

## Summary of Study

This study aimed to a) further explore and better understand the particular issues relating to girls and young women within women, peace and security agendas, and b) inform policy development relating to gender, peace and security. These agendas and policy development processes are very much linked to UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which does talk about women and girls and indicates the need to consider the experiences and needs of girls in conflict and post conflict situations. However, the study finds that this attention remains quite superficial, and there is little in-depth consideration of the particular implications of conflict for girls and young women, or of involving them in peacebuilding processes. Although Security Council resolutions relating to children and armed conflict also recognize some of the particular conflict-related issues for girls, the range of issues is quite narrow, and adolescent girls remain somewhat invisible. They fall between the quite separate UN agendas for women, peace and security, and for children and armed conflict. Yet adolescent girls and young women make up large sections of conflict-affected population, and are often mothers and heads of households. They are crucial actors in post-conflict reconstruction and in the rebuilding of peaceful communities and societies. The study also highlights the fact that although Canadian women and women's peace movements are active in the promotion of SCR 1325, their activities and messages do seem to have not targeted Canadian girls and young women; there are few young women activists on these issues.

The study builds on previous work of the GPWG and is based on a review of 1) relevant and recent Canadian policy documents 2) SCR 1325 and other related international documents 3) input (interview and email communication data) from policy-makers, academics, and programming staff with government departments, NGOs and other international organizations 4) input from Canadian-based organizations for women and peace. From this data, a number of thematic issues are highlighted as of particular importance to girls and young women in conflict affected contexts. From these, general policy recommendations and a number of specific recommendations are made. These are targeted at Canadian government, NGOs and all those involved in humanitarian and peacebuilding activities.

# Gender, peace and security agendas: Where are girls and young women?

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## Emerging Issues to Address

- **Participation of girls and young women in peacebuilding processes**

Girls are explicitly mentioned in policy documents relating to protection for women and girls especially from sexual violence and exploitation, but tend not to be mentioned in relation to agency and leadership for peace. Yet depending on age, maturity and contextual factors, it is possible for girls to take leadership roles in different sorts of peacebuilding activities, particularly at the community level.

- **Age and development-related differences between women and girls, diversity amongst girls, and very indistinct dividing lines between being a girl and being a woman.**

There is a tendency towards what we see as a 'womenandgirls approach', whereby age and development related differences and the specific needs and experiences of girls and young (particularly unmarried) women are rendered invisible. This approach fails to appreciate the blurred distinctions between women and girls, which can differ from context to context. Acknowledging differences is particularly relevant to sexual violence and exploitation, when the experience, interpretations and short and long term impacts can be very different for a girl or young woman depending on factors such as age, status (married or unmarried), family support. There is also a tendency to treat girls as a homogenous group, rather than a diverse section of the population. Many, if not all of the issues below will impact girls and young women from higher social and economic classes differently than girls and young women from lower classes. A class distinction as well as the rural/urban divide that exists in many conflict contexts can impact considerably on accessibility to programs such as health, education, and training. It is important to acknowledge how girls and young women might need different support than older women in order to take leadership roles in peacebuilding processes, and to look at how issues such as low status, low self-esteem and confidence and low levels of education impact on girls' aspirations, expectations and priorities.

- **Gender base violence and sexual exploitation**

In conflict affected contexts, girls and young women are particularly vulnerable to gender based violence and sexual exploitation. The rape of girls and young women is a particularly horrific war crime, and can leave them physically and psychologically scarred for life. Unmarried women who are raped may find it impossible to find a husband and may therefore be ostracized from their families and communities. Sadly, however, it is not only unknown men from outside the community who are the perpetrators. Girls and young women are also at high risk of exploitation from humanitarian workers, including teachers, and other men with some power, who may take advantage of their poverty and their desperation and demand sex in return for money, food and/or other items or favours. In conflict situations, where prevalence is high, girls

and young women run a high risk of being infected by HIV/AIDS; they are physiological-ly more susceptible than men, and are not in a position to insist on condom use.

#### Early marriage and pregnancy

This is a related issue, as in situations of conflict-related poverty and uncertainty, girls may be married off from their families at an earlier age for reasons such as bride price, reducing the strain on family resources, and a shortage of suitable men. An early marriage may also be some sort of protection for them, from sexual violence, and an insurance against them being left unmarried and ostracized later. However, early marriage usually means an end to education for girls, and the start of a series of often risky pregnancies, and a life confined to the home, and to household chores.

