsible for what happened, that we did it wilfully. They consider us prostitutes. During that period, they were helpless. They were like babies. They were not able to look after their families any more. A wife had to sacrifice herself, the marital contract, everything, to save the family, yet the men are not grateful … We sacrificed ourselves, our image in society, our integrity, everything, to save their lives and the children. So, my reaction to Liberian men is equal. Just as they think of me as trash, a prostitute, I think of them as animals … They have forgotten all the suffering we went through for them.’ (Excerpt from the narrative of Agnes from Liberia in Bennett et al. 1995)

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The process of armed conflict itself can lead to particular types of GBV due to the shifts in gender relations, particularly when women are active as combatants or dissenters in a conflict. Women who do not fulfil stereotypical roles are seen as deserving of violent torture or abuse.

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**Tortured for ‘betraying her womanhood’**

Nora Miselem is a women’s rights activist and one of only four survivors of nearly 200 people in Honduras who were kidnapped, imprisoned and tortured as part of state-imposed terror in the 1970s and 1980s. Backed by successive American governments, dictatorships in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador prevented popular socialist movements from taking root, resulting in the migration of scores of refugees fearful of persecution. Many ended up in refugee camps on the border of Honduras and El Salvador. Nora’s account of her experience follows:
‘They said they were going to sterilize me, because I didn’t deserve to have children – that idea they have of a woman as some sublime being whose sacred role is bearing children. According to them, I was breaking with the tradition of what a woman was supposed to be. And they were going to punish me, from their point of view, so I wouldn’t be able to have children. A woman like me didn’t deserve to be a mother … I had given birth to a little boy, my first, but he had died at the age of two … so the psychological torture was well aimed, … they said: You know why your son died, don’t you? Because you got involved in all this stuff. Imposing that I hadn’t been a good enough mother.

‘It was there in that torture chamber that I learned about the special treatment they reserve for women. That whole double morality thing. Because on the one hand they said I didn’t deserve to have children, that I was a bitch and they were going to sterilize me. But at the same time, individually, whenever one of them had me alone, he’d try to rape me. He’d come in, put the hood on me and a rubber bag – like a tire that chokes you – and those electric shocks in my vagina ...

‘They’d tell us we were traitors to our womanhood, as they conceived of that. How can a woman be involved in this sort of thing, they’d ask, along with men, no? [They told] us that war is a man’s business, or fighting against war is something for men alone to be involved in ...

‘They can’t stand it when they see a woman who thinks for herself, who wants to change the course of history, who wants to change her country’s future. That was the tone when they were all torturing me together. But when each of them would come in by himself, he would tell me he wanted me to have his child. I want to have a child with you, he’d say, mocking me with that. I had to struggle, so they wouldn’t be able to penetrate me. And morally speaking, they were never able to … I was physically overpowered by them, but not morally or emotionally or ideologically overpowered. The only recourse I had was to attack their morale, because they wanted to rape a woman who was afraid. But my words were not the words of a woman afraid.’ (Extract from the narrative of Nora Miselem in Randall 2003: 28-29)
5. Protecting human rights and promoting gender equality

The ongoing violation of human rights, and especially women’s human rights, in conflict zones continues to occur despite the existence of international laws and conventions designed to prevent such violations. We need then to understand:

1. What frameworks underpin international laws, rights and conventions related to armed conflict? How gendered are these?
2. What do international laws, conventions and rights actually protect?
3. Why are these international laws and commitments weak in practice?

The first section of this chapter looks at human rights and human security approaches, which form the basis of many international laws and commitments.

5.1 Human rights versus human security

Human rights
Historically, mainstream definitions of human rights, while seemingly gender neutral, have been predominantly based on men’s experiences. Article two of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises human rights as a universal ideal of respect for humanity that all people are entitled to, but does not make any specific mention of women. Indeed, few governments and NGOs are committed in domestic or foreign policies to women’s equality as a basic human right (Peters and Wolper 1995). In zones of conflict, the denial of women’s human rights has reinforced oppression and discrimination. When combined with other forms of power imbalance, this denial has more devastating consequences.

