

Mainstreaming Gender in Peacekeeping Operations: Can Africa Learn From International Experience?

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INTRODUCTION

Peacekeeping issues in all their diversity have enjoyed persistent priority on the agenda of many African security specialists and practitioners. Increased attention, however, has contributed much more to reveal the complexity of the subject, rather than to the implementation of workable models. Despite a plethora of lessons learned from specific international and regional cases, many matters in this field of study remain unresolved. Training of African peacekeepers and much of the official doctrinal thinking still rely heavily on United Nations-type approaches. Also, in situations where western approaches to peacekeeping are being questioned the momentum is lost due to a lack of doctrinal consensus on the continent.¹ Africa has yet to come up with a truly indigenous approach to peacekeeping. The fluid and insecure nature of conditions on the ground and the divergent motives of the warring parties can often be traced back to centuries of tension and conflict. The situation on the ground therefore increasingly renders the UN peacekeeping doctrine irrelevant and necessitates a critical look at traditional assumptions.

In the context of an already complex peacekeeping discourse and the vast underrepresentation of gender issues in this area, combining the two variables invariably raises the question whether gender can in any way promote the resolution of some of the many unresolved issues. The UN has little or no influence over the personnel recruited for peace operations by the various troop-contributing countries. Given the trend towards the development of regional security complexes and an increased emphasis on indigenous and more forceful peacekeeping, more developing countries are currently contributing troops to peace operations. In Africa, attempts at establishing self-reliance in this area have been met with numerous challenges related to the lack of capacity and political will to act constructively under suboptimal conditions. Given such enormous challenges in Africa, it is doubtful whether the percentage of women in peace operations in Africa is likely to increase in the near future unless concerted efforts are made to highlight gender issues. The political, economic and social turmoil on the continent further does not create conditions conducive to the mainstreaming of gender in society, in general. Furthermore, UN efforts at mainstreaming gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations also took a long time to materialise as will be shown later.

In spite of these difficulties, mainstreaming gender in peacekeeping operations is beneficial. A feminist or gender perspective not only enhances the understanding of global (non-state) developments by analysing and confronting the partiality of masculinist accounts, but also offers alternative constructions that could lead to new and creative answers to global security problems of which peacekeeping is both a solution and a cause. It will be a long and arduous struggle, however, which would necessarily have to take cognisance of the lessons learned by the UN, the Scandinavian countries and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in this regard. The purpose of this article is therefore to highlight a number of trends and areas of concern for African peacekeepers in relation to peacekeeping, human security and gender. Since the debate on the continent is still in its infancy, this contribution seeks to provide an exploratory framework for discussion and analysis.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Propelled by many factors such as the dawning of the post-Cold War era, peacekeeping as a concept has evolved from the traditional notion of consent, impartiality and the non-use of force to what Malan terms 'fourth generation' peacekeeping.² The latter implies an emphasis on delegation, specialisation, civil policing and a blurring of lines between traditional peacekeeping and peace enforcement typified by a more robust and flexible approach. Modern multidimensional peacekeeping includes complex peace operations where the military element is but one of many aspects involved. The so-called 'new peacekeeping partnerships' include the military, civilian police, government, non-governmental organisations, the media and organisations involved in development and democratisation projects. Currently, large civilian components take on responsibility for tasks like monitoring the local police, monitoring and organising elections, human rights monitoring, demobilisation, educational and institutional development, humanitarian assistance and national reconciliation.³

The term 'peacekeeping operations' is used here in its broadest sense to include both the traditional and contemporary types of multinational intervention. The term 'operations' — even though it is traditionally associated with the military — is also used in a broad sense to include both military and political processes.

The UN Commission on Human Rights defines gender mainstreaming as "the process of bringing an awareness of the status of women into the public arena."⁴ While the emphasis in this article is naturally more on the implications of planned action, legislation, policies and programmes on women, men are not excluded. After all, both men and women, as peacekeepers and within the relevant host community, benefit from the successful outcome of a mission. In this sense, mainstreaming refers to a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women *and* men an integral part of policy in all spheres of life.

GLOBAL TRENDS IN PEACEKEEPING

One of the most significant post-Cold War trends is the recognition of the need for regional security complexes to take collective responsibility for solving their own security problems. In Africa, the rather simplistic slogan of 'African solutions for African problems' has taken root.

The following trends in peacekeeping operations in Africa capture the main developments on the continent:⁵

- the withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the African continent;
- an increase in robust, multilateral military interventions by willing African coalitions, with the blessing of the UN Security Council, and the growth of bilateral military interventions, supposedly under the auspices of subregional organisations, but without Security Council approval;
- increased civilian participation and provision of humanitarian assistance; and
- the continued collaboration on African peacekeeping capacity-building programmes.

African peacekeeping is caught between the intransigence of the international world and the need for Africans to become self-sufficient. A preoccupation with state-centred approaches to peacekeeping on a continent where the state is often the source of insecurity has been problematic.

