

Enhancing Security and the Rule of Law: How can gender be better integrated into the priorities of the UN Peacebuilding Commission?

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Introduction

Madam Chairperson, Officials and members of the NGO Working Committee, officials from the UN system, Government representatives, colleagues from Burundi, distinguished ladies and gentlemen good morning. I feel highly honoured to be part of this august meeting and to lead the discussion on recommendations on "Gender, Security and the Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone."

Let me start this process by first thanking the organisers for inviting me to share these recommendations with you as we continue to analyse and discuss individually and collectively how best to integrate gender into the security and the rule of law priorities in Sierra Leone, and the work of the PBC in general.

Madam chair, I believe our gathering here is a manifestaion of our commitment to ensuring women's equal participation in and benefit from post-war reconstruction efforts as demanded by international human rights instruments such as the Geneva convention, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action, and the Millennium Development Goals.

My task is to give an overview of the issues that the PBC and its partners across Sierra Leone feel are critical to the analysis and discussions here today around integrating gender into security issues and the rule of law, and to suggest practical ways of responding to them.

The issues are not perhaps significantly different from those you already know, but I thought I would begin by reminding us all of why they are still critical.

At a fundamental level, integrating a gender perspective in security sector reform means asking questions such as: How is security defined by people? Whose security are we talking about? Who should legitimately participate in decision-making within the security sector? Why are women not involved? How are they affected by the decisions made by the decision makers? How can the security sector play a role in changing negative gender stereotypes and cultures of violence?

In doing so, I want to refer to a quick random interviews that I conducted in Marjay Town, a peri-urban area of Freetown. The interview targeted ordinary Sierra Leoneans, people who are greatly affected by these decisions including women, men, teenage boys and girls. What came out of this interview was very interesting and form the basis of my recommendations herewith.

Mrs. Mary Gbassa, a house wife in Freetown, defined security as a safe and free environment where women and children are allowed to move freely with no fear of attack, intimidation, sexual violence, kidnapping, etc. A situation where people have enough to eat, to send their children to school, or to pay for medical services at all times.

Asked to make two very important security recommendations, Mrs. Gbassa said (in very strong terms) "I will beg people in authority to put mechanisms in place to allow women and girls to move freely

without fear of been raped or physically attacked by adult men. Secondly, I will ask that they support women to be economically empowered (especially war widows) to enable them to provide food, send their children to school and pay for medical services”.

Mr. Moses Kamara, a community teacher, defined security as a well trained, armed and paid military force who protect people’s lives and properties at all times. Asked to make two recommendations, Mr. Kamara expressed the need for more military training and support for the military personnel in the form of good salaries and housing facilities. Secondly, to lobby ECOWAS and the UN for a stand-by force at all times, especially as the first democratic elections to be conducted by Sierra Leoneans alone draw near.

Jebbeh Feika, a Junior Secondary School pupil, looked at security as “a safe environment where girls are free from sexual and other physical violence, and with institutional mechanisms in place to support the education of girls to the highest levels.” Jebbeh recommended that the government put mechanisms in place to support girls’ education and prevent them from being sexually harassed by their teachers, other male colleagues and male guardians that some girls stay with. Jebbeh said, “Aunty Gladys, in school if a teacher proposes love and you refuse, you are sure of been punished always; losing your space in the school or repeating the class.”

Abdul Sillah, a young male school leaver, explained security as a well-trained, supported, committed and respected military force. Abdul recommends more training, support and appreciation of the role of the security forces. Such training should target young and energetic men who are willing and well-screened before any formal training.

From these expressions, you will all agree with me that women and girls, men and boys have different understandings of the same concept and thus different needs and priorities. The variations are based on their experiences and vision of the world around them. Thus, a gender sensitive approach should make a conscious effort to deepen the understanding of these variations, and should design strategies and programmes that address the different needs on an equal basis, but supporting the marginalised groups.

Such engagement can be done better by recapping and analyzing the situation, which brings me to my next section that provides a brief background of the context in Sierra Leone.

Background

Sierra Leone has had a succession of bad governments characterized by low or non-participation of the majority of its people, non-accountability, gross human rights violations, economic exploitation and deprivation of its poor people (the majority of whom are women), drugging of youths, the militarization of some key male institutions and a total neglect of the rule of law.

This is still evident in the deteriorating circumstances of the people, which culminated in the ten years of war of mayhem and destruction, characterized by killing of thousands of civilians, mutilations, rape [gang rape], sex slavery, forced labour, forceful conscription, destruction of homes and personal property, destruction of infrastructure, and the separation of families and friends.

Out of the total surviving population, women constitute approximately 51.3% of the population, but form a small fraction of the decision-making bodies. Their general low status has relegated them to positions of dependency and powerlessness. This situation can be connected to the wide violations they suffer; the disparity and inequality between them and their male colleagues in the economic, socio-political and cultural aspects of development.