An emphasis on human rights is important but insufficient in dealing with issues related to gender equality. Violations that occur during all stages of armed conflict are often considered simply to be the consequences of war and not necessarily human rights violations, and are frequently overlooked:

- Although armed conflicts violate the basic right to life and security, women experience specific vulnerabilities and violence including forced pregnancy, sexual mutilation and sexual slavery at the hands of soldiers (Anderlini 2001). Similarly, men may be physically or sexually abused or experience trauma after witnessing this type of abuse against family members. These types of violations are seen as ‘private’ issues or unavoidable outcomes of conflict as opposed to human rights violations.
- Human rights are also violated in conflict through imprisonment, torture, disappearances and forced conscription but, again, these acts are considered to be inevitable outcomes of war rather than violations. Women and men experience violations of human rights in distinct ways. Men of combat age constitute the majority of those killed during fighting, endure imprisonment and are forcibly conscripted. Meanwhile, women and children in conflict zones constitute the majority of civilian casualties as well as the majority of those displaced and impoverished (Byrne 1996).
Political representation and participation are basic human rights. But whether in conflict or not, political institutions frequently exclude women. Women are under-represented in national and international organisations in both conflict and post-conflict arenas (UNDP 2002). This violation of human rights is not defined as such, but rather, is seen as a reflection of ‘normal’, patriarchal structures of power in play. Therefore, it is rarely questioned, particularly during armed conflict.

In short, human rights approaches will continue to overlook serious violations unless they recognise the gendered effects of armed conflict as basic rights violations and not as private, normal or inevitable consequences of armed conflict.

**Women’s rights in Afghanistan**

In post-conflict, post-Taliban Afghanistan, the effort to redefine women’s rights as human rights and not as ‘private’ or ‘cultural’ matters is an ongoing struggle. The new Karzai government claims to have overturned Taliban laws and says it now upholds international human rights laws. However, the opportunity for significant post-conflict changes to gender relations seems diminished. As was the case under the Taliban regime, many women continue to be imprisoned for travelling without male accompaniment or marrying without male permission.

Whilst a government-endorsed poster campaign encourages parents to put girls in schools, female teachers are being threatened with death and schools are being firebombed. Despite a shortage of doctors, Najiba Asseed, a woman who returned to Kabul University Medical School, faced severe opposition from her husband and death threats from her brother. She applied for a divorce to the new Women’s Ministry, but was encouraged to ‘quit medical school, go back to her husband and have children’ (Garapedian 2002).

**Human security**

Human security relates to the safety of people (particularly disadvantaged people) from ‘such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression . . . [and] from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities’ (UNDP 1994: 23).

The human security approach is based on the assumption that all people ‘have basic human rights and should enjoy these rights regardless of who and where they are’ (ibid). In the context of gender, the term implies that all women and men are entitled to security, including economic security, food security, and health and environmental security (ibid). Feminist perspectives on human security draw a further link between sustainable development, social justice and the protection of human rights and capabilities as central aspects of any discussion of human security (AWID 2002).

A human security focus for studying gender and conflict is significant because it establishes a link between gender equality and human security. Unlike a focus on rights, the human security approach implies that anything that threatens security is a violation of human rights, including gender-specific violations long considered to be normal, private or inevitable outcomes of war. However, even with the security framework, in practice there will still be resistance to recognition of these violations.
A human security approach is also problematic, insofar as it can be appropriated by states and multilateral organisations for their own agendas (Enloe 1993). The attacks on the World Trade Center in the US on 11 September 2001, for example, have become a pretext for the racist depiction of Muslims and people from the Middle East in the name of ‘homeland security’. Current developments within US foreign policy strongly suggest that human security will continue to be used to justify wars such as those against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003.