There is also little evidence that a combined effort in the form of regional and subregional approaches has been more successful. The early warning system at the Organisation of African Unity's Centre for Conflict Management is a myth, and attempts at reviving the ailing Southern African Development Community (SADC) Organ on Politics, Defence and Security are fraught with political difficulties.

From these few examples it is clear that African peacekeeping is in a rather precarious situation. The only way in which peacekeeping in broad terms can begin to address the underlying causes rather than the symptoms of the African malaise, is to redefine security in terms that are relevant to all Africans. Africa's preoccupation with state security has to make room for a more comprehensive framework which conceptualises security as coming from within the state. Thus, respecting human rights, meeting basic socio-economic needs, protecting human beings from physical harm and following sustainable environmental policies all form part of a multidimensional and comprehensive approach to human or people-centred security. As a consequence of the broadening of the security debate, the security needs of marginalised groups in society started to be highlighted. Women's security needs and a feminist conceptualisation of security thus became popular topics of intellectual discourse. Women's contribution to peace and security both from outside and within the military establishment began to receive serious scholarly attention.

GENDER AS A VARIABLE IN PEACEKEEPING: DOES WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION REALLY MATTER?

The peacekeeping world was and still is a military world. However, since the late 1980s, the shift in the focus of peace operations to include the social or human dimension has resulted in an increased focus on the role of civilians. This trend has allowed women easier access to this bastion of male domination. In the first instance, a greater awareness of the impact of civil and other wars on women and children has contributed towards an emphasis on civilians. But, civilians are

not only viewed as victims. They are also increasingly recognised as essential 'tools' in the peacebuilding process. Hence, 'new' or multidimensional peacekeeping has opened many doors for more women to play new roles within peacekeeping as legal and political advisors, election and human rights monitors, information specialists and administrators.

The state of affairs in respect of women's 'place' in peacekeeping operations can be explained along the lines of three feminist theories, namely those of inequality, difference and oppression. In this article, the three core feminist approaches are treated as complementary and particular emphasis is placed on the relevance of liberal approaches to increase women's visibility — representation in peacekeeping matters and activities — as well as arguing that traditional concepts of and approaches to peacekeeping must be challenged and transformed. This can be done by acknowledging that women's 'uniquely female values and capacities', such as co-operative and less hierarchical leadership and management styles, are the products of women's socialisation and historical roles rather than of biological differences. Such qualities can be 'learned' by all human beings and need to be incorporated into security policy and mechanisms for conflict resolution. In similar vein, male peacekeepers' negative behaviour towards local populations (for example, prostitution, sexual harassment and sexual violence) is often linked to the nature of combat training and resulting attitudes of aggression towards the local population. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) and UN Transitional Authority in Namibia (UNTAG) have become notorious for the conduct of male peacekeepers towards local women. Another important recognition is the fact that the picture of women and peacekeeping is fractured and displays great variance across missions and contexts.

It is now generally recognised that, in situations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, it is beneficial to include both men and women in a team. Women are not necessarily better peacemakers than men. The assumption that men are aggressive and women peaceful is not only incorrect, but irresponsible. Such stereotypes reinforce the fallacy that women are too weak to participate in any form of peacekeeping operation. Stiehm⁶ makes a case for the combination of women's peaceful and men's aggressive abilities. According to her, this creates an ideal opportunity to achieve equality between the sexes. Women's contribution in this regard takes place at two interrelated levels:

- the internal dimension where women can positively influence social relations within the operations; and
- the external dimension which relates to their contact with the local population.⁷

On the basis of existing experience, women are perceived to make the following contributions to peacekeeping operations:

- Their presence, especially in decision-making roles, sends a clear message in favour of equality and non-discrimination against women.
- Women's presence puts new items on the agenda, such as the sexual conduct of male peacekeepers. The Namibian mission was probably the first mission in which these issues were raised.
- Women are perceived as being more empathetic, which enhances their reconciliatory and political work as negotiators. They are perceived to

foster confidence and trust — an important factor considering the fact that losing the trust of the local population may result in the increased vulnerability of peacekeepers. In Namibia, it was mostly women's efforts which led to the agreement to an electoral code of conduct. It is often easier for women to report sexual misconduct to other women. In Somalia, women experienced body searches by men as extremely humiliating. In Bosnia and Rwanda, women provided valuable assistance to victims of sexual violence.

- Women may have better and important access to women within a host country, especially in cases where culture and religion are deeply intertwined, for example, among Muslim women in Afghanistan. Their outreach may be essential to women's participation in elections and human rights programmes.
- They are seen as defusing tension rather than trying to control events. This may be perceived, however, as a weakness or unwillingness to use force. Hence, female peacekeepers may not be taken seriously as leaders.
- When there is a critical mass of women, it may have the effect of mobilising women in the host country to become involved in peacebuilding, democratisation, development and the demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants. Female peacekeepers may act as rolemodels for local women. The UN mission in South Africa is often quoted as an example where the high percentage of women in the mission may have mobilised local women to participate in the 1994 election. This may be somewhat of an overstatement. Black South African women who were active in the liberation struggle were quite capable of mobilising their own sisters.
- Adequate female representation also tends to inhibit men's licentious behaviour. The presence of women generally has a positive influence on social relations within the broader organisation and among the troops.
- Women's presence may reinforce the traditional notion that peacekeepers only use force in self-defence.⁸

An increase in civilian duties, together with the recognition of the special contribution made by women, however, have not fundamentally altered the gender balance of peacekeeping missions. Organisations such as the UN and NATO as yet do not have any official policy on the recruitment of women for peacekeeping operations. One of the explanations for this could be that the available information is fragmented.⁹ Systematised knowledge about the exact nature of women's role in the outcome of an operation and about the role of leadership is urgently required. In view of this, subregional organisations, peacekeepers and academics on the African continent should embark on proactive and coherent studies in this field.

