

Developing a Gender Policy for DPI - Background Note

There is a growing prioritisation of gender and gender-sensitivity on an international scale in general, and across the international conflict resolution arena in particular. The United Nations, the European Union, and individual governments are renewing their commitment to gender, and donors are increasingly keen to fund gender-sensitive work.

In this context, developing a gender policy framework constitutes a key strategic advantage for DPI. Indeed, addressing gender in a concerted and strategic manner will enable us to capitalise on our key existing assets and strengths; to expand the scope and efficiency of our work; and to forge new partnerships within an invigorated and dynamic field, both in terms of the organisational running of DPI and in the conducting of our substantive work.

Gender: the International Context

Increasingly prioritised on an international scale, gender related issues have also grown ever more prominent on the international conflict resolution agenda in recent years. A series of high profile reports published by the United Nations this year have highlighted the UN's renewed commitment to gender equality, which was also recently cemented in the newly created Sustainable Development Goals.

Responding to – and seeking to build upon – the growing focus on gender (by which we mean the culturally defined expectations about and roles of men and women, and the ways in which these impact across their lives and the societies that they live in) amongst peacemakers, governments, and international bodies, the EU has recently adopted a new policy framework to transform the lives of women and girls by working through external partners. The increased awareness of and heightened sensitivity to gender has significant ramifications for the work of NGOs, many of which have made addressing gender a priority issue. Donors are progressively more eager to fund projects that directly address gender issues, and organisations which display both sophistication and operationality in their approach to gender; conversely, organisations perceived to be neglecting to address gender realities are more likely to encounter adversity in their fundraising activities.

Gender in Conflict

The practice of closely examining the role of gender when working to resolve conflict and safeguard peace has emerged in recent decades, nurtured by academic research and institutionalised through policymaking and the development of practitioner models. Throughout, the experiences and behaviours of and impacts on women and men have been found to diverge in complex ways in the context of violence and post-conflict reconstruction; gender impacts upon the inculcation of conflict, its progression, and on the resolution process itself.

Yet much of the field is still emergent, and there remain significant gaps in our understanding of the gendered aspects to conflict and its legacies. Too often, crucial aspects of social reality integral to the peace process are missed when an inadequate comprehension of gender leads the experience of men to be taken as the experiences of all, or when the gendered aspect to certain patterns or behaviours amongst different groups are missed. New institutions - such as the Centre for Women, Peace and Security recently established at the LSE and funded by the FCO and new governmental focus groups such as the Irish DFA oversight group on Women Peace and Security and indeed the new informal Experts Group on Women Peace and Security of the Security Council of the UN enshrined in Resolution 2242 (2015) - are seeking to capitalise on the opportunity this situation presents to perform important work on and research into the expanding field of gender in conflict.

Why Gender at DPI?

DPI is already well situated to develop a focused, coherent, and sensitive approach to gender that will allow us to take advantage of the international momentum around this subject.

Our gender-balanced Board of Directors and Council of Experts include gender experts, and our staff is comprised of a number of individuals with academic and professional experience on the subject. DPI has valuable experience conducting specific activities and research related to gender – such as our recently published, and very well received, Conflict Related Gender Based Rights Factsheet, and our research papers on The Gendered Effect of Conflict and Gender, Development and Conflict Resolution: Enhancing Rights & Equitable Practice. Moreover, as a member of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) Working Group on Gender, Peace & Security, the DPI can draw on partner experience in this area.

The development of a gender policy will ensure that a gendered approach is taken at every level of DPI's work, both in its external activities and programmatic work and within its internal organisational systems and practices, including but not limited to human resources, recruitment, training, management, and decision-making, to support gender-equality. This comprehensive approach will include the opportunity at set intervals for staff to discuss gender and diversity issues as they pertain to the workplace as well as to the substance of our work.

The growing prioritisation of gender and gender-sensitivity across the international conflict resolution and peace-keeping arena makes the present moment a particularly opportune time to develop a gender policy framework that would open up new opportunities for growth and development.