5.2 International laws, resolutions and conventions

The human rights of women (and girls) are embodied in a number of international human rights instruments and international humanitarian laws. These instruments collectively condemn all forms of violence against women. Many of them also contain specific references to the inclusion of a ‘gender component’ in ‘peace and security’, most notably UNSC Resolution 1325, the Windhoek Declaration: Namibia Plan (UN 2000). These laws and resolutions stress that those negotiating and implementing peace agreements should adopt a gender-sensitive perspective and address the protection and rights of women and girls during conflict and in post-conflict reconstruction.

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<tr>
<th>International laws and conventions that protect women’s human rights</th>
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<td>Significant international human rights instruments and international humanitarian laws relating to the human rights of women include the following:</td>
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<td>• Charter of the United Nations (1945)</td>
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<td>• United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)</td>
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<td>• OHCHR Declaration on the Protection of Women in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974)</td>
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<td>• Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979)</td>
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<td>• The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985)</td>
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<td>• The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Policy on Refugee Women (1990)</td>
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<td>• UN Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action (1993)</td>
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<td>• UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993)</td>
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<td>• Optional Protocol to CEDAW (1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000)</td>
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<td>• European Parliament Resolution on Gender Aspects of Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding (2000)</td>
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What is UN Security Council Resolution 1325?

In October of 2000, the UN Security Council held a debate on Women, Peace and Security, which led to the passage of Security Council Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000. Among other things, the Resolution recognises that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls and effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process, can significantly contribute to international peace and security. The UN calls on all parties involved in conflict and peace processes to adopt a gender perspective. This will include supporting local women’s peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution. The NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security is working to ensure the implementation and raise the visibility of UNSC Resolution 1325 and incorporate more women in peace and security issues. The complete resolution is available in the Supporting Resources Collection that accompanies this report or online at www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf.

5.3 Why are there difficulties in implementation and enforcement?

Although the importance of these laws, resolutions, conventions and commitments must not be understated, they are limited in their application. International commitments are difficult to enforce in practice because of the limited interpretations of human rights that deny various forms of gender-specific violations, as discussed in the previous section. Also, a range of cultural, historical and patriarchal justifications exist for the exclusion of gendered concerns in both human rights and human security approaches. This oversight is reflected in the use of language in international laws, in that emphasis is placed on women and girls in isolation as opposed to gender and gender relations. Furthermore, many states have yet to ratify these international commitments. Finally, despite the availability of this information, communication and information sharing with respect to these laws and commitments within organisations and between policymakers and grassroots organisations has been poor.

The language of ‘gender’ in Resolution 1325

UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security is undeniably a breakthrough for establishing broader human rights guidelines, particularly for women’s human rights, at the international level. Unfortunately, the resolution does not provide much guidance on what a ‘gender perspective’ consists of, and where the term ‘gender’ is used, it is used interchangeably with ‘women and girls’. It denies many of the gendered concerns that arise in armed conflict. These concerns require an understanding of how existing power imbalances between women and men are experienced during and after armed conflict and how these inequalities might be removed to improve gender relations.

Even where equal rights and security are recognised in theory, the practice remains unequal because women and men do not have equal opportunities to claim these rights, due to differential access to economic, political and legal resources. At all levels, there is a need for laws, resolutions, strategies and interventions that specifically target the differential access to resources and opportunities.

Implementing and institutionalising gendered human security and human rights approaches into policies requires the commitment of resources and the development of strategies that effectively overcome...
gender bias. Civil society, particularly women’s organisations, can play a role in raising awareness and ensuring governments and NGOs are held accountable.

**Improving enforcement: The Gender Audit**

One way women have mobilised to improve enforcement is through ‘audits’ of states and multi/bilateral organisations engaged in post-conflict reconstruction processes. International Alert, for example, has been bringing together women’s NGOs and civil society organisations for the Gender Peace Audit Project. It consists of an ongoing process of systematically documenting women’s experiences of war and peace-building through national and regional consultations, thereby creating tools for awareness-raising and advocacy. The Project uses UNSC Resolution 1325 as a framework for promoting women’s human rights and recognising the role of women in post-conflict resolution and reconstruction.

Woman teaching on the psychological effects of conflict, Uganda © Jenny Matthews (no date)