In light of the fact that the emphasis in this article is on Africa, and due to the fact that the UN has been the main peacekeeper on the continent, the analysis of the international experience of women in peacekeeping will draw heavily on the UN experience. Brief reference to NATO peacekeeping and the contribution of the Nordic countries will also be made.

NATO PEACEKEEPING

NATO's track record as peacekeeper is relatively short. As such, the impact upon the role of women in NATO operations of this kind cannot be reliably evaluated. Helland and Kristense are of the opinion, however, that the high profile afforded to women in the Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia-Herzegovina does send out a positive message regarding the involvement of women in future NATO operations.¹⁰ Since many of the women performed the same military duties as men, these operations can rightly be typified as a benchmark of women's performance "in a real time hostile environment."

THE NORDIC EXPERIENCE

Table 1: Women deployed in IFOR/SFOR¹¹	
Countries	Number of women
Belgium	82
Denmark	n/a
Finland	215
France	162
Germany	410
Greece	0
Hungary	29
Luxembourg	4
The Netherlands	320
Norway	n/a
Poland	3
Portugal	41
Spain	447

Turkey	4
United Kingdom	n/a
United States	11 230

The Nordic countries — Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland — have a long and illustrious track record of involvement with issues around women and peace. Sweden, for instance, has been quite emphatic about the value of female peacekeepers in both military and civilian (for example, policing) capacity. Most importantly, prior military experience is not regarded as a prerequisite for entry. Instead, life skills and education are taken into consideration and women are then trained in basic military skills.¹² Norwegian women's participation in peace operations is officially recognised and encouraged. It is evident from statements that an holistic understanding of women's contribution, not only to peacekeeping but more broadly to post-conflict development and reconstruction, is present in official Norwegian circles. In the period 1993-1998, Norway contributed 400 female officers and 270 female soldiers to international peace operations in Lebanon, Bosnia and Macedonia. However, the majority of these women are still to be found in the medical corps. One explanation why this number is not particularly high is because completed military service is an entry requirement. Nevertheless, women candidates are given some priority. With regard to the recruitment of female civilian peacekeepers the Norwegian Resource Bank for Democracy and Human Rights (NORDEM) standby force has been established. The aim of this force is to offer assistance in areas such as minority protection, human rights, good governance and refugees. In 1997, NORDEM consisted of 32% women and 68% men.¹³

THE UN EXPERIENCE

There are many factors which can influence the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. In the context of this article, two variables are highlighted:

- the level of representation of women in both military and civilian operations; and
- the negative behaviour of male peacekeepers towards female counterparts and women in the civilian population.

The skewed representation of women in UN peacekeeping mirrors the gender bias in the UN, in general, with regard to employment and division of labour. However, there are more women to be found in non-peacekeeping parts of the UN. The beginning of the 1990s represents the watershed in terms of the representation of women in peacekeeping. Until then, women in UN peacekeeping roles were largely invisible. Between 1957 and 1979, only five out of 6 250 peacekeeping troops were women. During the period 1957-1989, only 20 out of about 20 000 military personnel involved in peacekeeping were women. The seven missions with the lowest female participation rate were established before 1980. In contrast, the twelve missions with the highest participation rate of women were established after 1990. By 1993, 11 out of the 19 UN peacekeeping

missions had significant civilian components, and women constituted one-third of the international UN civilian staff.¹⁴

Yet, despite the increase, women are still grossly underrepresented, particularly in the top decision-making structures of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). In 1994, only 5% of the professionals in the Military Advisors Office of the DPKO were women. In the Field Administration and Logistics division (FALD) of the DPKO, only 4.2% were women.¹⁵ Helland and Kristensen found that the numbers did not vary much from 1994 to 1998.¹⁶ The 1994 overall percentage of women in the DPKO was 30.2% compared to 30.8% in 1998. The percentage for higher level positions has in fact declined. Few opportunities for advancement exist. There are, however, a few women who occupied leadership positions in, among others, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, South Africa and Cyprus.¹⁷

