

GENDERED ALTERNATIVES

Gender- and conflict-sensitive framework for policy makers to engage with non-state governance actors



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* Illustrations by Dagmar Donners.

Introduction

This framework is a guideline for policymakers to engage with non-state governance actors in a gender- and conflict-sensitive way. There are important challenges for policymakers and practitioners working in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings (FCAS), one of which is working with non-state actors. These non-state actors in FCAS in some cases act as spoilers, while other examples illustrate they can provide governance in the absence of a functioning state. This policy framework explicitly focusses on the instances where non-state actors provide governance.

While the thinking on security has broadened (see box 1), there is still a hesitancy from Western policymakers to act upon the assertion that governance in FCAS is often provided beyond the state. The contention is rarely centred on if, and what kind, of threats civilians face in armed conflicts, but rather on what are seen as legitimate mechanisms and actors to address these threats.¹ Moreover, there is increasing attention paid to women and gender-related issues in armed conflict, yet gender-sensitive policies do not always respond to local needs and contexts.

Therefore, this policy framework provides a checklist of crucial questions policymakers must pose when dealing with gender-related issues in conflict settings controlled by non-state governance actors. The first section 'Gender and armed conflict'

¹ This policy framework stems from an extensive Policy Report, researched and written by Utrecht University, in collaboration with the Women's Commission in Rojava, northern Syria. The project first researched the gender-specific threats that women in Rojava faced, and then analysed the perceptions on the effectiveness and inclusivity of female-led initiatives established in a region under de-facto control of a non-state governance actor. Subsequently, recommendations were written in an attempt to more effectively tailor policies to engage and support these initiatives.

aims to create a clear understanding of gender identities, tasks, narratives and roles in the given context. The second section should be used to map out the gender-specific threats civilians, especially women, face during armed conflict. Thirdly, policymakers must look at what local initiatives are already established, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how they are perceived by the local population. The fourth section focuses on identifying entry points for development organisations, and what possible challenges may need to be overcome and how. And, finally, the fifth section poses questions about working with non-state governance actors – their legitimacy, effectiveness, willingness to cooperate, and so forth.

We recommend that policymakers and practitioners carefully consider all of the following questions, in order to create gender- and conflict-sensitive policies in regions governed by non-state actors.

Box 1: Human security threats

Economic security: This entails having the opportunity and access to an assured basic income.

Personal security: Aims to protect people from physical threats; these can be from the state, non-state actors, sub-state groups, individuals, and they can be in the form of violent crime, domestic abuse, and so forth.

Community security: Aims to protect people from losing cherished values and relationships, and from the threat of ethnic violence

Political security: The securement of basic human rights, where people are not at risk due to their political opinions or affiliations.

(UNDP Human Development Report 1994).

