
Preventing sexual violence in conflict

Saferworld's submission to the Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict

Introduction

This submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict brings together Saferworld's research and expertise on the causes and means to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict-affected and fragile states, and the importance of identifying and addressing the root causes of conflict. We have drawn on our experience of working with UK conflict prevention policy and reflected on our engagement with the Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict Initiative (PSVI) to recommend ways in which the Committee can use its inquiry to ensure UK government policy and practice on preventing sexual violence is effective, impactful, and sensitive to the needs of survivors by addressing the root causes of violence.

Summary of recommendations to the Committee:

- Question the UK government on how it is taking a holistic approach to preventing SGBV that considers and directly responds to the causes of SGBV, including conflict, while being sensitive to the needs of survivors and the challenges they face;
- Determine whether the Joint Analysis on Conflict and Stability (JACS) has been conducted in all operational countries and whether it has been used to adapt policy and inform programmes on SGBV;
- Ensure the UK government conducts a gender analysis as part of every JACS process;
- Ask the UK government about what evidence of gender-sensitive upstream conflict prevention has been generated, and how progress on implementation has been assessed in country;
- Ensure that the UK government supports women's leadership and meaningful participation through UK financial and diplomatic support to women's rights and peacebuilding organisations from conflict-affected and fragile states;
- Encourage the UK government to ensure gender and conflict is integrated into future international summits, conferences and meetings relevant to peace, security and development.

Q3) What evidence is there as to the causes of sexual violence in conflict?

1. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) – in conflict-affected countries and elsewhere – is primarily a result of gender inequality, the widespread prevalence of patriarchal attitudes and beliefs, power imbalances between women and men, and notions of masculinities and femininities that normalise these social inequalities. Sexual violence against women and girls in particular reinforces women's subordination and inequality in both the private and public spheres; while sexual violence against men and boys is used as a means of bringing shame and stigma which results directly from societal attitudes toward masculinity and gender roles.
2. A comprehensive prevention strategy should seek to address these causes of SGBV by transforming harmful social norms and gender inequalities, securing women's rights and the empowerment of women, and by promoting understandings of nonviolent masculinities. These transformative strategies must be employed in all contexts, regardless of whether there is an active conflict, in order to make progress on prevention with a realistic expectation of the timescale needed to make progress. Other factors, such as

unaccountable and unresponsive security and justice sectors, play a role in the prevalence of SGBV. Pursuing criminal prosecutions alone will not sufficiently prevent SGBV immediately, but can be effective in the long-term (alongside primary prevention activities – i.e. those that address its underlying causes) and help to create an environment in which such violence cannot be committed with impunity. We recommend that the Committee question the UK government on how it is taking a holistic approach to preventing SGBV that considers and directly responds to the causes of SGBV, including conflict, while being sensitive to the needs of survivors and the challenges they face.

3. While there are some commonalities, the underlying causes and triggers of SGBV can vary across different contexts, and it is therefore important that any strategies to prevent and eliminate SGBV are based on sound analysis of the societal context. In areas affected by conflict or fragility, this should include a conflict analysis, which should be used to ensure that all interventions are conflict-sensitive, such that they do not exacerbate conflict dynamics, and wherever possible they contribute to building peace.
4. The Joint Analysis on Conflict and Stability (JACS) is the UK's conflict analysis tool, introduced in 2012 to help officials to map and understand the conflict dynamics and drivers in any given context. It is unclear to what extent JACS have been conducted in all operational countries however, and Saferworld would encourage the Committee to question the Government on this, including how the JACS has been used to adapt policy and inform programmes on SGBV. From our understanding, the JACS methodology did not include guidance on how to include gender in its analytical approach, though the Stabilisation Unit is currently producing supplementary guidance on how to integrate gender analysis into conflict analysis. We therefore also recommend the Committee question the Government on how it will ensure that gender analysis will be part of every JACS process.

Q4) Preventing conflict is the best single way of preventing sexual violence in conflict. Is enough being done in this respect?

5. UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 affirms “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts” under one of its main ‘pillars’ (the others focusing on the promotion of women’s participation, protecting the human rights of women and girls, and addressing women’s and girl’s needs in humanitarian relief and recovery). However this ‘pillar’ of UNSCR 1325 is often interpreted in practice as referring only to the prevention of SGBV in conflict, and not to the prevention of conflict itself. The lack of attention given to conflict prevention has led some to express concern that the women, peace and security agenda has become limited to “making war safe for women”, rather than preventing the outbreak of war.¹ Preventing SGBV is important to promoting long-term security, and working to prevent violent conflict from breaking out in the first place –ensuring women and other marginalised groups are able to play an active and equal part in this – can help to prevent forms of SGBV which increase during conflict.
6. A more comprehensive vision of conflict prevention involves careful analysis of, and long-term strategies for addressing the root causes and drivers of conflict in any given context. This may include, for example, ensuring equitable access to basic services such as security, justice, health and education for all social groups; transforming political institutions that are exclusionary or corrupt; or reforming economic systems that are perceived to be unjust. Conflict prevention that successfully builds sustainable peace for all groups must, among other things, integrate a gender perspective, also referred to as taking a gender-sensitive approach.
7. A gender-sensitive approach would involve analysing and responding to the gender dimensions of root causes and drivers of conflict which are identified through using the JACS methodology. This could include, for example, ensuring that youth livelihoods programming responds to the needs of both women and men who are un- or under-employed; or challenging cultures of militarised masculinity within the security sector which fuel human rights abuses. The UK government’s commitment to gender-sensitive conflict prevention is contained in the Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS) and in the UK National Action Plan (UK NAP) on Women, Peace and Security. While this is welcomed and necessary for the prevention of SGBV, the extent to which this has been implemented is unclear. While the UK has articulated a progressive vision of ‘stability’ in the BSOS and how to achieve this by preventing conflict

¹ See, for example, Cora Weiss, quoted in Cohn C (2008), ‘Mainstreaming gender in UN security policy – a path to political transformation?’ (Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights), p 14.

'upstream', there remains a lack of clarity around what an 'upstream' approach means and how it should be put into practice. Identifying appropriate 'upstream' responses that are also gender sensitive is a challenge, not only due to the complex and often rapidly changing environment in conflict-affected states, but also due to the differing working cultures and capabilities across UK government departments working in fragile contexts. Therefore, an examination of what each department means when they say they are 'doing' upstream conflict prevention and how and whether this reflects the best available evidence of what works in promoting long-term stability should be a priority going forward. Saferworld suggests that the Committee ask the UK government about what evidence of gender-sensitive upstream conflict prevention has been generated, and how progress on implementation has been assessed in country.

Q6) How can the UK best use its influence to promote and increase the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution?

8. A culture shift is needed towards understanding gender as an important factor in conflict and security work, rather than an issue of secondary importance or a separate work stream. The participation of women in the peace and security field is central to this, whether it is local women's participation in local, national and international peace processes or participating in and leading work on conflict prevention and resolution. Although the provisions of UNSCR 1325 are often interpreted as referring only to conflict-affected contexts, the resolution in fact calls on all Member States to ensure increased representation of women in institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.
9. The UK government can support this culture shift by appointing both male and female senior officials in government departments – particularly the Foreign Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development – to champion the importance of gender mainstreaming, demonstrating that gender issues are not to be addressed solely by women. The UK can also lead by example on the participation element of the NAP by increasing the number of women working on conflict and security issues in the UK government, particularly in areas commonly dominated by men, such as senior positions in the military and delegations to peace negotiations.
10. Saferworld suggests that the UK government supports women's leadership and meaningful participation through UK financial and diplomatic support to women's rights and peacebuilding organisations from conflict-affected and fragile states. It can lead by setting a strong example, ensuring all of its international delegations have a gender balance and are led equally by both male and female officials and diplomats. The UK government can affirm this commitment by making the full and meaningful participation of women as condition of its support for peace processes, negotiations and donor conferences. This should include not only the presence of women on negotiating teams but also ensuring that civil society actors, including women's rights organisations, can scrutinise and influence decision-making on peace and security issues.
11. The UK government can also use its influence to ensure that gender, peace and security is meaningfully included at all international summits, conferences and meetings relevant to peace, security and development. The Wales NATO Summit in 2014 would have been a good opportunity to do so, capitalising on the recently published NATO action plan on Women, Peace and Security. It would have been particularly valuable for the Ministry of Defence to work with NATO to explore the lessons learned of what works in implementing gender and conflict prevention objectives. Saferworld was disappointed to learn that there was no inclusion of gender and conflict at the main Summit, and would encourage the Committee to question the Government on why this was the case and how this will be addressed at future such meetings.

About Saferworld

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

We are a not-for-profit organisation with programmes in nearly 20 countries and territories across Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Europe.

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