Table 2: Women in UN peacekeeping¹⁸

Mission	As of date	Professionals-		Military police		Civilian general service		International general service		Local general service		Field service	
		M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
UNDOF Golan Heights	31/1/99	3	1	1 014	37	-	-	1	2	71	26	23	4
UNIFIL Lebanon	31/1/99	16	2	4 395	89	-	-	2	10	302	45	87	7
UNFICYP Cyprus	31/12/98	5	3	1 184	33	30	5	-	6	153	64	23	2
MIPONUH Haiti	30/9/98	18	3	-	-	141	1	7	7	93	40	24	9
MICIVIH Haiti	30/9/98	13	18	-	-	-	-	-	1	67	20	2	1
UNTSO Jerusalem	30/9/98	7	-	156	2	-	-	103	18	-	-	79	5
UNOMIG Georgia	30/9/98	13	4	101	-	-	-	5	8	53	38	28	1
UNMIBH Bosnia-Herzegovina	30/6/98	67	32	27	-	1 863	64	23	28	502	489	142	12
MINUGUA	30/6/98	16	23	20	-	11	6	9	20	109	96	6	-

Guatemala	30/9/98	48	7	438	10	81	-	55	29	74	16	83	14
MINURSO Western Sahara	30/9/98	48	7	438	10	81	-	55	29	74	16	83	14
UNPSG/LO, UNPSG/VUKOVAR & UNTAES Slovenia	30/9/98	16	4	-	-	108	10	6	6	56	72	11	3
UNMOP Pakistan	30/6/98	1	1	27	-	-	-	-	1	3	2	1	-
UNMOT Tadjikistan	30/6/98	16	5	76	1	2	-	6	1	82	20	19	3
UNIKOM Iraq/Kuwait	30/9/98	10	1	1 130	3	-	-	3	7	120	28	37	2

The following table provided by the DPKO summarises women's representation at various UN peacekeeping levels in 1998/1999. There is a substantial difference in representation between men and women at the professional and military levels. Also noteworthy is the relatively high numbers of local women functioning as general support staff in clerical and administrative positions.

Women's involvement in military peacekeeping remains small. The low number of women acting as military peacekeepers is thus a reflection of the low number of women in the armed forces of the contributing countries. In 1993, women comprised only 1.7% of military contingents in a total of 17 peacekeeping missions.¹⁹ In 1999, the Golan Heights mission (UNDOF) had the largest number of women in the military section (3.6%). During the same period, the Georgia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Guatemala and Pakistan missions all had no women participating in the military component. This pattern is continued in the UN Civilian Police (CIVPOL). In Bosnia-Herzegovina, only 3.4% were women. The highest number of women ever in CIVPOL was in the mission to Slovenia in 1998, where 9.3% of the police officers were women.²⁰

With regard to participation in a mission involving electoral supervision, a higher component of women would be expected, especially since the risk factor is substantially lower. The mission to South Africa (UNOMSA, 1992-1994) tried to maintain a gender balance within the ranks of regular UN staff, as well as in terms of recruited personnel. Closer to the election, however, contributing countries sent their own personnel, mainly men. Until 1997, humanitarian assistance was managed by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA). In 1995, the DHA had about 25% women in decision-making positions at UN headquarters. In 1998, the number of women in the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has increased to 35.5%. Women have been traditionally 'well' represented in missions with a human rights purpose. Women, many of whom were lawyers familiar with indigenous issues, constituted 39% and 37%, respectively, in the Guatemala (MINUGUA, 1997) and Haiti missions.²¹ Helland and Kristensen report that, in the post-conflict operation of the Guatemala mission, 48% of participants were women.²² These women were not

only instrumental in drafting peace accords, but also facilitated better community understanding of the content of these accords.²³

CORRELATIONS

Although it is recognised that more evidence is required to increase the reliability of current findings, the following correlations based on the international experience are presented for consideration. The linkages between the number of women in peacekeeping operations and the listed variables may be useful when planning, executing and evaluating operations where women are involved

Policy

There is a correlation between the number of women in peacekeeping operations and the policies of troop-contributing nations. The extent to which these states are prepared to commit women to peacekeeping operations serves as an indicator of women's status in such countries. Any mission where the Nordic countries, the US, Canada, France or Australia are involved, is likely to have a high percentage of female participation. Yet, what may seem high in contrast with other countries' contributions is not always really that significant. Canada and the US have about 12% women in their national armies, yet contribute only 8% and 5%, respectively, to UN peacekeeping missions.²⁴ Furthermore, the relatively steady rise in the number of women who have joined national militaries since the mid-1980s is deceptive. Many countries still have restrictions on the kind of positions women can hold within the armed forces. In Germany, for example, women are only allowed in the medical services and military brass bands.