A major impediment to women’s participation in decision-making processes is the high rate of illiteracy, which is, to a large extent, as a result of gender and cultural biases between them and the men. Women rarely attain positions of decision-making both in public and private life.

Since the signing of the Lomé Peace Accords in 1999 however, the international community, including bilateral and multilateral agencies, the Government, and civil society organizations have

been engaged in various activities to restore peace and stability in the country, which has earned us the relative peace that Sierra Leone still enjoys.

Progress made in this direction so far include: the establishment and the completion of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Setting up of the Special Court, the creation of a number of democratic institutions such as the National Electoral Commission, the Political Parties Registration Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the newly established Human Rights Commission.

In addition, there are existing strategies and frameworks for peace and development such as Sierra Leone Vision 2025, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), the Peace Consolidation Strategy, the Improved Accountability and Governance Pact (IGAP), and the White Paper on the Implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Recommendations. It is expected that ordinary women, men and children will benefit from the peace dividends of these strategies.

Since the establishment of the PBC, the UN, the government, and some leading organisations like WANEP, CCR and MARWOPNET have organised activities to increase the interaction between the Government and civil society organisations to own and contribute to the peace consolidation strategies. Some key outcomes realised from such interactions and discussions so far include:

- Increased awareness among the population around the establishment, mandate and powers of the Commission
- Improved relationships and interaction on the part of the Government and civil society organisations on the need to work collaboratively in addressing the numerous post-war demands
- Deepened reflection on integrating post-war challenges into existing government strategies including the PRSP, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework, and the Peace Consolidation Strategies
- Increased awareness among stakeholders on the specific challenges under the four critical areas that need to be addressed: social and youth empowerment and employment; consolidating democracy and good governance; justice and security sector reform; and capacity building
- Development of a country-specific framework and management structure
- Heightened awareness of the goals and relevance of UN SCR 1325 in negotiating for women's involvement in and benefit from post-war efforts
- Newly formulated programmes and projects to respond to the diverse peace needs

On the security and justice front, the majority of the population still remain extremely insecure because of the huge crime rates (including mob justice), the lack of access to justice, poverty, and a lack of employment opportunities. Recent newspaper reports present accounts of violent incidences across the country. For example:

- The alleged killing of one staff member of the Guma Valley water company by members of the national fire force in a fight when the member of the Guma Valley water company attempted to stop members of the fire force from wasting and illegally collecting water from an outlet
- Kidnapping of a JSS 1 Grammar School boy, Ben Devo, as witnessed and reported by a friend Simon Sesay on the Spark newspaper of May 29th 2007
- The frequently violent response by the motorbike riders (majority of whom are ex-combatants) in the country. A recent example being the attack on the CKC pupils for refusing them access to park their bikes in their school compound; a situation that led to a fight that destroyed the school and other school properties

- The mysterious burning of houses in the Pujehun district by unknown men
- Increased sexual harassment and exploitation in schools and communities in rural and urban areas
- Continuous newspaper reports of rape. For example, a recent newspaper report of alleged raping and deflowering of a 13 year old girl by a Catholic priest in Blama, eastern region; the kidnapping and ritual killing of two women Kambia, northern region; and the alleged raping of an 85 year old woman by an 18 year old boy in Bo, southern region
- Attacks on fuel stations and private properties by unknown gunmen
- Frequent breaking out of prison cell by prisoners

In the effort to ensure that a gender perspective is fully integrated into the work the UN Peacebuilding Commission in Sierra Leone a national consultation was organized by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs with support from UNIFEM. This consultative conference in January 2007 was organized as a follow-up to the meetings on the civil society perspective on the role of the PBC in Sierra Leone, previously held in and out of Sierra Leone between July and October 2006.

The national consultation was also followed by two community-based meetings held in Makeni (Northern region) and Kono (Eastern region) to obtain first-hand information. These meetings identified a range of actionable priorities within each of the four priority areas.

In regard to the issue of security and the rule of law, and as already indicated in this presentation, gender-based violence (GBV) is still a massive threat to women's human security. There is a need to not only implement the TRC recommendations as they pertain to women's special needs and concerns, but also to provide support for women pursuing redress at all levels, to domesticate CEDAW, and to engage the network of women's organizations in security sector oversight.

In summary, the key security concerns from a gender perspective in Sierra Leone are the issues of :

- Women's weak educational and economic background
- The socio-cultural discriminatory practices regarding women's participation in decision making and in the field of security
- Violence and sexual harassment against women at all levels
- The lack of policies, programmes and mechanisms to ensure that women are equally represented in decision-making bodies within the security sector

The recommendations that follow are drawn from this background.