#### Education for Girls and Young Women

Access to quality and relevant education is a priority issue for many adolescent girls in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Education is the key to positive futures for themselves and for their children. Significant progress has been made in increasing girls' enrollment and retention levels, especially for girls in refugee camps. However, within women, peace and security agendas there is little attention to how the content and quality of education can be oriented to best prepare women and girls for leadership roles in peacebuilding processes and activities.

#### Girls and Fighting Forces

With recent publications especially, there is an increasing awareness of the roles that girls do play in fighting forces in many countries of the world. Yet there is still much to be done to ensure that these girls' experiences are recognized and that their needs and aspirations can be met in post-conflict reconstruction and particularly DDR processes. It is also important to identify and act on the needs of young mothers, who are still in many ways girls themselves.

#### Girls and Small Arms

Although there is little specific research on the topic, there are particular gender dimensions to issues related to small arms. With access to small, light and easily manipulated weapons, fighting forces can equally force girls to use them, and to carry out atrocities with them. Equally, though, although girls may feel guilt and remorse about such acts, the possession of a weapon can also be experienced as empowering. Where girls are routinely abused and exploited, a gun can also provide some sort of protection for them.

#### Trafficking

This is an issue which is of concern, and in which there are relationships between conflict, poverty, the vulnerability of girls and young women and the lack of other opportunities to be further explored. It would appear that many of the girls and young women who are trafficked come from conflict countries, and this is true of those who come to Canada too.

## Emerging Policy and Programming Recommendations

### General Policy Development

#### Address the 'women and girls approach'

In all policy documents – both national and international, we recommend a more careful and systematic usage of phrases such as 'women and girls', 'women and children'. Doing this should not however, be taken as a 'search and replace exercise', rather it should also imply attention to both the similarities between these groups in relation to the particular issue, and to the differences between them. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate to consider each group separately. It is also important to understand that differentiation between girls and women is very blurred, and may differ from context to context. The specific issues for adolescent girls and young women should be made explicit, as should the strategies in place to protect and empower them. At the same time, there is also a need to look at the relationships between women and girls and to prioritize training and capacity building initiatives for local women to act as role models, mentors and advisors to girls and younger women affected by conflict.

#### Ensure that the experiences and needs of young women are well met in all conflict and post conflict situations and that protection issues especially, are considered from their perspectives

Young women, who are over 18 years, and so are no longer officially girls but who are not yet quite considered as women, often fall through gap that exists between programming for child protection and programming for the protection of women. More attention needs to be given to the experiences and realities of young women within women, peace and security agendas. Is it also important to promote 'preventative protection' – for example, protecting girls and young women from sexual violence - and to protect young survivors of sexual violence and rape, particularly if they are seeking justice. Young women because of their age (over 18) have increased access to international justice mechanisms,

such as reconciliation commissions or Special Courts. However, the extent to which these mechanisms are at addressing the specific protection issues facing young women needs further examination.

#### Balance Protection with Participation

National and international policy does reflect the need to protect girls as well as women in conflict situations, especially from sexual violence and exploitation. However, there is little recognition of the specific need for girls to be active participants in peacebuilding processes, nor of the challenges of doing so, or the prerequisites for success. Clearly protection is needed, as girls and young women can be very vulnerable, but participation can also be an effective protection strategy. Yet given the double marginalizations of gender and age, promoting girls' participation can be very challenging, especially in conflict-affected communities. We recommend that further efforts be made by international actors, by Canadian government, NGOs and other 'on the ground' actors to promote the participation of girls and young women in peacebuilding activities and processes. As little documentation exists at the moment, efforts should be made to gather and share information on different initiatives, on successes, effective strategies, challenges and on the lessons learned.

#### Connect gender and youth analyses in conflict and post conflict situations

Much progress has been made in furthering understandings and appreciation of gender differences in conflict situations. This is also true of promoting gender equality and the active participation of women in all activities which affect their lives. There is also increasing awareness of the needs and perspectives of youth, of the imperative to fully implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child and particularly to promote children's right to participate. However, gender and youth analyses are often conducted separately, with little chance to compare, contrast and look at in relation to each other. We recommend therefore more concerted efforts to use the 'double lens' of youth and gender to identify specific issues relating to adolescent girls and also to identify appropriate strategies for promoting girls' participation in all stages of the project

cycle. To do so, we need to make sex distinctions when referring to children and youth, and to collect sex-desegregated data.