Recruitment

There is an obvious correlation between the number of women in peacekeeping operations and the existence of clear policy guidelines and coherent strategies for their recruitment. The lack of strategy on the recruitment of women in the area of peacekeeping stands in sharp contrast to the existence of structures and very vocal public policies of the UN on other women's issues. The UN 'strategy' for the advancement of women in peacekeeping is built upon three very shaky pillars, namely individual consciousness, *ad hoc* initiatives in terms of research and reporting, and the policies of troop-contributing member states. Despite a number of action plans, women's positions have changed very little. *The Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women* is silent on the issue of peacekeeping. In 1994, an Expert Group Meeting in New York made concrete suggestions for creating gender balance in the UN Secretariat by 2000. A target of 40% women in peacekeeping missions was suggested.²⁵ The *UN Platform for Action* document has not done much to translate good intentions into policy. However, the latter document does devote separate sections to violence against women and the advancement of peace, the promotion of conflict resolution and the reduction of the impact of armed or other conflict on women. In strategic objective E.1, the plan calls for increasing and strengthening "the participation of women in conflict resolution and decision-making and leadership in peace and security activities."²⁶ This involves:

- attention to a critical mass of women to promote gender balance;
- the creation of opportunities;
- lobbying national and international institutions; and
- integrating a gender perspective.^{[27](#)}

The *Platform for Action* document was followed in 1995 by a detailed report by Beilstein on the role of women in UN peacekeeping, published to promote the goals of the *Beijing Declaration* and the *Platform for Action*. The results of the review process regarding the implementation of the *Beijing Declaration*, the so-called Beijing +5, were deliberated upon at a special session of the UN General Assembly held in New York from 5 to 9 June 2000. The theme of the review process was *Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace*. While particular attention was devoted to women as victims of armed conflict, some mention was also made of the underrepresentation, at all levels, of women in decision-making positions related to peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and post-conflict reconciliation, as well as the lack of gender awareness in these areas.^{[28](#)}

In 1995, the 1994 targets of the New York meeting were given more impetus through the report by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on setting a target of 50% women in UN field missions. The implementation of this goal, however, is hampered by the UN's dependence on member states. The UN does not have the jurisdiction to enforce compliance. In 1996, a meeting on *Political decision-making and conflict resolution: The impact of gender difference*, hosted by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO), supported the need for comprehensive research on the impact of a gender perspective on conflict resolution, as well as the need for more evidence about the extent to which the contributions of women and men differ. In 1998, gender was placed on the agenda of the DPKO.^{[29](#)} In January 1999, the Lessons Learned Unit on Multidisciplinary Peacekeeping published a report. This document, however, paid scant attention to the issue of gender.

One positive UN initiative seems to be the current research project on *Gender perspectives in multidimensional peacekeeping operations* — a collaborative project between the Lessons Learned Unit of the DPKO and the DAW. The main aims of this study are:

- to enhance understanding of the role played by gender dimensions at all stages of the peacekeeping process; and
- to determine ways in which this understanding could be integrated at policy, strategic and tactical levels.^{[30](#)}

A follow-up workshop and/or conference took place in Namibia from 29 to 31 May 2000.

Mission types

Participation of women varies greatly between missions. There is a correlation between the type of mission and the number of women recruited. The more comprehensive the mandate, the more civilians, and the more women are recruited. The level of threat is thus a determining factor for women's representation in peacekeeping operations. According to Segal, female

participation tends to be low when there is a medium threat.³¹ Because of the cultural resistance to large numbers of women being killed, there either has to be a large threat to the society or a very small likelihood of women being hurt before substantial numbers of women will be deployed.

Leadership culture

There appears to be a connection between the culture of leaders and the level of recruitment among women. While the positive correlation between gender-sensitive decision makers and increased access and opportunities seems relatively obvious, it is less clear whether the gender and gender roles of leaders are decisive. Does it follow automatically that only female leaders are more sensitive to gender issues? Certainly not, if the case of Mr Ahtisaari, the Special Representative in the UNTAG mission in Namibia (1989-1990), is considered. He consciously recruited women for decision-making positions. His Nordic background may have played a role. There were extensive interviews, training and careful selection of staff before the mission commenced. During his term, women constituted 60% of the professional staff. While the highest positions were still held by men, the number of women was substantial enough to have an empowering effect. This success story stands in sharp contrast to the Cambodia mission under the leadership of Yasushi Akashi of Japan. The operation had a bad reputation for its low percentage of women and the extensive involvement in prostitution and sexual abuse of local women by UN personnel. When confronted with this, Akashi was quoted as responding that "boys will be boys."³² The South African UNOMSA mission (1992-1994) had 53% female representation during its first 16 months. Angela King led this mission, and ensured that women were appointed to 50% of the team's leadership positions. But, as mentioned earlier, males asserted their dominance closer to the election when a man was appointed over King.³³ Since the examples of female-headed missions are few and far between, there are no cases yet where female decision makers displayed a lack of gender sensitivity. Hence, more information is required to strengthen any hypothesis regarding the causal relationship between the gender of the decision maker and the outcome of the mission.

Traditional structures

Not only is there a connection between the cultural position of the contributing country and the number of women in its contingent, but the level of tradition in the structure of the host society is also a factor to consider. The more traditional the society, the lower the tolerance for women in arms. Alternatively, it also implies that the more traditional the role played by women in the host country, the more difficult it will be for female peacekeepers to perform their duties in the face of male (and female) opposition. Peacekeepers' assumptions about resistance to the presence of women could also be ill-founded. In the mission to the Western Sahara, a traditional Muslim country, 10.2% of the troops were women — the highest ever of any mission during 1993.³⁴ Contrary to expectations, there was no evidence that the presence of these 'military' women had a detrimental effect on the outcome of the mission. In another case, the Norwegian authorities excluded female officers from their group of observers to the mission in Pakistan (UNMOGIP) on the assumption that women would not be welcome. It later transpired that their decision was uninformed and would have benefited from consultation with colleagues in the host country.³⁵

LESSONS LEARNED

An analysis of international experience reveals that the overarching aim of establishing gender equality at all levels of peacekeeping operations and taking the needs of women into consideration may substantially reduce the risk of peacekeeping initiatives contributing towards women's insecurity.