I. Gender and armed conflict

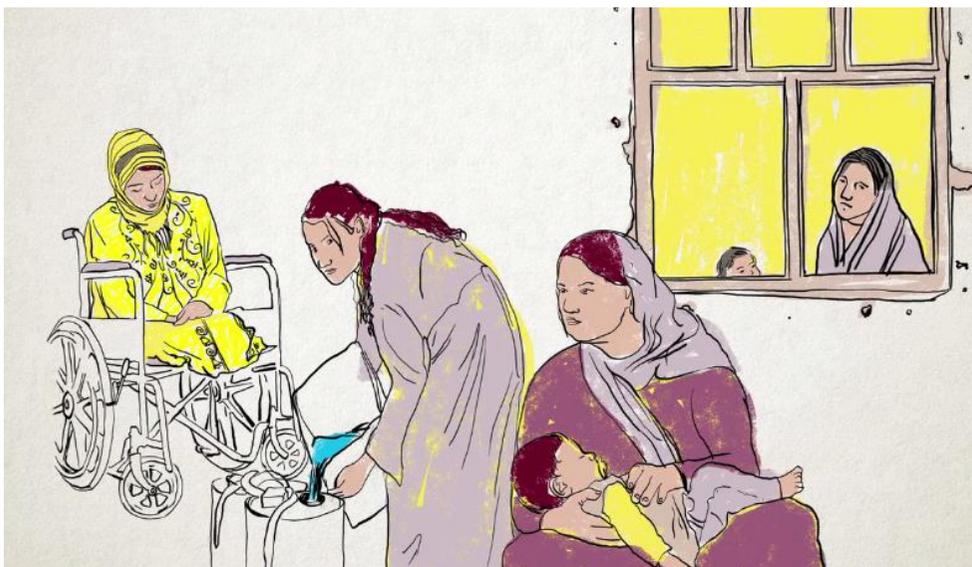


Conflict can strengthen traditional gender norms – for example, men embracing military roles and women caretaking responsibilities – yet it can also create a shift in gender dynamics as women are forced to take on roles not (stereo)typically assigned to them. For women, conflict can prove to be a site of subjugation, but also of new possibilities. It is crucial to recognise the changes in gender identities, tasks, narratives and roles so that, if women’s agency increases, it can be sustained in the post-conflict environment.

Below is a checklist of questions that must be answered in order to gain a clear understanding of the traditional gender roles for men and women, and to assess if and how these have changed.

1. What are the observable gender norms and values prevalent in society?
2. How do these norms differ according to age, marital status, class, ethnicity, (dis)ability, location, religion, or any other relevant markers of identity?
3. Have gender norms been shaped and changed by the conflict?
4. What roles have men and women played in fuelling the conflict, and why?
5. How has this affected gender relations, identities and discourses?

II. Threats



It is integral that policymakers have a contextualised understanding of the multifaceted threats that civilians face in conflict, and how these threats affect people differently depending on their gender. In order to develop conflict- and gender-sensitive policies, it is vital that these threats are mapped out.

The questions below take a human security approach so that threats extend beyond just the physical, but also encompass threats to civilians' personal, economic, security, community, and political security (see Box 1 on page 3).

1. What obstacles do civilians face in their daily lives?
2. Are there gender-specific obstacles for civilians?
3. Are there ethnic and religious obstacles for civilians related to their gender?
4. How are threats to civilians' economic security gendered?
5. How are threats to civilians' personal security gendered?
6. How are threats to civilians' community security gendered?
7. How are threats to civilians' political security gendered?

III. Addressing threats



In fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), local and non-state actors often effectively address the threats faced by the local population, as they have a better understanding of the local context. In order to better understand what role these initiatives play in the daily lives of local populations, policy makers and practitioners should ask themselves the following questions.

1. What local initiatives have been established to address threats to women's economic, personal, community and political security?
2. What role do men and women play within these initiatives?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these local initiatives in addressing the threats women face, and how are they perceived by civilians (especially women)?
4. What roles do men and women play in security provision? And how does society perceive them?
5. What roles do men and women play in local governance? And how does society perceive them?
6. What roles do men and women play in providing social services*? And how does society perceive them?
7. Are these services equally accessible for men and women?

* social services encompasses education and healthcare, the provision of water and sanitation, electricity, and food, and local organisations

IV. Entry points for development organisations

It is important for policy makers and practitioners to assess what current policies are in place, in order to identify possible entry points for (international) development organisations in FCAS. Reflecting on the strengths and shortcomings of these current policies allows for development organisations to better shape their policies to local needs, especially the gender-specific needs of women.



1. How are the current international policies engaging with women and women's organisations in the given region?
2. How effective are these policies in meeting the needs of women and addressing the threats that women face?
3. What are entry-points for development organisations to engage with local organisations?
4. Are there challenges for development organisations to engage with local organisations? If so, what are they?
5. How can these entry-points be utilised to tailor international responses to local needs in a conflict and gender-sensitive way?

V. Working with non-state governance actors



There is a tendency for policy makers to conform to state-centric development models. However, in many contexts around the world, non-state actors shape the daily realities of local populations by taking up tasks typically ascribed to a state. If the non-state governance actors are deemed legitimate by the local population, it is crucial that policy is tailored towards these groups in order to be most effective on the ground. To assess the legitimacy and effectiveness of these actors, and thus the reliability for policymakers to work with them, the following questions have been formed:

1. Create a map of the active non-state (de facto) governance actors in the region.
2. How do civilians perceive non-state governance actors in their region and are they deemed legitimate?
3. Do the non-state actors effectively govern society?*
4. Are the non-state governance actors willing to cooperate with international policymakers?
5. What are the challenges for policymakers to respond to the non-state governance actors?
6. How can these challenges be overcome?
7. What does an embargo for non-state governance actors by international policymakers mean for civilian suffering, and women in particular?

*by providing social services, representation and security for example.