#### Prioritize education for adolescent girls and young women

Education is critical for all conflict-affected young people, but this is especially so for girls. Conflict usually means that girls have increased difficulties in accessing education and yet have even more need of the information, skills, and the protection (physical, psycho-social and cognitive) that being in school can offer. Access is not the only issue; education should prepare and empower girls to be active participants in community and society reconstruction as well as to raise healthy children who also benefit from schooling. Education interventions should focus on primary school completion and transfer to secondary school, but also on complementary non-formal education opportunities specifically aimed at building confidence, increasing literacy rates and promoting self-reliance. Both should also include content on sexual and reproductive health. Prioritizing education from a gender and peacebuilding perspective should also build on the 'Education for All' and 'Millennium Development Goal' agendas that are being actively promoted and supported by the Canadian government and by Canadian organizations. These are somewhat attentive to conflict-related issues and to the need to support conflict-affected countries, but this could be strengthened. CIDA has, for example, supported the work of the Interagency Network on Emergency Education (INEE) and could consider more active support of gender equality issues and activities within this network.

#### Improve coordination, cross-referencing and policy coherence in international instruments, mechanisms and structures.

UN resolutions tend to be single issue-focused and do not necessarily make the connections between, for example, women, peace and security issues and children and armed conflict issues. A more comprehensive and holistic approach should be taken, by working concurrently with all related instruments, by analyzing common concerns, identifying any gaps, cross-referencing, and then by using the collective strength of the instruments for advocacy pur-

poses. There should be more coordination between the different mechanisms and bodies working at the UN around the particular issues for girls and young women in conflict. Such an approach may be particularly relevant in addressing the trafficking of girls and young women from conflict affected countries; there are specific human rights instruments which relate to trafficking which could be more connected to those dealing with women and conflict, and more actively used in conflict situations.

#### Understand and build on the particular coping and protection strategies of girls and young women

Across different programming areas in different locations there is a need encourage more listening and learning from the girls and young women who have survived conflict. The little research that is available suggests that with minimal resources, girls and young women do manage to cope with the trauma of conflict and its multiple impacts such as death and destruction, sexual violence, pregnancies, interrupted education, disabilities. Knowing more about girls' own strategies, skills and strengths for 'going on' and building on them, will promote policy and programming that better reflects their actual needs and experiences. This point has particular relevance in relation to girls who are or have been part of fighting forces.

#### Increase efforts to reach out to and to empower young women in Canada

Young Canadian women are not widely engaged in women, peace and security issues, whether it is a question of alternative priorities, a lack of knowledge and understanding or a feeling of disconnection with peace groups or women's groups. But young women do have agency, within their peer groups and also within their communities, and so spaces should be created within women's peace groups for younger voices to contribute and be heard. Understanding the particular barriers and discouragements to them is critical to promoting stronger leadership and engagement amongst young women. Advocacy skills will need to be strengthened and there will need to be openness to addressing the challenges, priorities and concerns which young women may bring.



## Specific Recommendations

- Canada should urge the UN Security Council and in particular, the Office of Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict to compile and publish sex-desegregated data on the government forces and armed groups which use boys and girls in their fighting forces.
- Canadian organizations, and those funded by Canadian sources, involved in humanitarian assistance and emergency response should have internal policies and practices consistent with the recommendations of the UN Secretary General's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, and which are particularly attentive to the vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women.
- Canadian training for civilian and military personnel involved in peacekeeping operations should include intertwined youth and gender dimensions in order to sensitize military and civilian personnel to the specific experiences and needs of girls and young women in conflict and post conflict situations.
- Ensure that information, especially on reporting and response pathways for survivors of sexual violence, is accessible to girls and young women; this is especially important in refugee camps, urban refugee communities and in returnee communities. Different dissemination strategies should be used such as posters and pamphlets in schools, clinics, and community centres.
- Efforts should be made by education authorities and their partners to include the rights of women and girls and the impacts of conflict in Canadian high school curricula and extra-curricular activities. Content should include relevant international instruments, including SCR 1325.

The full version of the study will be available in March 2005. In the meantime, for further details please contact Suzanne Taylor at :

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