Four areas related to the peacekeeping operation should be considered:

- policy;
- training, capacity-building and education;
- peacekeeping in the field; and
- research.

The value of clear policies coupled with top-level political support and responsibility, is commonly recognised. A policy for gender mainstreaming should incorporate, among others, the following aspects:

- concrete goals and timetables (targets) to secure equal representation of women at all levels of peacekeeping work (critical mass);
- a transparent and proactive recruitment system;
- accountability mechanisms and checklists;
- a review of the language of policy documents to ensure gender sensitivity; and
- institutionalisation of structures for mainstreaming gender issues, such as individual posts with a clearly demarcated remit, for example, a co-ordinator on women and security, gender units, task forces and focal points. In this regard, the US has taken the initiative and created two posts to promote women's issues in conjunction with the NATO military staff.^{[36](#)}

With regard to training, capacity-building and education, a two-tiered systematic approach is required. On the one hand, it refers to ongoing training programmes for permanent and temporary staff, as well as field mission personnel, on gender mainstreaming and the role of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, in general. On the other hand, it also includes gender sensitivity training and awareness-raising of women's issues, including the status and situation of women in all kinds of peacekeeping operations. Workshops aimed at decision makers, as well as regular reporting of violations of women's rights, constructive initiatives and lessons learned are useful mechanisms for deepening an understanding of the positive contribution of women to peacekeeping. Capacity-building programmes which consider women's life skills and education in the selection process are considered to be very constructive. However, women should acknowledge their responsibility to examine their own attitudes as well. Political considerations regarding the recruitment of women must not overshadow women's responsibility to enhance their own competence and understanding of peacekeeping and peace support operations.

Advance planning regarding gender issues is vital. In preparation for a mission,

decision makers and team leaders need to determine — preferably in consultation with the host country — the gender composition of the force in accordance with their understanding of the cultural and gender dynamics of such a country. Stiehm suggests in this regard that planners:

"sort out what are 'Western values', what are 'UN principles' (of non-discrimination), what are 'traditional values', and what are the views and values of women as well as men in a host country."³⁷

The final area of concern is research. There is a definite need for more systematic comparative analysis in order to confirm or reject hypotheses. For instance, were the positive results of the Namibian, South African and Guatemalan missions, where there was relative gender balance, coincidental? Or, are these findings reliable and sustainable? More empirical case studies at national and international levels will enhance the scientific value of research initiatives. Longitudinal studies may also prove valuable in developing new and strengthening existing hypotheses. In this way, archaic concepts, definitions and doctrine, such as those related to first generation peacekeeping, can be critically questioned and transformed. Between 1995 and 1998/99, very little follow-up activities were undertaken to apply lessons learned in new UN missions. Mandates to follow through are absolutely necessary to ensure long-term application. Data on own and other training programmes should also be collected and compared. 'Lessons' should be systematically drawn from data, documented and widely disseminated. This could lead to the development of 'best practice' models.

Earlier in the article, it was argued that the trends in international peacekeeping seem to present African peacekeepers with enormous challenges. What the continent really needs, is to reconceptualise security in comprehensive people-centred terms. There is substantial evidence that women's understanding of peace and security can make a positive contribution. By introducing gender as a unit of analysis, and mainstreaming it in all areas of conflict resolution and security, these so-called female values and techniques can become part of policy and military doctrine, thus benefiting all. In theory, it is known what to do, but international experience indicates that this is easier said than done.

In the concluding remarks, the feasibility of a gender perspective for peacekeeping in Africa is examined. The central question is whether the introduction of gender to the peacekeeping debate in Africa will either facilitate or retard prospects for peace and security.

GENDER AND PEACEKEEPING — STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OR A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN?

The argument against infusing a gender perspective is based on the realist's interpretation of conditions in Africa. According to this view, the prospects for an equal partnership between men and women in peacekeeping are indeed slim, if the present conditions of instability prevail. In Somalia, for instance, military units had to provide humanitarian assistance, as the situation was too dangerous for civilian agencies to distribute relief aid. Most of the missions in Africa, where fairly large numbers of women had been involved, took place in stable situations with the emphasis on peacebuilding. Those who are against the inclusion of women would argue that calculating the risk of including women in the military component of a peacekeeping mission would unnecessarily complicate an

already complex situation. But, this is not to imply that women cannot handle such situations. Simply because there is not much evidence of women in more hazardous peacekeeping situations, there is a tendency to overlook the central role that women have played in numerous liberation wars. A good example is the high percentage (30%) of women in the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).³⁸

African leaders have a reputation for being notoriously ambivalent when it comes to women's rights. Africa is inundated with examples of lip service being paid to international declarations such as the *Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW). Under the guise of preserving tradition, a dual legal system, which perpetuates women's subservience to men, is unofficially condoned and maintained. It is therefore quite plausible to believe that such leaders will not honour their commitment to quotas and targets for gender equality in peace missions. Apart from the absence of the will to enforce compliance, weak states do not have the capacity and resources to devise special structures and posts. Special structures such as the Gender Desk of SADC cannot be expected to function efficiently in the area of peacekeeping if the Organ on Politics, Defence and Security is weak and defined in separatist terms. Comprehensive adherence to basic democratic principles of transparency and accountability is clearly lacking.