Recommendations

My recommendations as I earlier said are practical suggestions from a gender perspective, which entails ensuring the full and equal participation of women, girls, and also marginalized men and boys taking into account their different experiences, needs, priorities and actions.

To effectively initiate a process to mainstream gender, the framework begins with a **deeper understanding and analysis of the gender barriers to security**. Though marginalised men and boys also face distinct threats to their security and barriers to their participation in security sector reforms (SSR), the following framework should focus on women and girls because they remain the largest and most vulnerable group of marginalized individuals, but men must also remain involved in their protection.

To identify the full range of gender-related barriers, the analysis must be conducted at the two levels at which SSR is conceptualized:

(a) the level of broader underlying principles such as accountability, transparency and democratic governance; and

(b) the level of practical implementation of common security sector reforms.

This dual focus ensures that gender is not only mainstreamed into existing SSR initiatives, but that larger social and cultural barriers are also identified and addressed.

Such a process can include informal or formal consultations, a general diagnosis to identify and determine entry point(s) to address, specific assessments or reviews, stakeholder meetings, implementation; and monitoring and evaluation

Thus, integrating gender concerns into the security and justice priorities of the PBC in Sierra Leone can be done better by first undertaking studies to identify the gaps and needs but also to provide suggestions. Importantly, such studies could also be the baseline for any programme interventions

(a) The level of broader underlying principles such as accountability, transparency and democratic governance:

- Joint gender impact study of the DDR Programme by the PBC, Government and CSOs (particularly Women's CSOs)
- The Government and CSOs to undertake a gender needs assessment of its security sector to identify gender gaps/needs

(b) The Level of practical implementation of common security sector reforms.

1. Socio-cultural barriers and gender stereotyping:

- CSOs should launch intense national awareness-raising campaigns on women's equal rights and women's political participation and other gender related issues.
- Women's CSOs should intensify advocacy for and the government should support the recommended 30% quota for women in all decision making positions as recommended by the TRC and UN SCR 1325.
- The government to remove section 27 4d-f of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone and ensure the passage into law of the three gender bills on domestic violence, devolution of estates, registration of customary marriage and divorce, and the child rights bill
- The Peacebuilding Fund should support initiatives that support women's economic empowerment to enable them to respond to their human security concerns
- The Government should initiate support for capacity-building for judicial and security human resource personnel, supervisors and staff of the security sector

2. Weak capacity of women's CSOs and the Gender Ministry, which is to a large extent a result of the weak educational and professional background coupled with huge financial constraints

- PBF should support scholarship programmes for women to study professional areas especially in the field of gender, politics, security and other relevant professional courses
- Government and CSOs should initiate programmes that economically empower women to respond to certain human security needs such as food, medical, payment of school charges for their children, including skills training also for gainful employments etc.

- PBC, multilateral and bilateral partners of the Government to assist it in providing the required infrastructure for foreign investments e.g. electricity, good road network, good water supply etc.
- Government to prioritize the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs for financial and logistical resource allocation
- Government and CSOs to address the reintegration needs of women and girls associated with ex-combatants that were not fully addressed under the DDR programme

3. Violence, sexual harassment and abuse

- Government to enforce internal codes of conduct and/or policies on zero tolerance towards discrimination and violence against women at all levels of society especially within the educational institutions
- Government and CSOs with support from the PBF to design special programmes aimed at working with disadvantaged groups like the bike riders association, girls and boys on the street. Such programmes should include psycho-social counselling, training in human relations, communication skills, human rights and responsibilities (with a focus on women's human rights)
- Government should critically review policies relating to the termination of the services of military personnel and initiate programmes to support and rehabilitate them (ex-service women and men)
- CSOs to initiate civic education programmes on tolerance and non-violent responses to resolving conflict.
- Strengthen the Family Support Unit of the Sierra Leone Police with logistics, financial and appropriate training for adequate response to GBV cases

4. The lack of policies, programmes and mechanisms to ensure that women are equally represented in decision-making bodies within the security sector

- Gender sensitive policies that support women's involvement. e.g. new recruitment policies and processes that take on board the needs and aspirations of women and men, the development and enforcement of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) policies and codes
- Strengthen the gender capacity of ALL ministries, not just the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs. There is a need for gender advisors within the Ministries of Justice, the Interior, Defence, etc
- Through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and Women, the Government and CSOs should ensure the passage of the three gender bills on domestic violence, the devolution of estates and registration of customary marriage, divorce, and the child rights bill
- Institute the quota system and/or other affirmative action to ensure women's equal representation in decision-making positions within the security and justice sectors
- Put mechanisms in place to ensure the effective participation of CSOs (including women's organisations) in the monitoring progress and review section of the draft compact for Sierra Leone. This should include gender-differentiated indicators for monitoring.

Above all, peace consolidation programmes should be designed to positively impact on the lives of women and girls, including efforts related to promoting security and the rule of law. Thank you very much.