With regard to the prospects of raising gender awareness through training, pessimists would argue that traditional culture is so pervasive that no degree of training would make any difference. The argument that African countries will have a better understanding of each other's cultural dilemmas and practices may be true, but is nullified by problems relating to capacity and the will to act. In addition, subregional peacekeepers such as SADC are weakened by the lack of common political values among its member states. While South Africa, in all likelihood, may adopt a progressive stance towards women in peacekeeping (as in the case of the DRC),³⁹ other member states may not be accommodating to this extent. Similar to the situation of the UN, any subregional peacekeeping force is dependent upon the contributions of member states.

Ultimately the strongest argument against increasing the number of women in peacekeeping relates to the shift away from traditional peacekeeping to more muscular forms of peace enforcement as witnessed in Africa, as well as in Europe under NATO command. This trend will necessarily favour the military component at the expense of the civilian sector. Consequently, the recruitment of women will also be in jeopardy.

In developing a more positive argument for mainstreaming a gender perspective, the following facts must be considered:

- Two out of the top three UN missions with relative gender balance took place in Africa (Namibia and South Africa).
- In 1995, Ghana surprised everybody by sending a mixed infantry company of rifle soldiers to Rwanda.⁴⁰
- Women constituted 18% of the participants in a police officers training course (UNPOC) held in Southern Africa in November 1998.⁴¹ The course was initiated within the framework of the Norwegian funded project *Training for Peace in Southern Africa*. It was organised by the Institute of Security Studies together with the South African Police Service, but had a

regional outreach to SADC countries.

- The high level of female representation in the training course was upheld during Exercise Blue Crane. These women were generally regarded as among the best police officers both in the training course and during the peacekeeping exercise.

While it may not be easy to obtain concrete results at policy and institutional level in Africa, the area of training and capacity-building remains an important terrain of development. The UN has committed itself to stay involved in specialised training and research projects. This is supported by the fact that two of the three case studies in the UN research project on gender mainstreaming are located in Africa. In Somalia, women played a central role in the peace process through the joint efforts of the UN and non-governmental organisations. In Liberia, peacekeepers negotiated with a female head of state amidst all-male faction leaders. The situation in Sierra Leone may also be included in the study.⁴² Other countries with experience of gender issues in the military such as Norway and Sweden have launched important initiatives in the area of civil policing or law enforcement. This is a much-neglected area of mainstreaming and offers vast opportunities for improvement. It is interesting to see how, under Norwegian guidance, a gender perspective was integrated into the civil policing project right from the start. The issue of gender balance was dealt with in advance and in conjunction with all participating countries, which may explain the relatively high representation of women on the course and in the training exercise. This example indicates that a proactive approach can have positive results.

Contrary to the realist perception that the cultural diversity of Africa presents insurmountable obstacles, experience has shown that advance planning, consultation, sensitivity and awareness, as well as a critical attitude towards one's own prejudices and assumptions can go a long way in achieving the desired results.

The need for research on mainstreaming has been elaborated in the previous section. Suffice it to say that the opportunities on the African continent are legion. African researchers have the expertise to conduct extensive research on gender issues in peacekeeping. The institutional capacity is also there — in South Africa alone, a number of institutes have embarked on gender-related security studies. However, it is not always clear whether the will to scrutinise so-called 'marginal' issues such as gender is strong enough to sustain long-term projects in this area. This notwithstanding, African researchers are in the enviable position of being able to learn from the international experience, yet being allowed to develop indigenous approaches.

The aim of this contribution was to highlight a number of key areas of concern for African peacekeepers in relation to gender. Some of the key issues included questions such as:

- Do women in peace operations make a difference? Are women better peacemakers than men?
- To what extent do female peacekeepers have an impact on life within the operations?
- Is there a connection between the number of women in an operation and the gender perspective of the leadership?

- How can female peacekeepers act as rolemodels for local women?
- What policies and strategies for participation and recruitment are required? What are the implications for training?
- Should gender distribution take precedence over context, culture and the mandate of the mission?

The prospect of a truly non-gendered perspective on the African continent is still fairly remote. But, the beginning of a new century has brought with it the likelihood of an increasing recognition of women's visions of global security. In this context, western experiences of the mainstreaming of gender in peacekeeping must be scrutinised to learn from their mistakes and to identify opportunities for fostering integrated home-grown doctrine and strategy.

NOTES

1. M Malan, Towards an integrated doctrine for peace support operations in Africa, in J Cilliers & A Hilding-Norberg (eds), *Building stability in Africa: Challenges for the new millennium*, [ISS Monograph 46](#), Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, February 2000, pp 46-69.
2. M Malan, Peacekeeping in the new millennium: Towards 'fourth generation' peace operations?, [African Security Review 7\(3\)](#), 1998, pp 17-19.
3. A J Rossouw, *Towards a new understanding of the terms and definitions for international peace missions*, ACCORD Occasional Paper Series, <www.accord.org.za/programmes/peacekeeping/publishing/rossouw.htm> (20 June 1999); C de Coning, South African blue helmets in the Democratic Republic of Congo, *Global Dialogue* 4(2), August 1999, p 9; T Neethling, The peace process in Kosovo: Structures, processes and thoughts on peacekeeping in Africa, [African Security Review 9\(1\)](#), 2000, p 40.
4. L Olsson, *Gendering UN peacekeeping: Mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peacekeeping operations*, Report 53, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala University, Sweden, 1999, pp 2, 3.
5. M Malan, *Peacekeeping in Africa — Trends and responses*, [ISS Paper 31](#), Institute for Security Studies, Halfway House, June 1998.
6. Olsson, op cit, p 27.
7. A Helland & A Kristensen, *Women in peace operations, Women and armed conflicts — A study for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, Oslo, 1999, p 83.
8. For more information see Olsson, op cit, pp 16-18, 22, 31-32; Helland & Kristensen, ibid, pp 82-87; J Hicks Stiehm, United Nations peacekeeping: Men's and women's work, in M K Meyer & E Prügl (eds), *Gender politics in global governance*, Rowman & Littlefield, New York, 1999, pp 55-56; K Karamé, Women and war: A highly complex interrelation, *Women and armed conflicts*, op cit, p 17; J C Beilstein, *The role of women in United*

***Nations peacekeeping, Women 2000*, study carried out for the Division for the Advancement of Women, 1995, p 9.**

9. Helland & Kristensen, op cit, p 73.
10. Ibid, pp 81-82.
11. Ibid, p 96.
12. Beilstein, op cit, p 3.
13. Helland & Kristensen, op cit, pp 101-110.
14. Ibid, p 78.
15. Beilstein, op cit, pp 2, 6.
16. Helland & Kristensen, op cit, pp 89-91.
17. Names such as Dame Margaret Joan Anstee who served in Angola; Elisabeth Rehn, Special Representative and Co-ordinator of the UN Operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1997; and Angela King who served as both the Chief Administrative Officer and Deputy Secretary-General Special Representative in the South African mission come to mind. Dame Ann Hercus from New Zealand is currently serving as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of Mission in Cyprus. For more details see Olsson, op cit, pp 9,14.
18. Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 1999.
19. Beilstein, op cit, p 2.
20. Olsson, op cit, pp 21-22; Helland & Kristensen, op cit, p 92.
21. Olsson, ibid, pp 23-25; Beilstein, op cit, p 7.
22. Helland & Kristensen, op cit, p 80.
23. A E V King, Statement, preparatory workshop on *Mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peacekeeping operations*, Uppsala University, Sweden, 1 June 1999.
24. Beilstein, op cit, p 3; Stiehm, op cit, p 42.
25. Olsson, op cit, p 8.
26. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Draft Platform for Action*, <www.iisd.ca/linkages/4wcw/dpa-000.html> (17 October 1999)
27. United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, *Draft Platform for Action*, <www.iisd.ca/linkages/4wcw/dpa-039.html> (17 October 1999)
28. *Ad hoc* committee of the whole of the Special Session of the General Assembly entitled *Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for*

the twenty-first century, Proposed outcome document: Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, 8 June 2000, p 11, <www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/infocon.pdf> (11 June 2000)

29. King, op cit, pp 1-2.
30. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (Lessons Learned Unit) & Division for the Advancement of Women, *Study on mainstreaming a gender perspective in multidimensional peacekeeping operations*, September 1998, p 1.
31. Olsson, op cit, pp 21-22.
32. Stiehm, op cit, pp 53-54.
33. This case is cited in several sources such as Olsson, op cit, p 10; Helland & Kristensen, op cit, pp 79-81; Beilstein, op cit, p 11; and Stiehm, ibid, pp 48-53.
34. See Olsson, ibid, pp 17,22; Stiehm, ibid, p 51; and Helland & Kristensen, ibid, p 81.
35. Helland & Kristensen, ibid, p 84.
36. Ibid, p 100.
37. Stiehm, op cit, p 52.
38. Karamé, op cit, pp 19-20.
39. The initial team of 165 specialists sent by South Africa to the DRC included 13 women (8%) — 1 personnel officer, 1 doctor, 7 medical sisters, 1 military law officer and 3 logistical clerks.
40. Beilstein, op cit, p 3; Olsson, op cit, p 21.
41. Helland & Kristensen, op cit, p 92.
42. DPKO & DAW, op cit, p 2.

